



Vol. 1, No. 1

Vol 1 No 1, 2025, The Journal of African Philosophy and Indigenous Knowledge (JAPIK)

EDITORIAL NOTE

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/EN>

The Journal of African Philosophy and Indigenous Knowledge (JAPIK) is a quarterly collection of well-researched articles that seek to present the philosophical and indigenous dynamics of Africa to the world. Africa as the cradle of humanity lives in a contradictory world where little is known about its glorious past and the riches of its indigenous reality in the present. To this extent, there are fears that if nothing is done to introduce Africa to the modern world for what it possesses and can offer, it would be difficult to compete with other regions as the world is gravitating towards unprecedented levels of development.

The foregoing informs the establishment of the journal as an intellectual platform for discussing African philosophy and indigenous knowledge in a most needed nuanced manner. Given that African philosophers, thinkers and Indigenous knowledge custodians occupy the lower rungs of mainstream academic platforms, the journal intends to address this challenge through the publication of well-researched articles that bring African ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies to the fore. This helps in getting the needed recognition for African knowledge production in the world as the journal is committed to rigorous, multidisciplinary and inclusive discourse of issues on Africa and the African diaspora.

As noted earlier, all articles featured in this issue of the Journal of African Philosophy and Indigenous Knowledge are well-processed, thereby ensuring their publication is in line with best practices. Therefore, we acknowledge the efforts of the editorial board, reviewers and authors for contributing their respective quota to the publication of this issue.

Guest Editor

Bamidele Olajide

Department of Political Studies and International Relations,

North West University,

Mafikeng Campus,

South Africa.

Table of Contents

A CROSS ANTHROPOLOGICO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED AFRICAN PROVERBS AS EVIDENCE OF A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE <i>Feyi Ademola-Adeoye</i>	4
THE RISKS OF DIVIDED IDENTITIES IN AFRICA: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF STIGMATIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS VICTIMS AMONG YORUBA-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA. <i>Ajomale Funmileyi Festus</i>	16
HETEROGENEITY IN THE HOMOGENOUS AFRICA, POLICY GAP AND THE CHALLENGE OF PAN-AFRICANISM <i>Anyanwu, Christianus Izuchukwu, Jeremiah John, Nso Favour Chinyere</i>	26
DYNAMICS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA. <i>Oluwanifemi Adeyemo</i>	32
A REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF WIDOWHOOD AMONG OLDER WOMEN IN NIGERIA <i>Akinwale, Gbenusola A., Amodeni, Oluwatobiloba S. & Oke, Onome S.</i>	42

A CROSS ANTHROPOLOGICO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED AFRICAN PROVERBS AS EVIDENCE OF A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/a1>

Feyi Ademola-Adeoye

Institute of African and Diaspora Studies

University of Lagos, Nigeria

E-mail: fademolaadeoye@gmail.com

Abstract

Proverbs are short, pithy sayings that contain the treasures of traditional wisdom which are passed down from one generation to another. In some concrete way, they are the bedrock upon which societies build their civilization. Stone (2006: xiii) defines proverbs as 'bits of ancient wisdom' that represent words of critical wisdom based on the tested experience of ancestors. As an integral part of language, proverbs reflect the patterns and structures of culture and consequently influence human thinking, psyche, world view, social practices and power relations in society (Djite, 2008). Employing Lakoff and Turner's (1989) theory of ethnography of proverbs and Lazar's (2005) approach to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), this paper examines selected proverbs from some African societies (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Amharic, Bukusu, Frafra etc.) in order to determine if the African society has a history of patriarchy and violence that ultimately promotes a culture of gender-based violence (GBV). The study reveals that proverbs with violent overtones are found in several African societies. These proverbs have the power to subtly influence speakers' attitudes and behaviour towards women, especially when it comes to upholding patriarchal hegemony.

Keywords: Gender, Patriarchy, Culture, Gender-Based Violence, Proverbs

Introduction

It has been argued that society generally tends to underestimate the power of women, often leading to the false assumption that women either lack power altogether or that their power is inferior to that of men (Wodak, 2008). Proverbs, as a cultural tool employed by society to instil guided behaviour, are not exempt from the elaborate and pervasive social infrastructure that reinforces this notion. Proverbs are considered to provide advice and life lessons on the behaviour of men and women in society and may significantly impact individuals' social and emotional well-being. They project cultural and societal expectations, being age-old yet still valued in contemporary times. Mieder (2007:18) asserts that proverbs pass judgement and prescribe appropriate behaviour for the future. Similarly, Mulaudzi (2013:154) contends that proverbs are cultural constructs that dictate values and norms for both men and women.

According to Hussein (2005), language is a symbolic means of both representing and valuing ideas. Just as a dance is inseparable from its performer, our attitudes towards subjects and the manner in which we discuss them are inextricably linked. In other words, a society's perception of men and women is reflected in the proverbs that surround them. In many African societies, as in most societies worldwide, gender power relations tend to be expressed in proverbs, which often exacerbate the subordination of women and perpetuate their disadvantaged position. Many African proverbs contain messages that sustain male

supremacy in both private and public spheres. The influence of proverbs on African thought is profound to the extent that even the construction of gender as a social concept admits the notion of male superiority and female subordination. African proverbs serve as conduits of this imbalance. For the purpose of clarity and guidance, three key concepts—Proverb, Patriarchy, and Gender-Based Violence (henceforth referred to as GBV)—as used in this paper, require brief definitions.

Proverbs

A proverb is a saying, statement, or expression of collective wisdom, containing truth, moral guidance, experience, or advice concerning life in a metaphysical, fixed, and memorisable form, handed down from generation to generation (Etta & Mogu, 2012). Proverbs serve as tools in the philosophical pursuit of knowledge, reality, and wisdom. They are widely accepted as having educational, cautionary, or advisory purposes within a population. When skilfully employed, they can be powerful instruments that either divide and weaken or unite and strengthen. According to Esen (1982), proverbs function as verbal archives of a community's ideas and philosophy, akin to an oral museum. Similarly, Akporobaro and Emovon (1994:1) argue that "the proverbs of a community or nation constitute, in a real sense, an ethnography of the people, which, if systematised, can provide a penetrating insight into their way of life, philosophy, moral truths, and social values."

Through the use of proverbs expressed in indigenous languages, the knowledge systems of a people are defined, clarified, and transmitted. Proverbs offer a window into the mindset, worldview, thought processes, and beliefs of a community. In traditional African society, elders are revered as custodians of cultural wisdom. These elders, who are often male figures representing the power elite within the community, are instrumental in the transmission of proverbs. Consequently, the epistemic authority in proverbs is frequently aligned with elitism, masculinity, and patriarchy. Elders utilise proverbs to reinforce their points, leading to the common assertion that "proverbs are the oil with which words are eaten" (Achebe, 2006). It is believed that these elders, possessing deep linguistic and cultural knowledge, are closest to the divine source of wisdom and thus more likely to articulate truths. Proverbs, therefore, serve as a medium for conveying what is regarded as traditional African knowledge, acting as a means by which individuals—especially men—attempt to assert control over their environment and social relationships. According to Uduigwomen (2002), proverbs function as tools for socialisation and formal education in many African societies, while also serving as mechanisms for the preservation of cultural traditions.

Patriarchy

In the context of this study, patriarchy is understood as the institutionalisation of power dynamics that establish and maintain male supremacy (Lakoff, 2004). This system marginalises and subjugates women's interests, whether through explicit or implicit manifestations of male dominance in social, political, and economic spheres, or through restrictions on women's mobility, access to education, and opportunities for personal growth. Studies indicate that despite the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985 by various nations, including Nigeria, and the implementation of local gender policies (such as Nigeria's 2006 National Gender Policy), gender inequality persists. This continued disparity is largely due to entrenched cultural and structural challenges that hinder women's participation in all aspects of life, with significant consequences for human resource development, economic progress, and overall gender equality (see Ali and Naylor, 2013; Bako and Syed, 2018; Strid and Hearn, 2022).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence directed at an individual or group based on their gender

identity. While it was historically perceived as limited to acts of violence perpetrated by men against women, contemporary understandings recognise that GBV encompasses hostilities based on gender identity and sexual orientation, including violence against men who do not conform to dominant expressions of masculinity (Collins, 2014). More broadly, GBV encompasses "any interpersonal, organisational, or politically motivated violation perpetrated against individuals due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or position within male-dominated social structures such as the family, military, workplace, or labour force" (O'Toole and Schiffman, 1997: xii).

Collins (2014) argues that the rise of Western feminism in the 1970s played a pivotal role in bringing attention to the prevalence of violence against women, shaping contemporary discourse on GBV. During this period, high rates of sexual violence against women were exposed, and such violence was theorised as an intrinsic feature of patriarchy. For instance, some theorists posited that rape functioned as a mechanism through which men, as a social group, maintained their dominance over women. Although modern discussions are less conspiratorial, they continue to acknowledge the undeniable link between GBV and the broader social structures of gender inequality.

Empirical Review

Numerous studies have examined gender-related proverbs from various perspectives. **Hussein (2005)** explores how African proverbs contribute to the construction and perpetuation of gendered cultural norms. Using **postmodern power dynamics theory**, the study analyses selected sexist proverbs to determine how language mediates social relationships. Hussein argues that African proverbs reinforce **gender stereotypes** by associating **masculinity** with strength, respect, and authority, while equating **femininity** with weakness, meekness, and inconsistency. He further suggests that such proverbs depict men as **prototypes of humanity**, relegating women to a secondary status. Consequently, men often use these biases to justify their dominance over women.

Phiri, Mulaudzi, and Heyns (2015) investigate the impact of the indigenous proverb *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* on women's **mental health**. Using **snowball and purposive sampling**, they selected **57 women** (married, divorced, widowed, and single) who participated in focus group discussions and in-depth interviews in Tshwane and Johannesburg. The study reveals that the proverb **perpetuates oppression and stigmatisation**, leading to **psychological distress and, in extreme cases, fatal consequences**. Some

women reported multiple forms of oppression and feared being socially ostracised if they sought divorce. Others lived in constant fear of domestic violence. The findings also indicate that the proverb **reinforces the expectation that women must endure hardships to sustain their marriages**, reflecting deeply ingrained patriarchal values.

Gyan, Abbey, and Baffoe (2020) examine the representation of women in **Akan proverbs** and how they institutionalise **women's roles and identities** in traditional Akan society, Ghana. Their study highlights the role of **oral traditions in perpetuating patriarchal norms and gender inequalities**. The authors advocate for a **radical restructuring of oral traditions** to dismantle the frameworks that sustain **patriarchal discourse and gender-based discrimination**.

Research on **Zulu proverbs** provides both **interpretive and descriptive analyses**, revealing how these proverbs reinforce **patriarchal norms** that restrict women's rights (Nyembezi, 1990). **Baloyi (2017)** finds that many Zulu proverbs prescribe specific gender expectations that hinder women's personal development, particularly within **marriage and leadership roles**. Similarly, **Chiliza and Masuku (2020)** examine **gender inequality** in Zulu proverbs, arguing that the **Zulu cultural setting positions men as dominant and women as subordinate**. Their study highlights how these proverbs **reinforce long-standing stereotypes**, portraying women as **inferior, submissive, and objects of subjugation**.

Studies on **Yoruba proverbs** yield similar conclusions. **Adegbola (2021)** and **Balogun (2010)** argue that many Yoruba proverbs **violate women's rights and dignity** by employing **derogatory metaphors** that influence attitudes and behaviours, ultimately **upholding male hegemony**. The scholars assert that proverbs, alongside other **cultural tools**, have historically functioned as mechanisms of **women's oppression and subjugation**. They advocate for **replacing misogynistic proverbs with gender-inclusive alternatives**.

Extensive research on **gender-related proverbs in Ethiopia** further supports these findings. **Assefa (2016)** explores **linguistic violence** against women through **sexist Amharic proverbs**, while **Gebeyehu (2019)** examines **negative portrayals of women in Awngi proverbs**. **Jobo (2015)** focuses on **biased depictions of femininity in Wolaita proverbs**, highlighting their role in reinforcing **gender-based discrimination**.

Baataar et al. (2023) analyse proverbs from the **Frafra traditional area of Ghana**, demonstrating their **significant impact on gender relations**. While some proverbs depict men as **brave, resilient providers and protectors**, others reinforce the stereotype of **women as dependent, vulnerable, and subordinate**. Additionally, Frafra proverbs **highlight the struggles and endurance of women**, portraying them as **nurturing and industrious** yet subjected to **harassment and oppression**.

The existing literature clearly shows that numerous African proverbs, rooted in **patriarchal traditions**, contribute to **women's oppression, marginalisation, and devaluation**. However, **limited attention has been given to proverbs that may incite or legitimise violence against women**, despite the widely acknowledged rhetorical power of proverbs in shaping **moral consciousness, social beliefs, and behavioural norms** (Akporobaro & Emovon, 1994). Furthermore, **many gender studies have focused on specific ethnic groups**, limiting broader insights into the **ethnocultural foundations of proverbial misogyny** across Africa. **This study aims to bridge that gap** by providing a **comparative and cross-cultural analysis** of African proverbs that may encourage gender-based violence.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The African proverbs analysed in this study were sourced from various published and unpublished materials. Given that a single proverb can have multiple interpretations depending on context, those related to gender-based violence (GBV) were selected based on their most apparent and direct meanings. This study relies on secondary sources, which include newspaper articles, book and film reviews, and scholarly journal articles that discuss or evaluate original research. As Haralambos (2013) explains, secondary sources describe, interpret, analyse, and summarise primary sources.

Relevant materials on "African proverbs that encourage violence against women" were identified through desk research using search engines such as Google, MSN, Lycos, and Yahoo. Search terms were refined to include synonyms and variations, such as "African proverbs that justify beating women" and "proverbs that support the oppression of women." The selected materials primarily examined gender construction and the portrayal of women in African proverbs. From these sources, proverbs referencing violence against women were extracted for analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed as the analytical framework. According to Phillips and Jørgensen (2006: 61-65), the core principles of CDA are that "discursive practices contribute to the construction of social identities and relations; discourse both constitutes and is shaped by social practices; and language should be analysed within its social context, as discursive practices create and reinforce unequal power relations." Proverbs subtly but powerfully sustain gendered social hierarchies that disadvantage women. CDA helps reveal how proverbs contribute to the continued subjugation of women in Africa and provides insights for promoting positive social change, as discourse is both a reflection of and a tool for shaping society (Wetherell, 2001; Richardson, 2007).

This study also adopts Lazar's (2005) approach to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), which critiques discourses that reinforce patriarchal power structures—systems that privilege men while disempowering women. FCDA is particularly relevant for examining hegemonic masculinity and femininity, which underpin gender inequality in patriarchal societies. Connell (1987, 1995) explains that such systems normalise male authority and female subordination, presenting male dominance as natural or inherent. Connell (1995) defines hegemonic masculinity as a set of gendered practices that legitimise patriarchy by securing male dominance and female subjugation. FCDA is well-suited to this study as it exposes the ways in which taken-for-granted gender norms and hegemonic power relations are produced, reinforced, and sometimes challenged through discourse (Lazar, 2007: 142). By applying this framework, this study critically examines how African proverbs can perpetuate GBV and gender inequality.

Data Presentation

It can be reasonably asserted that, in Africa, proverbs serve predominantly as **linguistic instruments of patriarchy**, given their empirically demonstrated tendency to **diminish the status of women while glorifying men**. African oral literature is abundant with **subtly nuanced expressions** that reinforce **imbalanced power dynamics** between genders, systematically **marginalising women while elevating men** to positions of **dominance and significance**. The following proverbs, drawn from various African societies, exemplify how language can **perpetuate and legitimise violence** against women.

1. Pashan ta fi na yale, oun be laja fun 'yawo

The whip that was used to beat the first wife is kept for the second wife (Yoruba; Balogun, 2010)

This proverb implies that a woman is regarded as a child who must be disciplined whenever she errs and that a man has the right to physically chastise his wife (or wives). It also presupposes a man's right to marry multiple wives, reducing women to mere possessions. Additionally, it warns the second wife not to expect preferential treatment over the first. Similar proverbs can be found in the **Frafra Traditional Area of Ghana (2)** and among the **Igbo (3)**:

2. Doseka n gme pogi keema la, n gme'ere pogsariga.

The stick that is used to beat the first wife will be the same stick that will be used on the second wife. (Frafra; Baataar et al., 2023)

3. Nwaanyi na-dighi anuru di ya okwu, itali ka e ji ezi ya ihe.

A woman that is disobedient to her husband must be taught obedience with the cane. (Igbo; Agbedo, Obiora & Ahamefula, 2016)

This Igbo proverb is frequently used in Igbo society. It is sexist as it is predominantly used by men to **diminish the worth and dignity of women**. It reflects a **chauvinistic ideology**, reinforcing male superiority and endorsing violence as a means of coercion. Hussein (2005:66) cites another Igbo narrative proverb:

4. An Ugwuta (Oguta) girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her. Her mother told her to go and retaliate. She went, and was sexed (raped) again.

According to Hussein, this proverb highlights the **sexual vulnerability** of women and underscores the **normalisation of sexual violence in patriarchal societies**. It reflects men's **collective and individual assumption of dominance**, reinforcing gender-based oppression (Disch, 1997:564-565). Furthermore, it signifies how **African men are socialised into dominant roles** (Tlou, 2002), fostering a culture of **subjugation and degradation** that strips women of **dignity, autonomy, and human rights**.

5. hinakuhilayikambunjimatakakahacyineyitalakuo wumuvumbuwuchinana

What annoys the red mongoose most are insults, but you still insult it mentioning how red his lips are.
(Lunda; Mutunda, 2016)

This proverb mocks a wife who has been physically assaulted by her husband. The underlying assumption is that a man has the **right to beat his wife**, likening her to a child who must be corrected when she misbehaves. It normalises **domestic violence** as an acceptable means of **coercion and control**. A similar proverb, *chanunantunū* (“A roof remover”), suggests that a **woman provokes her husband's aggression**, thereby justifying **physical abuse**. The following West African proverb furthers this narrative:

6. Beat your wife regularly; if you don't know why, she will.

The proverb in (6) encourages **systematic domestic abuse** and **reinforces gender-based violence**.

7. If you really love your wife, you have to beat her.
(Tarika, Ethiopia; Kiiru, 1999)

This proverb upholds the notion that **mental and physical abuse** is a natural part of marriage. It suggests that **violence serves as a means of asserting male dominance**, portraying marriage as a **rehabilitation institution** where women must be trained into obedience (Ncube & Moyo, 2014:132). Such perspectives are **particularly troubling**, considering they persist even within **matrilineal societies**, where women might otherwise be expected to hold more social power.

8. Eyaapa Nabulobe, eliipa Nabukelema.

That which was used to beat the rejected one (wife) will be used to beat the loved one. (Bukusu)

This proverb, similar to those in (1), (2), and (3), appears to caution against complacency and arrogance. However, it subtly alludes to women, reinforcing the idea that all wives, regardless of their status, will ultimately experience domestic abuse.

9. Okhayiya khubalebe nga namulekhwa tawe.

Do not wander about among the relatives like a widow (Bukusu)

This proverb singles out widowed women for **contemptuous commentary**, reducing them to figures of **ridicule and isolation**. According to Barasa and Opande (2017), proverbs like the one above highlight the prevalence of **polygamy and domestic violence**

among the Bukusu, where men beat their wives, force them out of their homes, and take new wives—who, in turn, suffer similar abuse. Research indicates that **45% of women** have experienced **physical violence** (KDHS, 2014, cited in Barasa & Opande, 2017).

10. Beat your wife regularly; if you don't know why, she will know why

(West Africa; Schipper, 2006)

11. If you really love your wife you have to beat her

(Tigrinya, Eritrea; Schipper, 2006)

12. Now the marriage is going to begin, as the neglected wife said, when she was flogged with thorns.

(Hausa; Schipper, 2006)

Proverbs, such as those in (10) (11) and (12) **normalise and encourage domestic violence**, treating it as an essential component of marriage. Across diverse cultures, these expressions reinforce the **universality of men's perceptions regarding the acceptability of violence against women**. These proverbs illustrate the **lack of regard for women's suffering**, reinforcing the notion that **physical punishment strengthens emotional bonds**. However, in reality, **domestic violence fosters resentment, hatred, and trauma**, undermining healthy relationships (Tatar, 2022:44).

Additionally, Assefa (2016) identifies numerous **misogynistic Amharic proverbs** that **dehumanise and oppress women**, making **domestic abuse appear acceptable**. By **normalising such behaviour**, society prevents individuals—including women—from recognising it as **criminal or abusive**. The data presented here underscore the **pervasiveness of domestic violence** and its **deep-seated cultural legitimisation through language**.

(13)

a. ሴትና አህያ የማቸሉት የለማ

setanna ahayya yamaytʃalut yällämm

‘A woman and a donkey can tolerate everything’

b. የደንጋይን ጦርነት፣ የሸሮን ቀለብነት፣ የሚስትን ባርነት

yädəngayən t'orännät yäfəron k'alläbännät yämistən barännät

‘Conflict using stone is analogous to supplies of mush and slavery of a wife’

c. አህያና ሴት ቢረግጥዋት አይከፋት

ahəyyanna set biräḡat'wat aykäfat

‘A woman and a donkey do not refuse being trampled’

d. እናት ትረገጣለች እንደመሬት

ənnat tərägḡät'allätif'əndämäret

‘A mother is trampled like the earth’

e. ሴትና አህያ በዳላ

setənnā ahəyya bādulla

‘A woman and a donkey are controlled by a stick’

f. ከሸንጎ ቢረታ ከቤት ሚስቱን መታ

käfängo birräta käbet mistun mäta

‘When a man was beaten in a forum, he went home and beat his wife’

g. ማንን ታሸንፋለህ ቢሉት ሚስቴን አለ

mannəntaffännəfalläh bilut misten alä

‘When a man is asked over whom he enjoys victory, he said, “my wife”’

h. አማቱን ምታ ቢባል ሚስቴን በየት አልፎ አለ

amatun məta bilut misten bəyät alləfe alä

‘When a man is ordered to hit his mother-in-law, he said “how can I

skip over my wife”’

i. የምታሸንፈውን ምታ ቢባል ወደሚስቱ ሮጠ

yämmətaffännəfäwən məta bilut wädemistu rot'ä

‘When a man is ordered to hit the person over whom he has won, he runs to his wife’

Assefa (2016) argues that women are vulnerable to domestic abuse within the sociocultural context under study and, presumably, in many other cultures as well. In addition to performing arduous physical labour, they endure beatings from their husbands during domestic disputes. However, neither women nor society at large perceive this as abuse or criminal behaviour, as it has been normalised and ingrained through socialisation. Proverbs (13a) and (13b) reflect how women are regarded as mere servants, despite the immense burdens they bear in supporting their families. Instead of being acknowledged for their contributions, they are dismissed as undeserving complainers. Even more degradingly, they are

compared to mush—one of the most common and frequently mistreated food items in society—further reinforcing their status as subjugated individuals.

Proverb (13c) suggests that women not only accept but also enjoy being beaten, particularly by their husbands. This mindset fosters the belief that physical punishment is the only way to correct perceived misbehaviour in women. The comparison of women to the ground—constantly trodden upon—further implies that they are deserving of violence. Even more disturbingly, women are likened to donkeys, an animal widely regarded as unintelligent and expected to endure mistreatment without complaint.

According to Assefa, proverb (13f) suggests that men project their frustrations and failures in public life onto their wives through physical violence, using them as emotional scapegoats. Within this societal framework, women—especially wives—are perceived as inferior to men and are thus subjected to domestic abuse as a means of control. Husbands, in particular, assume an inherent right to beat their wives, to the extent that, when seeking an outlet for their aggression, they instinctively turn to their spouses. Proverbs (13f)–(13i) exemplify this socially constructed reality, directly contradicting the core principles of marriage, which advocate unity and mutual respect.

Furthermore, Assefa (2016) contends that the Amharic proverbs in (13a)–(13i) illustrate how the target speech community has historically reinforced a reality in which women are expected to be victims of domestic violence. Wives, in particular, endure multiple forms of abuse, with physical beatings being the most severe. This reality is embedded in both the society’s proverbs and its broader oral traditions, which perpetuate and legitimise violence against women in domestic settings. These proverbs not only reflect but also actively encourage the continuation of such violence, serving as clear examples of how sexist language devalues women.

Hussein (2005) argues that proverbs reinforcing masculine dominance—such as “*The husband returned home and whipped his wife when he was allowed to whip whomever he could*”—can lead some men to develop a distorted sense of masculinity, equating manhood with the control and subjugation of women through physical and psychological violence.

As previously noted, linguistically induced violence against women is not exclusive to Africa. Many cultures and societies possess proverbs that endorse violence against women. Fernández (2022), in his

study on the persistence of sexism in Martínez Kleiser's *Refranero General Ideológico Español*, highlights the following examples:

(14)

- a. To a woman and a dog, a stick in one hand and bread in the other.
- b. To a woman and a candle, twist their neck if you want them to be good.
- c. The woman and the pavement always want to be trodden on.
- d. The ass and the woman must be beaten with sticks.

Fernández (2022) argues that, even when uttered in jest, such expressions—laden with derogatory and violent connotations—perpetuate a culture of domestic abuse. These proverbs do not merely reflect violence against women; they actively promote and legitimise it. Moreover, the recurring comparisons between women and objects or animals, particularly beasts of burden, are neither coincidental nor insignificant. Many proverbs that justify violence against women attempt to rationalise such actions by equating women with animals that must be controlled through force.

Tartar (2022), referencing Schipper (2006), presents a collection of cross-cultural proverbs that advocate for the beating of women as a means of securing their obedience:

15. The man who cannot slaughter his sheep or beat his wife [when she deserves it], it is better for him to die than to live (An Arabic proverb from the Maghreb).
16. To keep your wife on the rails, beat her – and if she goes off the rails, beat her (Spanish, Puerto Rico).
17. Women, like gongs, should be beaten regularly (English, USA).
18. A bad woman and a good woman both need the rod (Spanish, Argentina).
19. Good horses and bad horses need the spurs, good women and bad women need the whip (Many variants in both Europe and the Americas).
20. Do not spare a bullock or a wife (Burmese).
21. Caulk a new boat; beat a new wife (Khionghta).
22. Clubbing produces virtuous wives (Chinese).

23. A woman who is beaten is going to be a better wife (Korean).

24. The nails of a cart and the head of a woman, they only work when they are hit hard (Rajasthani).

25. For who beats up his wife, God improves the food (Russian).

26. A nut, a stockfish, and a young wife should be beaten, in order to be good (Polish).

27. A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the harder you beat them, the better they be (English, UK/USA).

28. Women, like dogs: the more you beat them, the more they love you (Spanish, Argentina).

29. Women and steaks, the more you beat them, the better they'll be (German).

30. Wring a wife's and a hen's neck, if you want them good (Europe and both Americas).

31. If you don't thrash your wife, she might think she's already a widow (Armenian).

These proverbs, originating from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, reinforce the deeply ingrained notion that physical violence is an acceptable and even necessary tool for controlling women. For instance, the Arabic proverb from the Maghreb (15) equates a man's ability to beat his wife with his worthiness to live, while the Puerto Rican proverb (16) prescribes beating as a routine measure to ensure a wife's compliance. Similarly, the American-English proverb (17) likens women to gongs that require regular striking, and the Spanish-Argentinian proverb (18) asserts that both good and bad women need to be subjected to physical punishment.

This pattern of thought is not limited to any single region; rather, it persists across continents, from Burmese (20) and Chinese (22) proverbs to Rajasthani (24) and Russian (25) expressions, all of which normalise and legitimise violence against women. The recurrence of comparisons between women and animals, objects, or food—such as horses (19), stockfish and walnuts (26), dogs (28), and steaks (29)—further illustrates the dehumanisation embedded within these cultural narratives. The Polish (26) and English (27) proverbs go so far as to claim that the harder women are beaten, the better they become, reinforcing a dangerous ideology that equates submission with virtue. Even more explicitly, the Armenian proverb (31) warns that without routine violence, a wife may begin to see herself as

independent, further highlighting the patriarchal anxiety surrounding female autonomy.

These proverbs, despite their varied origins, reflect a disturbing global continuity in the justification of gender-based violence. The normalisation of physical abuse through such sayings perpetuates misogynistic attitudes and reinforces the structural oppression of women. While some may argue that these expressions are relics of the past, their continued presence in oral traditions and literary compilations suggests that the underlying beliefs they promote still resonate in many societies. Recognising and challenging these proverbs is crucial in dismantling the cultural narratives that sustain violence against women and in fostering a more just and equitable world.

Discussion of Findings

The purported purpose of proverbs is to provide guidance and wisdom in both private and public affairs through the social norms and beliefs they convey. However, an examination of selected African proverbs reveals that this objective is not always fulfilled. While some proverbs do offer wisdom and guidance for life, others are laden with gender discrimination and stereotypes. These serve as both a moral burden and a societal blemish that calls into question the belief in true humanity. Throughout history, women have been subjected to victimisation and violence, facilitated by the reverential canonisation of oral literature and proverbs that promote excessive male dominance and female subjugation. Within this framework, men develop a sense of entitlement to superior treatment and opportunities, while women are conditioned to accept an inferior status, often being likened to animals. Such comparisons dehumanise women, thereby justifying their mistreatment and the violence directed at them in order to maintain the distorted social equilibrium created by patriarchy. Africa is not an exception to the global oppression of women. Gender equality remains elusive, even in regions of the world where racial and gender disparities in education and other social achievements are believed to have been largely eradicated (Hussein, 2005).

The examples cited, drawn from diverse ethnic groups, illustrate how proverbs are utilised in African social and cultural organisation to reinforce entrenched patriarchal structures. They depict the oppression and subjugation of women across many African nations. Proverbs are integral to African epistemology, as they play a crucial role in shaping knowledge for the advancement of human existence. Their connection to significant existential issues and their perceived

immutability over time lend them credibility in supporting historical claims (Etta & Mogu, 2012). If proverbs are indeed regarded as an unalterable set of social rules, then it follows that a skewed and disparaging representation of African women is being consistently reinforced across the continent. These deeply embedded cultural notions influence major life decisions based on the principles believed to be encapsulated within proverbs. Ultimately, proverbs function as an open gallery of African knowledge, facilitating control and the imposition of a particular worldview as sacred and universally accepted. Consequently, proverbs often serve to uphold patriarchy across generations by presenting male dominance as an unchanging, stable component of the social order (Kamwendo & Kaya, 2016).

Goheen (1996) argues that proverbs can function as vehicles for disseminating powerful ideologies, sustaining the dominance of certain groups by favouring ideas and traditions that discriminate against individuals based on gender, age, race, social class, ability, and other attributes. Similarly, Gyan (2018) asserts that attitudes, judgements, and perceptions of women—both positive and negative—are internalised and learned through a combination of direct instruction, behavioural patterns, songs, proverbs, wise sayings, and folktales. These internalised views subsequently shape behaviour.

In accordance with von Bülow's (1992) analysis, Hussein (2005) advocates for the continuous redefinition and reinterpretation of gender stereotypes to liberate both men and women from restrictive gender roles. If proverbs are to retain their significance as concise and universal distillations of common wisdom, they must be reconstructed to discourage all forms of violence against women. A significant number of scholars (Raji-Oyelade, 1999; Balogun, 2010; Adegbola, 2021) have championed the revision of oppressive proverbs, resisting them through education and the persistent pursuit of the feminist agenda. This process involves reinterpreting certain African proverbs that are considered obsolete. In a similar initiative, a South African women's shelter in 2021 called for the reconstruction of African proverbs to reshape public perceptions of gender-based violence. The shelter collaborated with various organisations to employ a public relations, influencer, and billboard campaign aimed at actively revising traditional proverbs about women, thereby shifting the discourse towards equality and respect. This approach effectively disempowers outdated, harmful proverbs and fosters new perspectives grounded in justice and fairness. By altering societal perceptions of women's

worth, it is possible to address deeply embedded beliefs that perpetuate gender-based violence. A conscious effort to reconstruct discriminatory proverbs is believed to positively influence men's attitudes towards women and gender-based violence. If canonical texts steeped in misogyny have negatively shaped men's perceptions of women, turning women's history into one of suffering and oppression (Chollet, 2020; Holland, 2006), then a concerted effort by governments, non-governmental organisations, and the academic community to raise awareness and promote gender equality is essential in addressing violence against women. This effort should engage both men and women, particularly young people, in fostering healthy gender relations. To drive societal progress, young men must be encouraged to cultivate positive attitudes and dispositions towards their female counterparts.

Ultimately, we all have a personal responsibility to critically examine the body of popular knowledge that has accumulated into canonical expressions. According to Kerschen (2000:68), "We risk fostering animosity, miscommunication, and prejudice if we do not carefully analyse what we have been taught by proverbs to determine what we truly believe and discard the rest in our personal use." Similarly, Nisrane and Tizazu (2019:342) assert that "Efforts should be made to educate society about the damaging expressions while maintaining and supplementing the positive practice." A fundamental aspect of this process is the rejection of harmful ideas, even when they are conveyed in jest (Martínez Garrido, 2001:95). Additionally, strategies for subverting negative gender ideologies through creative appropriation or the production of new, positive discourses should be employed (Lomotey, 2019:336), and the prejudices inherent in sexist proverbs must be recognised as "blatant lies" (Presbey, 1999:178). The emergence of female paremiographers is seen as a development that could help mitigate the detrimental effects of proverbs on society.

The United Nations estimates that approximately 736 million women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their lifetime. This equates to about one in three women globally. Violence against women and girls remains one of the most widespread and egregious human rights violations. The root cause and the solution to this issue are not difficult to identify. Generations of individuals in Africa and beyond have been indoctrinated into a culture of hegemonic patriarchy, which provides fertile ground for misogynistic views and sexist

ideologies. The solution lies in the commitment of African nations and societies to dismantle patriarchal structures by embracing gender equality and implementing comprehensive educational reforms to counteract the damaging impact of harmful proverbs. To eradicate gender-based violence, governments, NGOs, and the academic community must take concerted action. Governments must lead the way by instituting legal repercussions for gender-based violence and enshrining them in national constitutions. Despite the need for robust responses, including investment in preventative measures, data on national expenditure towards combating violence against women and girls remains alarmingly scarce. Academics should engage in rigorous analysis to align cultural and linguistic properties with contemporary values, while NGOs should conduct extensive awareness campaigns to challenge and correct harmful cultural norms. Lastly, positive cultural elements should be harnessed to reform societal attitudes. By promoting progressive proverbs, songs, and dramatic performances, societies can effectively challenge and transform the narratives that sustain violence against women. Igbolekwu et al. (2021) advocate for the creation of indigenous songs, playlets, and proverbs that highlight the adverse effects of domestic violence, with local radio and television broadcasts disseminating this knowledge to raise public awareness.

Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies within African societies as reflected in proverbs that perpetuate violence against women. Through an anthropologico-linguistic analysis of selected African proverbs, this study demonstrates how language serves as a medium for sustaining gender inequalities and reinforcing male dominance in both private and public spheres. While proverbs are a cherished aspect of African cultural heritage, their content must evolve to reflect contemporary values that uphold the dignity, rights, and agency of women in society.

References

- Achebe, C. (2006). *Things Fall Apart*. Penguin Classics.
- Adegbola. O.F. (2021). Conceptualization of 'the Woman': A Critical Analysis of Selected Yoruba Proverbs. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 11(13): 44-58.
- Agbedo, C.U., Obiora, H.C. & Ahamefula, N.O. (2016). Regulated Women and Manipulative Language Use in African Proverbs: A

- Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective. *CACH Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, 1:37-60.
- Akporobaro F.B.O. and Emovon J.A. (1994). *Nigerian Proverbs: Meanings and Relevance Today*. Lagos:
- Ali, P. A. and Naylor, P. B. (2013). Intimate Partner Violence: A Narrative Review of the Feminist, Social and Ecological Explanations for its Causation. *Aggression and Violent Behaviour*, 18(6): 611-619.
- Assefa, E. (2016). Linguistic Violence against Women as Manifested in Sexist Amharic Proverbs. *Ethnorama*, 11(1) 67-94
- Baataar, C, Agana, T.A. and Akapule, S.A. (2023). Wise Saying or “Foolish” Saying: Assessing the Views on the Impact of Some Ghanaian Proverbs and Sayings on Gender Relations in the Frafra Traditional Area of Ghana. *Open Access Library Journal*, 10: e9770. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1109770>
- Bako, M. and Syed. J. (2018). Women’s Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward. *Human Resource Development International*, 21(2):1-19.
- Balogun, O. A. (2010). Proverbial Oppression of Women in Yoruba African culture: A Philosophical Overview. *Thought and Practice: A Journal of the Philosophical Association of Kenya (PAK) New Series*, 2(1): 21- 36.
- Baloyi, M. (2017). Gendered character of barrenness in an African context: An African pastoral study. *die Skriflig / In Luce Verbi*.
- Barasa, M.N. & Opande, I.N. (2017). Proverbs in Lubukusu and Ekegusii in Kenya: Empowering or Disempowering for Women and Girls? *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10(7): 155-173.
- Bülow, D.v. (1992). Bigger than Men? Gender Relations and their Changing Meaning in Kipsigis Society, Kenya. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 62 (4): 523-546.
- Chiliza, T.H. and Masuku, M.M. (2020). Manifestation of gender inequality in some Zulu proverbs that reflect patriarchal domination of women (by men) within the Zulu cultural context. *Indilinga: African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge System*, 19 (1):58–69. <https://journals.co.za/doi/10.10520/EJC-1ee3e91ad9>.
- Chollet, M. (2020). *Today’s Witches-The Invincible Power of Women*, translated by Louze, Hazel, Contact Publishing.
- Collins, A. (2014). Gender-Based Violence. In Teo, T. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology*. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-5583-7_121
- Connell, R.W (1987). *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1995). *Masculinities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture.
- Disch, E. (1997). *Reconstructing Gender: A Multicultural Anthology*. California, Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing.
- Djite, P.G. (2008). *The Sociolinguistics of Development in Africa. Multilingual Matters*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Esen, A. J. A. (1982). *Ibibio Profile: A Psycho-literary Projection*. Calabar: Paico Press.
- Etta, E. E. and Mogu, F.I. (2012). The Relevance of Proverbs in African Epistemology. *Journal of Contemporary Research*, 9(1): 186-205.
- Fernández, L.J.T. (2022). Perpetuation of Sexism through Proverbs: The case of Martínez Kleiser’s Refranero General Ideológico Español. *Language and Communication*, 83:77-96.
- Gebeyehu, T.A. (2019). The Negative Representation of Women in the Language of Awngi Proverbs. *IJRAR- International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 479-490
- Goheen, M. (1996). *Men Own the Fields, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Gyan, C. (2018). *Gasping for Breath: Women’s Concerns and the Politics of Community Development in Rural Ghana*. PhD Dissertation, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo.
- Gyan, C., Abbey, E. and Baffoe, M. (2020). Proverbs and Patriarchy: Analysis of Linguistic Prejudice and Representation of Women in Traditional Akan Communities of Ghana. *Social Sciences*, 9(3), 22. MDPI AG. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/socsci9030022>
- Haralambos, H. (2013). *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. London: Harper Collins Publishers Limited.
- Holland, J. (2006). *A Brief History of Misogyny: The World’s Oldest Prejudice*. Constable &

- Hussein, J.W. (2005). The Social and Ethno-Cultural Construction of Masculinity and Femininity in African Proverbs. *African Study Monographs*, 26(2): 59-87.
- Igbolekwu, C.O., Arusukwu, O., Nwogu, J.N., Rasak, B., Asamu, F., and Osueke, N.O. (2021). Domestic Violence against Women in the Nigerian Rural Context. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(1):226-245.
- Jobo, M.M. (2015). The Prejudiced Negative Images of Femininity in Wolaita Proverbs. *International Journal of Society Culture and language*, 4(1): 58-68.
- Kamwendo, J. & Kaya, H.O. (2016). Gender and African Proverbs. *Stud Tribes Tribals*, 14(2): 92-99.
- Kerschen, L. (2000). Proverbs about women: from the Pacific Northwest and California. *Calif. Hist.* 79(1):62–69.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/25591579>.
- Kiiru, M. (1999). You Cannot Catch Old Birds with Chaff: Woman's Multiple Images in Proverbs. *Wajibu: A journal of Social & Religious Concern*, 14: 1,1-7.
- Lakoff, R.T. (2004). *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lazar, M. (2005). *Feminist critical discourse analysis: Gender, power and ideology in discourse*: Springer.
- Lazar, Michelle M. (2007). Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse *Praxis I. Critical Discourse Studies* 4 (2):141-164.
- Lomotey, B.A. (2019). Women, metaphors and the legitimisation of gender bias in Spanish proverbs. *Journal of International Women Studies* 20 (2):324–339. <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article¼2111&context¼jiws>.
- Martínez Garrido, E. (2001). Palos, animales y mujeres: expresiones misóginas, paremias y textos persuasivos. *Cuad. Filol. Ital.* 8, 79–98.
<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/CFIT/article/viewFile/CFIT0101120079A/17558>.
- Mieder, W. (2007). Anti-proverbs and mass communication: The interplay of traditional and innovative folklore. *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 52(1):17-45. DOI: [10.1556/AEthn.52.2007.1.2](https://doi.org/10.1556/AEthn.52.2007.1.2)
- Mulaudzi P.A. (2013). Cultural perceptions and linguistic terminology regarding traditional marriage within indigenous South African communities. *South African Journal of African language* 33(2):153–158. 10.1080/02572117.2013.871456.
- Mutunda, S. (2016). Portrayal of African Women in Folklore: A case Study of Proverbs among the Lunda in the Northwestern Part of Zambia. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities (IJELH)*. Volume IV, Issue II.
- Ncube, B. and Moyo, T. (2014). Portraying Women as the Other: Ndebele Proverbs and Idioms in the Context of Gender Construction. *Africana*, 5: 3, 126-142.
- Nisrane, T.G. & Tizazu, S.B. (2019). Discourse Analysis on the Representation of Women in Western Gurage Proverbs. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 14(6), 335-343.
- Nyembezi, C. (1990). *Zulu Proverbs*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.
- O'Toole, L.L & Schiffman, J.R. (1997). *Gender Violence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Phillips, L. and Jorgensen, M.W. (2006). *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publications.
- Phiri, S.S., Mulaudzi, F.M. and Heyns, T. (2015). The Impact of an Indigenous Proverb on Women's Mental Health: A Phenomenological Approach. *Curationis* 38(2): 1539. doi: [10.4102/curationis.v38i2.1539](https://doi.org/10.4102/curationis.v38i2.1539)
- Presbey, G.M. (1999). Should women love “wisdom”? Evaluating the Ethiopian wisdom tradition. *Res. Afr. Lit.* 30 (2), 165–181. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3820565>.
- Raji-Oyelade, A. (1999). Postproverbials in Yoruba Culture: A Playful Blasphemy. *Research in African Literatures*, 30(1):74-82.
- Richardson, J. (2007). *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Palgrave Robinson.
- Schipper, M. (2006) *Never Marry a Woman with Big Feet: Women in Proverbs from Around the World*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Stone, J. R. (2006). *The Routledge book of world proverbs*. NY, New York: Routledge.
- Strid, S. and Hearn, J. (2022) Patriarchy. *Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, & Conflict (Third Edition)*.
- Tatar, M. (2022). The Cultural Basis of the Violence against Woman. *Contemporary Research in Education*, 10(1): 40-53.
- Tlou, S.D. 2002. Gender and HIV/AIDS. In M. Essex, S. Mboup, P.J. Kanki, R.G. Marlink & S.D. Tlou, eds.) *AIDS in Africa* (2nded.), pp. 654-663. Kluwer Academic, New York.

Uduigwomen, A. F. (2002). Epistemological Functions of Proverbs in Traditional African Societies. *NDUNODE-Calabar Journal of the Humanities* 3: 126-135.

Wetherell, M. (2001). Debates in Discourse Research. In M. Wetherell, S. Taylor, & S. Yates

(Eds.), *Discourse Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications. (pp. 380-399).

Wodak, R. (2008) Introduction: Discourse studies – important concepts and terms. In: Wodak R, Krzyżanowski M (eds) *Qualitative Discourse Analysis for the Social Sciences*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1–29.

THE RISKS OF DIVIDED IDENTITIES IN AFRICA: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF STIGMATIZATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS VICTIMS AMONG YORUBA-SPEAKING COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA.

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/a2>

Ajomale Funmileyi Festus

Caleb University Imota Lagos, Nigeria

Email: bayojomale2015@gmail.com

funmileyi.ajomale@calebuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract

The risks associated with divided identities among Yoruba-speaking communities in Southwestern Nigeria highlight the complex interplay between culture and perceptions of mental illness. In the context of Yoruba communities in Southwestern Nigeria, the concept of divided identities plays a significant role in shaping perceptions and attitudes towards mental illness. The socio-cultural fabric of these communities is deeply intertwined with traditional beliefs, religious practices, and social norms that can contribute to the stigmatization of individuals suffering from mental health issues. Understanding this phenomenon requires an exploration of how cultural identity influences mental health perceptions and the implications for those affected. Using a qualitative research design, this study explores this phenomenon of Stigmatization of Mental Illness Victims due to Cultural Beliefs and Mental Health Perceptions, Impact on Help-Seeking Behavior, Social Consequences and Identity Division and Efforts towards Reducing the Stigma. This study reveals that individuals experiencing symptoms of mental illness is viewed as being fixated or cursed, leading to social ostracism. This stigmatization result in families hiding their mentally ill members due to fear of societal judgment, which further exacerbates the isolation and suffering experienced by these individuals. In conclusion the paper emphasized that stigmatization not only affects individual well-being but also disrupts family relationships and community cohesion. The study recommends that addressing these challenges requires multi-faceted approaches that incorporate education, advocacy, and community engagement concerted efforts aimed at fostering understanding and acceptance while respecting cultural context.

Keywords: Identities, Mental Illness, prejudice, stereotype, Socio-Cultural, Stigmatization.

Introduction.

Mental illness seems to be widely endorsed by the general public leading to having apparent stigmatizing manifestations. Lee et al (2022). In African, it is a common knowledge that mental illness is stigmatized among people in the society. Stigma is a significant obstacle to mental health care, and there is a need to foster a culture in which mental illness is treated like any other medical issue. It is not unusual to discover persons with mental challenges. The stigma surrounding mental illness is sturdy, that it places a wall of silence around the issue as a disease that is serious and the effects are detrimental to the identity of individual and the community, family, and friends. According to history, People's attitudes to mental health are still strongly influenced by traditional beliefs in supernatural causes and punishment for wrong doing and some believed to be hereditary and self-inflicted. Lee et al (2022). In African communities especially in south-west Nigeria, stigmatizing victims of mental illness is very common. They are ostracized by their families, friends, and relations. These behaviours are clearly emphasized as social and cultural factors for both the actors and mentally ill persons. Their families often attempt to

control and cure them, using traditional healing measures, and the mentally ill are sometimes locked up in their homes, pushed out of the society, or treated with contemporary orthodox therapies. Whether the mental disease is treated or healed, stigmatization persists, producing an unhealthy environment for mentally ill people and their families of origin. The prevalence of mental challenges and the harmful repercussions on victims has continued to be a reoccurring decimal in Africa and indeed Nigeria. Corrigan and Watson (2002) asserted that, despite high prevalence of mental disorder, many people with the illness struggle with the symptoms and disabilities that result from the mentally challenged and are confronted by stereotypes and prejudice resulting from stigmatization and misconception about the illness. Some existing studies indicate the burden of specific mental illness on the family and attitudes towards the mentally ill but their main focus was entirely an "overview on psychiatry in Africa", focusing on south-west Nigeria. Persons with mental illness often have to struggle with a double problem. First, they have to cope with the symptoms of the disease itself; depending on the particular mental disorder they may have problems such as recurrent hallucinations, delusions, anxiety, or mood

swings. These symptoms can make it difficult for someone with a mental illness to work, live independently or achieve a satisfactory quality of life. Second, the misunderstandings of society about the various mental disorders result in stigma. Some persons who manage their mental illness well enough to work still have tremendous difficulties finding a job because employers discriminate against them. Thus, mental illness results not only in the difficulties arising from the symptoms of the disease but also in disadvantages through society's reactions. As a further complication, some people with mental illness may accept the common prejudices about mental illness, turn them against themselves, and lose self-confidence.

However, whether the illness is controlled or cured the fact remained that once a family is identified as having a mentally ill person people in the family or history of mental illness, the community members keep away from having any empathy or relationship with such families. Stigmatization goes far beyond the individual but to other family members. This is more evident in the rural communities than urban in Yoruba speaking communities. The risk of fragmented identities in the sociocultural framework of stigmatizing mental illness seeks to directly address the gap between perception, cultural beliefs, and mental health disorders. The science of mental health recognizes that a range of variables can influence an individual's psychological well-being, including genetic disposition, environmental influences, life experiences, styles, and biological aspects. Mental illnesses are common mental health issues that have a substantial impact on an individual's everyday activities. Being diagnosed as mentally ill changes an individual's identity and nomenclature, and it gives new meaning to behaviour regardless of the label used to previous behaviour. Exploring divided identity in individuals with mental illness can be a complex and sensitive topic. Research suggests that individuals with mental illness experience public stigma and self-stigma, leading to feeling of exclusion, rejection, and devaluation. This stigma can contribute to worsening symptoms, reduced likelihood of seeking treatment, and difficulties with social relationships.

According to Corrigan and Watson (2002), mental illness can result from spiritual attack and can be cured spiritually. Spiritual therapy centres on diviners and their therapeutic methods, and there is always disagreement between the herbalist therapeutic method of treatments who apply sorts of physical punishment inflicted on the mentally ill person, such as incantation, rituals and sacrifices, and sometimes beating in an attempt to feed them. The relationship between therapeutic modalities and the stigma associated with them is uncertain. Millions of mentally ill people in Africa are abandoned,

without medication or assistance, and are left to wander about towns and villages. The World health organization (WHO) in its 2019 report emphasized that, one out of every five persons in Africa experienced madness. Statistics shows that 75% of people with mental illness experiences stigma and 50% of individual with mental health conditions do not seek help due to stigma while the stigma caused the global economy \$2.5 trillion annually. There is a poor degree of understanding of individuals suffering from the disease, families, communities, and governments are not helping the problem since they enable mentally challenged patients to travel and forage for food on their own and are stigmatised as "were" meaning madness in Yoruba dialect. In traditional Yoruba societies, it is not unusual to discover persons with mental illnesses who continue to indulge in wicked, greedy, and harsh behaviour that jeopardizes communal cohesion and individual freedom.

Stigmatizing individual is a manifestation and proof of abnormality and the identities attached to people who are mentally challenged and are most times criminalized. The Yoruba speaking people and community laid great importance on the ancestral history of mental illness and this affect marriage and interfamily relationships. The eligibility of any candidature for kingship and other political positions centres on history of any mental disorder in the family. Precedence is laid to the appointment and credibility of any person in the community as to whether anybody in the family in the time past had suffered from such malady. The interplay between culture, health and stigmatization is complex and bidirectional, cultural beliefs and values influence health behaviour and practices, traditional healing practices and remedies, dietary habits and nutrition, social supports networks and community ties. Health outcomes affect cultural identity and community cohesion and illness experiences shape cultural narratives and storytelling, health care systems reflect cultural values and priorities (Gureje and Alem 2000, Makanjuola 1987; Odejide 1989)

Specifically, the paper sought to address the following research questions:

- Why is mental illness (MI) stigmatized among the Yoruba speaking communities of south-west?
- What empirical evidence could be established in socio-cultural context of stigmatizing mental illness?
- What empirical explanation can be given to the process of stigmatizing the mentally ill individual?

- Does stigmatizing behavior rest largely on the social and cultural conditions of the community in which the mental illness exists?

Literature Review

The condition of mental illness (MI) extends beyond the established burden evaluated in terms of prevalence. According to Morakinyo et al. (2002), hospital studies in Nigeria suggest that the incidence of MI is comparable with projections for most developing nations throughout the world. They also argued that the only valid epidemiology of MI data available in Nigeria was from 1963. Lenghton and Lambo (1963) conducted a Yoruba community study in Abeokuta, as well as an ongoing multiphase community research in Ogun state. For generations, MI was misunderstood, feared, concealed, and frequently neglected by scientists. Stigma is more than just using the wrong phrase or behaviour; it is about disrespect. For many individuals, the term "mentally ill" is associated with "mad", "lunatic," "crazy," "schicopsychopath," and "maniac," and it has terrible implications of being chronically out of control, unpredictable, and sometimes violent. Prejudice Stigma and prejudice are strongly related and intricately linked to social constructs. These constructs influence many people based on their age, religion, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background. It affects people of all grades and socioeconomic backgrounds, and because many mental illnesses are chronic and incapacitating, those who are affected find it difficult to break free from unfavorable social attitudes. Mental illness and divided identity can lead to compounded stigma, exacerbating feelings of shame and isolation. Stefano (Occhipinti et al. 2023).

Associating MI with violence perpetuates stigmatizing and discriminatory actions towards mentally unwell people. It is a negative stereotype, with typically biased views towards them. Hundreds of millions of women, men, and children suffer from mental illnesses, and despite their relevance, these issues receive little attention (Desjarlais et al., 1995; Ross et al., 2022). In Nigeria, government and health professionals recognize the presence of these issues, but the provision in the national budget for avoiding and dealing with them is disproportionately little in comparison to the risks to human health they pose. According to Wakil et al. (2002) in Morakinyo et al. (2002), despite the fact that Nigeria has a mental health policy program and action plan, the nation has done nothing to implement the policy or revise the legislation controlling the treatment of the mentally ill. These issues are worsened by the prevalence of socio-cultural attitudes and practices surrounding mental illness in our societies. Statistically, 75% of Nigerians think that mental illnesses are caused by demonic spirits (NPC, 2018). The idea of normality and abnormality is

loaded with several meanings and implications; most societies have a diverse set of social standards that are deemed suitable for various age groups, genders, jobs, social conventions, ranks, and cultural minorities within society. Displays of behaviour that are unusual by the standards of regular life must be considered in the context of the culture in which they exist. Observable behaviour that differ from the norm may be labeled as deviant or illness and social pressure may be used to persuade the individual to seek care. In this example, "help" refers to changing one's behaviour in order to conform to social standards. What one group considers being mental illness or aberrant behaviour may be normal in another. MI has been classified within Yoruba societies, and many names and appellations have been assigned to the accounts. Nomenclature such as "were," "Alawooku," "Alaaganna," "ayiiri," and others, all signifying mental illness. However, socio-cultural and social attitudes, beliefs, and treatment methods all have a significant impact on health-seeking behaviour. Abubakar and Aliyu (2004) said that, society's responsibility in the prevention and treatment of those suffering from MI cannot be overstated. People's health and social connections are affected by their cultural background. Culture shapes people's attitudes and perceptions. The risks of personal identities and the patriarchal nature of the Yoruba communities has make a man's MI to be traced to the handwork of the wicked ones in the community or the family members who are after his success. Woman on the other hand is not perceived in such manner due to her subjugated position but attributed theirs to bad manner and peer influence or self-caused or generational.

Divided Identity and Mental illness.

Divided identity can manifest in individuals with mental illness as they struggle to reconcile their perceived "normal" self with their mental health condition. This internal conflict can lead to feelings of confusion, anxiety and low self-esteem. Someone with depression may feel like they are fighting an internal battle between their "happy" self and their "sad" self. Kim, et al (2020). Several factors can contribute to divided identity in individual with mental illness. Factors like:

- Societal stigma: Negative attitudes and stereotypes perpetuated by society can lead to feelings of shame and self-doubt.
- Self-stigma: internalized negative attitudes and stereotypes can exacerbate feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth.
- Trauma: past traumatic experiences can fragment an individual's sense of identity, leading to divided loyalties and conflicting values.

The consequences of divided identities can be severe and reduced hope. Feelings stuck between conflicting identities can lead to feelings of hopelessness and despair, internalized stigma and self-doubt can erode an individual's sense of worth and can increase psychiatric symptoms. Bohart, A.C (2019). It is essential to recognize that divided identity is a common experience for individuals with mental illness. By acknowledging and addressing this internal conflicts, individuals can begin to integrate their fragmented identities and work towards recovery. This may involve seeking professional help, engaging in self-compassion practices and connecting with supportive networks (Lee et al., 2022).

Etiology of mental illness.

Social class and stressful experiences have been recognized as factors that are likely to play a substantial impact in the development of mental disorders. However, the etiology of mental illness involves several causes. According to Rees (1976), the causes of mental illness can be divided into predisposing and precipitating factors, which he refers to as intrinsic causes that reside in the individual, such as gynogenic, constitutional, personality, and critical stages of development, and extrinsic causes, which include psychosocial stresses, infections, and trauma. Traditional beliefs, culture, and the wrath of the ancestors and generational curses all have a significant impact on Yorubas views regarding mental illness. The phenomenon of mental illness is said to be created by violating taboos or failing to heed the ancestor's creed. The attitudes towards the mentally ill have a significant impact on their acceptability and social integration. In most countries, mental illness is considered a significant disgrace or mark of shame. The mentally sick are sometimes accused for bringing humiliation, ostracism, and contempt to their families as a result of their diseases, while others consider them as victims of poor luck, religious offences, witchcraft, or misbehavior on the part of the sufferer or traces of generational curses. Such stigma may prevent families from admitting a family member's illness. Some Yoruba households may hide or overprotect a member with mental illness. These lead to keeping the person from receiving potentially effective care and support or they may reject or ostracize the person from the family and allowing the mentally ill to walk all round the town and villages on their own.

Cultural identities and stigmatization of Mental illness (MI).

Stigma is a cultural invention, and its interpretations differs from society to society (Herrick et al., 1995). This suggests that, a situation seen as branding in one culture may not be treated similarly in another. The stigma

associated with the mentally ill can be traced back to antiquity and is founded on fear, a lack of understanding, and a deeply held moralistic belief (Garfinkel & Goldbloom, 2002). Discrimination is defined as making an unpleasant distinction with relation to those stigmatised, as well as making prejudiced distinctions between individuals from oneself in terms of race, color, and sanity. Efforts to erase the mark will make it more visible and attract more negative forces. According to Jacoby (1993), there is both felt stigma, which is a sense of shame, and an oppressive fear of enacted stigma, which are individually or collectively applied to those with mental illness. This can have serious social consequences for individuals in terms of their rights, freedom, self-identity, and social interactions with other community members, as well as psychopathological consequences. Dishonor is enacted in the workplace, which inhibits the behaviour of the mentally ill or prevents them from pursuing job in responsible roles or interacting with coworkers. Some deviant stigmatised people believe they are normal, although the so-called "normal" is neither normal nor human. Corrigan and Watson (2002) stressed that the impact of stigma is twofold: (a) Public stigma which is the reaction that the general population has to people with mental illness. (b) Self-stigma is the prejudice which people with mental illness turn against them. They claimed that both public and self-stigma may be understood in terms of three components; stereotypes, prejudice, and Discrimination. People who are biased support negative stereotypes, which tend to elicit negative emotional responses and violence. The community and family members utilise a range of methods, procedures, and traditional cures to keep their stigma secrets hidden. This includes the concealment of stigma symbols such as a change of family name, relocation from the community, family denial of the mentally ill person, denial of some adoption of certain behaviors, and avoidance of situations that can expose a hidden stigma, confiding of secrets in a carefully selected few, and avoidance of intimacy with others in order to avoid the subsequent obligation to divulge closely guarded information relating to the mentally ill person or family. The fight against stigma emanating from mental illness in Yoruba communities becomes an essential part of the fight against the scourge of abnormal and deviant behaviors and its consequences. It is not just the need to overcome barriers for care and prevention but the urge to view the socio-cultural context of its existence in the community (Livingston, & Boyd, 2010).

Stigmatization of MI across cultures is a significant barrier to psychiatric care. It causes delayed diagnosis, worsen quality of life, and a higher risk of social isolation and prejudice. Culture may impact the cause of mental illness, create symptoms, and make particular subgroups

more vulnerable. Cultural attitudes and values have an important impact in mental illness. Communities' attribution of observed behaviour that violates social standards can cause discomfort and generalization of the relationship between deviant behaviour and mental illness, culminating in stigmatisation, labelling, and avoidance. It plays an important role in understanding differences in stigma experiences among mentally ill people, as well as influencing societal attitudes to mental health concerns and treatment expectations. Rusch et al. (2005).

Cultural belief and mental health perception.

Mental health is a complex and multifaceted concept that encompasses an individual's whole emotional, psychological, and social functioning. According to WHO (2014), mental health is defined as a state of optimal well-being in which an individual recognizes their own strengths, handles common life stresses, performs successfully and efficiently, and contributes to their community. Negative views and ideas about mentally ill people are frequent, and it is a negative stereotype that distinguishes personal characteristics that are considered harmful. Stigmatization is an extremely effective technique that embeds a distinguishing imprint on a person or issue. The "marker," or stigmatizing individual, loses control of the circumstances forced on him. People suffering with major mental illness face difficulties and try to overcome the disease's symptoms and impairments. Stigma around mental illness appears to be largely accepted by the general public in Western countries. Defamatory views about mental illness are not limited to uninformed members of the general public; even well-trained professionals and traditional healers from most mental health (MH) disciplines subscribe to stereotypes about mental illness, which are more prevalent among westerners.

It is critical to conduct a multicultural investigation of the idea of stigmatization, people's experiences and responses to mental illness (MI), and the repercussions that follow. Geopolitical influences are being more recognized as essential aspects in the development and delivery of mental and physical well-being for people and families. These variables are critical to our knowledge of how mental illness is stigmatised and spreads physically, as demonstrated in the current SARS-CoV-2 epidemic, as well as the migration of people who can carry illnesses and mental illness (MI) for the rest of their lives. Interpersonal curses and inequities that cause stress and conflict may be a major contributing factor to mental illness. Perceptions of mental disease in Africa and the western half of the state have begun to shift, and there is a definite change in indications of mental illness as societies evolve. The influence of socio-cultural indices on mental health difficulties is thus critical for

identifying potential causes and treatment solutions, as well as the impact if eliminated but minimized.

Theoretical Framework.

The theory adopted for this study is social stigma theory which is credited by most authorities and scholars to Goffman. The theory is an explanatory supposition that account for the concept, etiology, nature, typology, burden and perception of a social stigma as well as the strategies commonly employed by the stigmatized for managing the information about their stigma status. The main thrust of Goffman theory is that a stigma is a socio-cultural or physical trait perceived as devaluating the process by an individual or group and so attract adverse social action. Stigmatization is the behavioral and attitudinal responses directed by people who claim to be normal at bearers of dreaded diseases, physical deformities and highly detest antisocial practices. It also involves the discriminatory and aversive treatment suffered by members of certain cultural groups.

Goffman was interested in the lacuna between what a person ought to be "virtual social identity" and what a person actually is "actual social identity." (Ritzer 1996). Therefore, anyone who has a gap between these two identities is stigmatized. Goffman focuses on the dramatological interaction between stigmatized people and normal. The nature of that interaction depends on which of the two types of stigmas an individual has. The basic dramatological problem is managing information so that the problem remains unknown to the audience. In actual sense, Goffman is really saying that we are all stigmatized at some time or the other, or in one setting or other. The theory reveals that the bearers of stigma always suffer from discrimination. Consequently, stigma bearers are victims of a host of physical and psychosocial burdens. In order to cope, the stigmatized reportedly evolve and use effective strategies for managing information about their stigma status and social identity.

Inherent in this theory is an idea that the prevalence of stigma cuts across sexes, various age groups and different social strata. The "normal" as a group always perceive the stigmatized as inferior, the perception is perpetuated by the use of various labels, stereotypes or derogatory terms to describe the stigmatized. The stigmatized person on the other hand perceived the normal as being unpredictable in terms of the way they react to stigmatization, owing to the discriminatory treatments meted out by morals, stigmatized persons design and use various strategies for coping or ameliorating the burden induced by these undesirable differences. This strategies Goffman (1963) sum up as techniques used by the stigmatized to hide their stigma secrets; concealment of stigma symbols such as change of name, rejection of bifocal lenses as suggestive of old age, confiding of secrets in a carefully selected few and

avoidance of intimacy with others so as to avoid the consequent obligation to divulge guarded information.

Conceptual Framework.

Developmental progression of Mental illness (MI) to Stigmatized Mental illness (SMI).

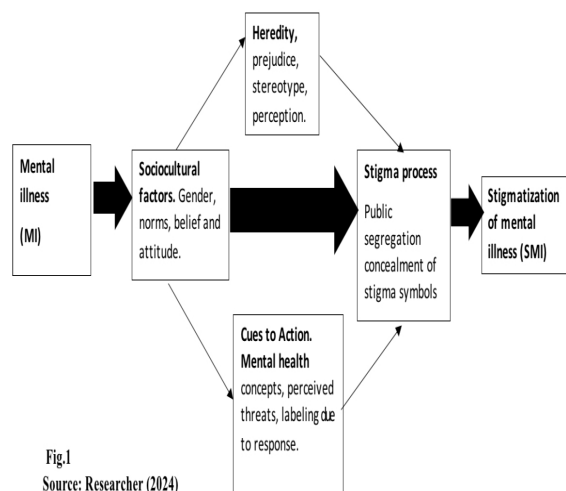


Fig.1
Source: Researcher (2024)

The conceptual framework for the analysis is based on the fundamental postulate that stigmatizing illness as the dependent variable, is influenced by a number of social and cultural variables. The perception of susceptibility and seriousness of mental illness can be viewed in the context of awareness and knowledge of the illness. This automatically elicits threat from mental illness that has an effect on stigmatizing of mental illness. When individuals are not susceptible to a particular health problem, any appropriate to take a health action may be considered as time wastage. Individuals weigh the seriousness of a health problem or the consequences of not taking action must be perceived as significant before behavior change can be contemplated. Health campaigns through health education and mental health concepts, promotion and prevention of mental illness, government policy and programs could enhance or worsen the consequences of mental health problems either as perceived susceptibility, seriousness, threat or increase awareness and knowledge thereby promote or affect desired behavior. All these could be influenced by the culture of the individuals such as norms, belief systems, and values etc. which adversely affect stigmatization of mental illness. Once labeled, individuals are subject to a number of cultural cues that tells them how to play their role, that is, they learn how to be sick in a way the particular society or culture understands. Use of derogatory words are affirm to them such as deviance, mad, insane, “were” (mad person in Yoruba dialect) etc. Once expectation and obligations associated with being

mentally ill are incorporated into the individual’s self-conception, they become the guiding imagery for future behavior. The individual identified as mentally ill internalizes an altered interpretation of himself and his behavior as part of his re-socialization into a deviant status. His role is now derived from the concept of their meaning contained in cultural category “mental illness.” (fig. 1)

His behavior is interpreted as a reflection of the characteristics which culture ascribes to persons falling into that category. This imagery defines what kind of people are mentally ill are, why they behave as they do, and how to react to them in both the evaluative and interactional sense. The resultant effect is connotative and denotative meaning attached to them which also come to be shared by the person defined as mentally ill and others with whom he interacts. This triggers the process of stigmatization. The individual will be prejudiced, stereotyped (negative emotional reaction towards them) and discriminated. The resultant effect is devaluation of individual self that brings about low self-esteem. This is because the individual internalizes these meanings both due to what he/she has learned during his/her socialization process into the culture and because of the sanctions applied to him by others in social interaction subsequent to being defined by them as mentally ill. The individuals experience three different kinds of stigma such as: self or felt stigma (feeling of shame and oppressive fear of enacted stigma); public or enacted stigma (sanction from outside world, attitude towards them etc.) and courtesy stigma (stigma against the family members and significant others). These stigma leads to avoidance strategies, concealment of stigma. Symbols such as change of homes, wrong addresses, locked up, denial, adoption of certain behaviors, withholding help, coercive treatment and segregation institution etc.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative method to explore the social and cultural context of stigmatizing mental illness (MI). A Focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews, a household survey, case study, life history and Face to Face interviews were conducted with the selected respondents. The study was exploratory descriptive and retrospective, aiming to elicit information on the stigma of mental illness. A total of 25 in-depth interviews were conducted with three different groups including indigenes, care givers, traditional healers and religious leaders. The case study focus on those treated by the traditional rulers or orthodox healers, while the Life history included those diagnosed as mentally ill. The interviews were conducted in Okeigbo town and suburb, a Yoruba speaking community in ileoluji/Okeigbo area of Ondo State. The sampled community was purposively

sampled based on their knowledge of study and their role in decision making regarding mental illness and stigmatization.

Research Questions.

Question 1. Why is there stigmatization of persons with mental illness among the Yoruba speaking communities of south-west?

21 out of the 25 respondents to the above question posited that, Persons with Mental illness are stigmatized as a results of a belief of evil manifestation of wrong doings or generational curses on the affected persons. They emphasized that, people see or regards persons with mental illness as abnormal that have the mark of evil. The fear of attack and easy spread of the infection or malady warrants the community members from associating and having anything in common. While 4 respondents is of contrary opinion citing their reasons on religious belief and mere sickness and that the madness situation is temporal.

Question 2. Is there any empirical evidence that can be established in socio- cultural context of stigmatizing mental illness?

16 out of the 25 respondents to the above question hypothesized that, the prevalence of madness in the society is as a result of the community attaching greater support and belief in culture of the people and adduced that, madness is a fallout of socio-cultural deficiency of the community and that the community attached much to the reality of madness and gave ample testimonies on the precedence, history and manifestation of generational wrongdoings of their ancestors.

Question 3. Is there any empirical enlightenment that can be given to the process of stigmatizing the mentally ill individual?

Greater number of the respondents is of the opinion that there is no education as regards the causes, effect and belief of the people in the community. All reasons are placed on the consequences of the challenges and precedence is laid to historical evidence in the family if any. The face to face interview with the residents revealed the historical evidences and the manifestation of the illness on cultural undertone which has been affecting normal individuals in the area of marriage, chieftaincy title and securing positions in the community. People segregate themselves from the families that have the traces of madness and as well stigmatize them.

Question 4. Does stigmatizing behavior rest largely on the social and cultural conditions of the community in which the mental illness exists?

All the respondents concerned that social and cultural circumstances of the people is not a determinant factor to mental challenges. The study revealed that residents of the study area understand what madness is and what kind of stigma attached. This could be traced to the family background, spiritual, afflictions or self-caused. Heredity as a factor of madness can be generational.

Discussion of findings.

On the issue of cultural identity, respondents identify some cultural factors and traits that distinguish persons suffering from the malaise from people with other cultural background. Statistically, 93% of the respondents is of the opinion that cultural identity plays a vital role and that there is nexus between madness, culture and identity. The interplay between Culture as total ways of life of people and general wellbeing of an individual in the community serves as identifying factor describing the origin and source of a particular mental illness among people of same sociocultural background. Cultural identity influences the perception of mental health and the implications for those affected by the disease. 87% of the respondents are of the opinion that there is empathy between culture and stigma attached to it and that community treat madness as a cultural problem.

Help-seeking behavior and efforts towards reducing stigma: Mental health-related discrimination and stigma are global multifaceted problem. Anti-stigma strategies have been considered in terms of advocating and replacing the crux of mental illness with accurate knowledge using para-social interaction with people with mental illness (PWMI) to challenge prejudice and protest to suppress stigmatizing attitudes and representations. Mental health literacy programs aim to increase awareness and knowledge of mental problems, improve attitudes and stimulate helping behavior need to be emphasized within the community. Over time, the use of traditional means (orthodox medicine, herbalists and healing homes) of seeking help and treatment for the mentally challenged individual through intergroup contact have increased, and this approach have been used both separately and together in population-level interventions and those targeted to specific groups. There is need for a narrative of contact-based strategy and opening mind programs using sociological framework where stigma is considered reflective of the co-occurrence of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination. Contrary to the interpersonal manifestations of public stigma towards people living with mental illness (PLWMI) cultural norms and

community policies and practices and help-seeking effort have not been favorable to PLWMI.

PLWMI among the Yoruba speaking communities were denounced and forced into seclusion because of the belief that their conditions was a divine punishment or a form of social pollution. This is evident in how individuals with mental challenges, disabilities or certain racial or ethnic identities are treated, the underlying dynamics of ostracization, discrimination and devaluation continue to influence social interactions and institutional structures. Mental illness in Yoruba communities have been mythologized, and in some cases people with severe mental illness or issues do not have adequate access to proper health care. 89% of residents in Okeigbo community is of the opinion that, Curable mental health problems are poorly managed or neglected by friends, families and government. Stigma of madness have led to shame and isolation making seeking necessary supports and resources more problematic. Hence, stigma has philosophical effects at personal and community levels, negatively impacting multiple levels of injuries and of the psychotic care continuum.

Social consequences and identity division: issues of self-identity and community involvement in stigmatization of people living with mental illness have revealed that 92% of persons experiencing the symptoms of mental illness may be viewed as being possessed or cursed by the ancestors or as a repercussion or the manifestation of their evil deeds. This stigmatization can result in families and communities hiding their identity and renouncing the membership of the mentally challenged with the community or muddying their mentally ill members due to fear of societal judgment.

Findings from this study corroborate the works of Thomas Scheff (1985) on labelling theory with respect to mental disorder. The approach emphasized on how a deviant behavior become symbolically ascribed to person through labelling and also the work of Goffman (1996) on social stigma theory as an explanatory supposition on the nature, etiology and perception of stigma and the strategies of managing stigma status.

Conclusion

The research on stigmatization of mental illness victims in Yoruba-speaking communities in Southwestern Nigeria demonstrates the severe impact of split identities on those suffering from mental illnesses. The socio-cultural setting influences views and attitudes towards mental illness, frequently leading to prejudice and marginalization. The findings suggest that cultural ideas, traditional practices, and societal standards all contribute to the stigma associated with mental health, exacerbating the difficulties that afflicted people confront. This stigmatization impacts not only the victims, but also their

families and communities, perpetuating a cycle of misinformation and fear that impedes proper treatment and assistance. The study emphasizes the need for a more comprehensive understanding of how cultural influences impact mental health beliefs. It demonstrates that many people see mental illness as a spiritual or moral failure or generational curse on the affected individual rather than a physiological problem that requires expert help. As a result, this attitude causes reluctance to seek treatment from healthcare practitioners, reinforcing the stigma associated with mental health concerns. Implementing the following ideas has the potential to drastically reduce stigma associated with mental illness in Yoruba-speaking communities, boosting access to care and the quality of life for people afflicted. Understanding and eliminating stigmatization is essential for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for people with mental health disorders. Stigma affects mental and physical health, delayed or forgone care and provides poor adherence to treatment of people with mental health challenges. The interplay between culture, health, and sigma is complex and bidirectional because cultural beliefs and values influence health behaviors and practices, traditional healing practices and remedies. The paper recommends the following:

There is an urgent need for community education and awareness efforts to help Yoruba-speaking people understand mental illness. These initiatives should focus on delivering accurate information about mental health diseases, emphasizing that these are medical problems rather than moral or spiritual shortcomings. Engaging local leaders, religious figures, and influencers may boost the legitimacy and impact of these projects.

There is an urgent need to address mental health concerns in these communities, including the integration of native traditions with contemporary healthcare. It is critical to strike a balance between traditional healing techniques and modern psychiatric treatment. Collaborating with traditional healers can help to provide a more holistic approach to therapy that respects cultural beliefs while delivering required medical practices.

Advocating for policies that promote mental health services at both local and national levels is crucial for policy advocacy for mental health services. This involves expanding financing for mental health initiatives, training healthcare professionals to provide culturally sensitive care, and ensuring that all community members have access to affordable treatment alternatives.

Establishing support groups can provide a secure environment for people with mental disorders and

their families to discuss their experiences, reducing feelings of isolation and increasing community understanding. These groups can also act as forum for participants to learn about coping skills of mental illness.

Continued study into the socio-cultural elements that influence stigma in different Nigerian groups will be critical for designing tailored and orthodox treatments. Boosting the narratives of the indigenous people on their perception of mental illness and help to create interventions that are relevant to certain cultural and identity situations.

References

- Bennett, M.J (1990): Stigmatization; experiences of person with AIDS: issues Mental
- Bohart, A.C (2019): "The Divided Self: A Study of Identity and psychopathology" Oxford University Press.
- Corrigan PW (2000): Mental health Stigma as social attribution: implications for research methods And attitude change clinical psychological science practice vol. 7 page 48-67
- Corrigan, P.W, & Watson, A.C (2002). understanding the impact of stigma on people with mental illness: World psychiatry, 1 (2), 98-106
- Crisp, A. H. Gelder, M.G. Rix, S et al. Stigmatization of people with mental illness. British journal of psychiatry. 2000. Vol. 177: 4-7
- Davidson, M: What else can we do to combat stigma? Official journal of the world psychiatric Association (WPA): Feb. 2002 Vol 1: No.1: 22-23
- Eisenberg, L.: Good, B: and Kleiman, A: et al (1995): World mental health: Problems and priorities in low-income countries. New York: Oxford University press.
- Erinosho, O.A.: "Belief system and the concept of mental illness among medical students in developing country: A Nigerian example." Journal of anthropological research 1977.
- Erinosho, O.A.: concept of mental illness among medical students in Nigeria. International journal of health education 1979: Vol.22: 57-58
- Erinosho, O.A. and Ayorinde A: Educational background and attitude to mental illness among the Yoruba in Nigeria. Human relations 1980 vol. 34: 1-12
- Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH). (2020). National Mental Health Policy
- Goffman, E (1963): Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity. New York: prentice-hall.
- Grills, L. (1980): human behavior in illness psychology and interpersonal relationships. 3rd edition London: Faber and Faber. 2000 Vol.78: 503-505
- Gureje O, and Alem, A. mental health policy development in Africa. WHO Bulletin 2000: vol 78: 475-482.
- Gureje O. (2004): Mental illness increases- WHO Report in this day Lagos, June 3, 2004 Health; vol II, 141
- Hilton, J. von, Hippel, W. stereotypes (1996) in Corrigan, P.W and Watson A.C.: Understanding the impacts of stigma on people with mental illness. World psychiatry: Official journal of the World Psychiatry Association (WPA) Feb. 2002 vol.1 No.I: 16-18
- Historic White House Conference: Mental health stigma and bias assailed. Jan. 2000. Public policy.
- Jacoby, A (1993) Felt stigma versus enacted stigma: a concept revisited. Social science and medicine: vol. 38:269.
- Kim et al (2020): The Relationship between Divided identity and Anxiety. Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 72, 102744.
- Kleinman, A. (1988). The illness narratives: suffering, healing, and the human condition.
- La court, M: The stigma of mental illness journal of Mental Health Prospective. July-Sept. 1998: 1-5
- Lee et al (2022): Divided identity and mental health: "A systematic review" Journal of mental health 31 (2), 147-157.
- Link, B. et al: On stigma and its consequences: evidence from a longitudinal study, journal of Health and Social Behavior; 1997; vol38.177-190.
- Link, B.G., & Phelan, J.C. (1999): the labelling theory of mental disorder II: The consequences of Labelling, in Horwitz A. & Scheid T.L (Ed): a handbook for the study of mental health: social contexts, theories and systems. Pg. 361-376. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Link, B.G., & Phelan, J.C. (2001). Conceptualizing stigma. Annual Review of Sociology, 27, 363-385
- Livingston, J.D, & Boyd, J.E. (2010). Correlates and consequences of internalized stigma for people living with mental illness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. Social science & Medicine, 71(12), 2150-2161
- Mufford, E: socio-cultural factors in mental illness; and the Epidemiology of mental disorders. In Simons R.C. (1983): Understanding human behavior in Health and Illness. P 597-279. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins.

- National institute of mental health (NIMH). (2020). Stigma and mental health.
- National Population Commission (NPC).2018. Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey.
- Patel et al (2019): "Divided Identity and Depression: A Study of Intersectional identity". *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 249, 858-866
- Ross, A. M., Morgan, A. J., Wake, A., Jorm, A. F., & Reavley, N. J. (2022). Pilot trial of a media intervention with journalism students on news reporting of mental illness in the context of violence and crime. *Health promotion journal of Australia*, 33(3), 602-613.
- Transnational organized crime in W/A Region, United Nations Office and Crime (UNODC) N.Y 2005, pg.15
- Wahl, O. F. (1999). The stigma of mental illness. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 55 (2), 141-148.
- Wong et al (2017): Divided identity and Mental Health Help Seeking Behaviour. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 39 (2), 141-153.
- World Health Organization (WHO) 2019. Mental Health.
- Yang, L.H., et al. (2013). Stigma and mental health at the intersection of culture and society. *Social Science & Medicine*, 78, 14-21

HETEROGENEITY IN THE HOMOGENOUS AFRICA, POLICY GAP AND THE CHALLENGE OF PAN-AFRICANISM

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/a3>

Anyanwu, Christiantus Izuchukwu (Ph.D)¹, Jeremiah John², Nso Favour Chinyere³

Department of Political Science and Diplomacy
Veritas University Abuja, Nigeria
izuchuksforeva@gmail.com, anyanwuc@veritas.edu.ng

Abstract

The dream by some Pan-Africanists to achieve supra-statehood at the continental level has been a mirage despite the efforts in playing down on the heterogeneous factors, and therefore emphasizing on homogenous traits that could make Africans see themselves as one indigenous people from one stock, same historic experience, culture and traditions. These efforts have only resulted to a mere union currently known as African Union (AU) which struggles through policies to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between and amongst member states. This study investigated the implications of Africa's heterogeneity on the efficacy of Pan-African policies, and examined how the existing policy gaps undermine the objectives of Pan-Africanism. The study employed incremental model for conceptual analysis. Qualitative methodology is adopted as data were gathered through secondary means. Documentary content study was used for analysis. The study reveals that the heterogeneity which is manifested in the quest of African states for the protection and preservation of their political sovereignty, and the "overzealous policies" of African Union have led to the impediment of Pan-Africanism. It recommended amongst others that Pan-Africanism should be realized through an incremental rather than radical approach.

Keywords: Heterogeneity, Homogeneity, Policy, Pan-Africanism, and Incremental model.

Introduction

Despite Africa's tremendous complexity, it is frequently viewed through a homogeneous perspective. Ethnicities, languages, cultures, political systems, and economic circumstances are just a few of the ways that this diversity shows up. Although the idea of pan-Africanism encourages cooperation and togetherness among African countries, the actual situation frequently shows a complicated web of identities and interests that makes such objectives difficult to achieve. Colonialism's historical background has permanently altered Africa by drawing arbitrary borders that separate ethnic and cultural groupings, leaving a patchwork of countries that may be close to one another geographically but differ greatly in terms of social cohesiveness and political systems.

The historical injustices that Africans had to endure gave rise to pan-Africanism, which promoted group movements for independence, unification, and socioeconomic advancement. However, the diverse fabric of the continent often results in glaring policy gaps that impede the goals of Pan-Africanism. For example, regional organizations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU) strive to integrate and harmonize policies, but execution frequently encounters major obstacles. Different levels of

institutional capacity, political will, and budget allocation among member states result in inconsistent application and efficacy of policies.

Furthermore, the quest for unified policy is made more difficult by the socioeconomic differences among African countries. Nations with abundant natural resources could set different goals than countries that are mostly agrarian or experiencing unstable economies. The social sphere also exhibits this economic heterogeneity, with various regional approaches to topics like gender equality, health, and education. As a result, measures intended to promote growth and unity frequently fall short of addressing the local realities of varied communities, which causes disenchantment and resistance among the populace.

The problem of pan-Africanism also arises in leadership and governance, as contrasting political philosophies and approaches to government widen the chasm. Coexisting authoritarian governments, democratic institutions, and hybrid governance approaches frequently cause conflicts that impede regional collaboration. Additionally, the political environment has been muddied by the history of foreign influence and intrusions, making it challenging to build a cohesive strategy for tackling shared issues like economic development, security, and climate change.

Given these intricacies, the purpose of this research is to examine how Africa's diversity affects the effectiveness of pan-African policy. In addition to undermining Pan-Africanism's goals, it looked at how the current policy gaps undermined the objectives of Pan-Africanism. By addressing these important topics, the study hopes to advance a more sophisticated knowledge of how Africa might use its diversity to promote harmony and collaboration in the quest for sustainable development and group advancement.

Statement of Problem

Because of the inherent heterogeneity on the continent, the idea of Pan-Africanism—which aims to unite African states and foster solidarity among peoples of African descent—faces several obstacles. The diverse range of political systems, ethnic groups, cultures, and languages that make up Africa can make it difficult to implement policies that are meant to promote regional cooperation and integration. Although this diversity is a strength, it frequently leads to different objectives and interests across member states, which causes a disjointed approach to Pan-African activities.

Furthermore, there is a significant policy divide in regional institutions like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU). Due in large part to uneven political will, different governance models, and economic differences among member nations, these organizations usually have difficulty converting their lofty ideas into practical activities on the ground. Many policies consequently fall short of local residents' realities, which

exacerbates their sense of alienation and disenfranchisement. Socioeconomic disparities that affect how the general public views pan-Africanism further exacerbate the problem. The ideals of Pan-African unification may seem far-fetched or unimportant in countries that struggle with unemployment, poverty, and poor educational opportunities. As a result, participation in Pan-African projects frequently stays shallow or selective, which hinders the movement's ability to foster a true sense of shared identity and purpose.

The implementation of Pan-Africanism faces a number of challenges due to the intricate interactions between heterogeneity, policy gaps, and socioeconomic inequality. Although the idea of a unified Africa has great promise for economic growth, political stability, and cross-cultural interaction, the actual situation shows a clear gap between ambition and reality. The development of a cohesive policy framework that can successfully meet the multiple demands of the continent is hampered by the divided

political will of many nations as well as differing degrees of dedication to shared goals.

Research Questions

The study poses the following questions;

- 1) How has Africa's heterogeneity impacted on the Pan-African policies of integration and corporation?
- 2) In what ways have the existing policy gaps undermined the objectives of Pan-Africanism?

Research Objectives

The following constitute the research objectives:

- 1) To ascertain how Africa's heterogeneity has impacted on the pan-african policies of integration and corporation
- 2) To identify ways the existing policy gaps undermined the objectives of pan-africanism.

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design and relied on secondary courses of data collection. Official documents and empirical studies provided the needed information for analysis. Data obtained were analyzed using documentary content analysis approach.

Conceptual Review

Pan-Africanism

Pan-africanism is a popular concept that has continued to reverberate among Africans and African scholars. It was conceptualized in the quest to confront racial injustice, inequality and total elimination of colonialism in every part of Africa. Idowu (2023) argues that pan-africanism was seen as the necessary philosophy around which all the people of African descent should unite to develop strategies against inequalities, racial discrimination and ending colonialism in Africa. For him, pan-africanism is with the understanding that all African descended peoples are one nation, therefore should unite and form a common front to achieve their aspiration. Anyanwu (2024) corroborates this position that pan-africanism is the belief by Africans at home and in diaspora that African people, both within the continent and beyond share not only a common history and experience but a common destiny. This reflects the common understanding that the pan-african intellectual, cultural, and political movements seem to view all Africans and descendants of Africa as belonging to a single race and therefore are homogeneous irrespective of the independent states and other heterogeneous factors. Anyanwu (2024) argues that what could be cited as heterogeneous factors among Africans are exogenous in nature, they are artificially created by both Africans and the Europeans – beginning from the partitioning of African territories

to the creation of independent states, protective policies, xenophobic attitudes among others.

Since 1945 after the second world war when pan-africanism gained popularity, it has yielded some aspirations which include liberating and uniting African people around the world leading to the establishment of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963, now known as African Union (AU) in 2002. This is captured in the address by Kwame Nkrumah at Addis Ababa, that “we must unite in order to achieve the full liberation of our continent” (cited in Bamidele, 2019). In no doubt, decolonization has been realized giving rise to various independent states, but the need for African unity which consists of integration and corporation continues to be utopic even in the contemporary time.

Having achieved the first philosophical focus of pan-africanism, the post-independent Africa remain confronted by challenge of political integration which it proposes. Adetula, Redie, Laaksa and Levin (2020) observe that at the center of this debate was the need to establish a political organization of post-colonial Africa, and the united states of Africa as a concrete political project. Oguh (2010) faulted the move made by some post-colonial African state leaders and proponents of pan-africanism led by Kwame Nkrumah in canvassing for supra-state continental structure where independent states will collapse their sovereignty. Such radical approach will only be realized unless the supra-state rises on the grave of the independent states.

Policy

The concept of policy has no generally accepted definition as regards to what constitutes policy among policy analysts and practitioners alike. This is usually the case in concepts and phenomena that are mostly domiciled in social sciences. This has therefore resulted to numerous perspectives in viewing the concept of policy by various policy analysts. Among these however, are many “attempted” or “unsatisfactory” definitions and explanations of policy.

Policy can basically be viewed as a scientific approach by government in solving a social problem. The scientism is what many policy analysts have attempted to explain in the course of defining a policy. Dye (1975) sees policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do, while Eyestone (1971) defines it as the relationship of a government unit to its environment. However, Anderson (1979) succinctly pointed out Dye’s definition of public policy as whatever governments choose to do or not to do. Though the two may be oblivious of the fact that there

could be a divergence between what governments decide to do and what they actually do, and at the same while quite a number of things governments do may have no policy significance.

Anderson (1979) and Ikelegbe (1969) gave what we could consider as our operational definition of policy as – for Anderson, it is purposive course of action followed by an actor or a set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of social concern, while for Ikelegbe, it is an integrated programme of actions which an actor or a group of actors is accustomed to or intends to undertake in response to given problems or situations with which he is confronted. The definitions viewed policy as purposive and integrated course of action in the sense that it is consciously and deliberately brought about with a holistic view that put into consideration the related factors, alternatives, implications and consequences, with a clearly designed and delineated methods for implementations. A gap occurs in policy process if it does not reflect the above definitions.

Theoretical Framework

This work adopted incrementalism as a model for better explanation of this study. It was postulated by Robert Dahl and Charles Lindblown as a responds to the weaknesses of the rational model. The major assumption of the model is that decision makers consider limited values, limited goals, limited alternatives and only realistic solutions to the desired goal(s). Here, the goal is not a one-time, radical, bold and major solution to the societal problems but marginal or incremental policies or changes especially in a sensitive environment or situation. For Lindblown, incremental policy making proceeds in a chronological series, that is – made and remade, building out of the current situations, step by stem and in a small degree (cited in Ikelegbe, (1969).

This is the policy model needed in the pan-african policies geared towards achieving the objectives of pan-africanism which is beyond eradication of colonialism and racial discrimination but the integration and corporation of African states and peoples. The zealous and radical approach (which is antithetical to this model) applied by Kwameh Nkrumah and other supporters in the quest of achieving the goal of African integration was rejected by most African political leaders who just as at that time secured their independence, thus, awakening the consciousness of safeguarding their nascent political independence.

Considering the sensitive nature of the issue and environment of the time, the policy actors failed to take a step by step measure which allows for the

enlightenment and buy-in of every stakeholder in seeing the reasons for the need to achieve the goals of pan-africanism especially on the area of integration and corporation at the level where necessary. Undensi (2022) observes that the early push by Kwameh Nkrumah to establish supra-state was considered by other heads of states as a poisonous chalice that undermined their independence, and this has explained while it has been difficult for the continent to achieve any level of integration.

How Africa's Heterogeneity Has Impacted on the Pan-African Policies of Integration And Corporation

The understanding of pan-africanism from the lens of a homogeneous Africa with a supra-state has been an illusion due to the heterogeneous fabrics that exist in the African continent. The pan-african policies to realize integration and cooperation which has for the sake of implementability been structured into three tiers level of governance – national, regional and continental (AU) have suffered setbacks due to the manifestation of heterogeneous realities. Uba (2022) argues that the three tiers governance structure through which the policies are to be implemented has in itself suffered major constraints because of the friction that exist between it and the sovereign member states. This is because the structure cannot operate smoothly without confronting the sovereignty of member states. This is re-echoed in the argument by Salisu, (2023) and Anyanwu (2023) that the mandates of Regional Economic Communities (REC) in Africa which include – peace, security, development and economic integration has been impaired by the lack of supra-national accountability and sanctions to ensure compliance by member states. They are impeded by the general challenge of global governance and multilateralism. In addition, the operation of these RECs is dependent on the willingness of member states and international funding agencies to provide the necessary funds needed for policy implementation.

One of the most recent pan-african policies is the African Continental Free Trade Agreement (AFCFTA) which all the RECs are expected to have established and the Customs Union in 2017 is yet to be completed by RECs and some member states. Amadi (2023) observes that the AFCFTA policy is yet to fully commence due to the fact that it does not have a binding power on member states but survives at their mercies of approval and implementation. He further holds that the economic inequality between and within countries has contributed to the frustration of the pan-african integration policies.

The pan-african parliament is another product of African Union policies in pursuance to the objectives

of pan-africanism. The pan-african parliament dates back to the Abuja treaty, which was signed by African leaders in Abuja, Nigeria in June 1991, and came into force in may 1994 while the inaugural session took place at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Conference Center in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 18th March 2004 (Demekke, 2004). One of the primary objectives of the institution is the – “familiarization of the people of Africa with the objectives and policies aimed at integrating the African continent within the framework of the establishment of the African Union, strengthen continental solidarity and build a sense of common destiny among the people of Africa.

Working towards its objectives, the institution has recorded some achievements which include – resolution on signing the adherence to the African Peer Review Mechanism, the development of a continental code of conduct on the use and exploitation of National Resources and Environmental protection, and so on. However, the institution has been impeded by the heterogeneous traits that exist amongst member states and individual parliamentarians. Amadi (2016) points out that in spite of the achievements recorded by the Pan-African Parliament (PAP), a flip of the other side shows that PAP still grapples with numerous challenges, part of which include – political inequality where some members countries have been pressured and invaded to ensure democratic change of government while there are not less than 10 member states that have issue of “sit-tight-syndrome” of their Head of States or president, spending more than 15 years on sit which is against the principle and objectives the institution stand for.

Dokwu (2020) argues that the PAP has been incapacitated by the independence and sovereignty of member states in carrying out its objectives of ensuring good governance, transparency, and accountability among its members. A report published by Transparency International in its 2015 edition of Corruption Perception Index identified more African countries in the 10 most corrupt nations – including Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya and Eritrea. It is unconceivable that while some of these nations fail to meet their obligation of financial subscription to the organization, the political leaders are catering away their nations’ limited resources.

With regards to the heterogeneous element of member nations’ independence and sovereignty, the pan-african parliament has continued to find it difficult to implement most of its resolutions, policies and programmes, and noting the non-commitment of member states especially in giving the necessary support needed for the institution to fulfill its mandate. This is pointed out in the Pan-African Parliament

Performance Report of 2024 by His Excellency, Hon. Chief Fortune Charumbira, as he called for enhanced parliamentary support and infrastructure to bolster efficiency and institutional credibility.

Policy Gap and the Undermining of Pan-Africanism Objectives of Integration and Corporation

The objectives of pan-africanism have today grown beyond struggle against colonialism, fight for freedom and independence, but rather consider the relevance of the situations in the contemporary Africa, the objectives are tailored towards ensuring Africa's unity, solidarity, economic integration and the development of Africa and Africans as a continent. Okwudili (2023) points out that the concept of pan-africanism has shifted from movement and fight against European colonialist, subjugation and oppression of Africa to a focus on the integration and economic development of African states.

Agunwa (2021) argues that efforts have been made by the African Union and its various organs to achieve the objectives of pan-africanism which centers on political and economic integration through various policies, but the integration processes in the continent are hampered by not just the effects of the political and socio-economic hangovers from colonial past but also from the shortfalls of various policies, especially in the failure to adequately give cognizance to the political, economic, social, administrative and cultural systems of African countries. Most African countries are beclouded by the concept of sovereignty, and for them it is associated with the preservation of national identity, and therefore, adherence to sovereignty is very strong given to the fact that most countries were very young at independence when the 'radical' move was made to create a supra-national authority. Odimfe (2022) states that the radical approach towards the political, economic and geographical integration of Africa through the creation of a supra-state re-awakened the consciousness of member states to protect and preserve their sovereignty and become apprehensive of every regional and sub-regional policies that geared towards integration.

On the area of regional institutions and organs, Osilameh (2023) observes that the institutions of most regional economic integration arrangements are weak, and human resources and financial capacity are inadequate for effective running of the institutions. This shows the deficiency and gap in the policies that establish the institutions and organs, especially considering the failure in taking into cognizance the need and how to build capacity to the institutions for better policy implementation.

African integration policies and protocols failed to address the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Charter of Article (1) which constitutes an impediment to the African integration efforts. Jiboku (2022) maintains that other theoretical contradictions in the integration plan are the principle of the OAU Charter in the Article (1) which upholds the territorial integrity of African states and the declaration on non-interference in the domestic affairs of member states. This principles recognize and uphold the sovereignty of member states, and have constrained the efforts of the AU and its organs in achieving its objectives (Ekot and Anyanwu, 2024). It is therefore expected that policies towards achieving integration and corporation should have addressed the provision in the Article one (1) of the Charter to ensure implementability of the policies and objectives.

Discussion of Research Findings

The study in line with the research questions and objectives finds out the following:

- 1) The overzealous and radical move by some proponents of pan-africanism in 1960s created 'sovereignty protective consciousnesses' among newly independent African states that were yet to have the conviction on the need for African political and socio-economic integration and the extent of the integration.
- 2) There was existence of diverse understanding of the philosophy of Pan-Africanism. Some African leaders view it only as a movement for African emancipation against the Europeans, while some view it as a socio-cultural African identity as a homogeneous continent
- 3) Failures of the pan-African policies to give cognizance to the heterogeneous realities of African states and identify ways to accommodate them

Conclusion

The study examined to a large extent the policy gap that impedes the realization of the objectives of Pan-Africanism, identifying the African heterogeneous and homogeneous realities. The policy gap is identified in the failure of the Pan-African policies to take into cognizance the sensitiveness of the socio-economic and political disparity among African states, and their sovereign status which has made African political and economic integration an illusion.

Recommendation

The study in reflection of the set out objectives recommends the following:

- 1) Pan-African policies should adopt incremental model rather than radical approach to be able to

address the heterogeneous realities that constrain the efforts of African integration

- 2) The political actors and stakeholders should have a clear and consensual understanding of the philosophy of Pan-Africanism, this will allow for concerted effort in realizing its objectives
- 3) The Article one (1) of the OAU Charter should be addressed to reflect the objective of Pan-Africanism

References

- Adetula, V., Redie, B., Laakso, L., & Levin, J. (2020), *The legacy of pan-africanism in African integration today*. Publication Policy Note
- Agunwa, O. (2021), *The Challenges of regional integration in Africa*. Awka: Lamberts Press
- Amadi, E. (2016), The Pan-African parliament: Issues, challenges and prospects. *International Journal of Social Sciences and management Research* 2(1) 1-11
- Amadi, E. (2023), *African continental free trade agreement: Issues and prospects*. Retrieved from <http://www.nai.uu.se> 20th November, 2024.
- Anderson, J. (1979), *Public policy-making*. New York: Praeger.
- Anyanwu, C. I. (2023), Drug abuse and the challenges of electoral violence in Nigeria: A Review. *Vuna Journal of History and International Relations*. Journal homepage: <https://www.veritas.edu.ng/journals/vunahisjournal.php> ISSN:2408-6177
- Anyanwu, C. I. (2024), Smart technology as a veritable tool for credible elections: A Nigerian study. *Journal of Legal Studies, Humanities and Pilitical Sciences* 11(3) 16-25.
DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13361173>
- Bamidele, O. (2019), *The philosophy of pan-africanism*. Benin: Chitex Publishers
- Demeke, T. (2004), The new pan-african parliament: Prospects and challenges in view of the experience of the European parliament. *African Human Right Law Journal* 7(5) 53-73
- Dokwu, A. (2020), *The pan-african parliament*. Dakar: Grahams Publishers
- Ekot, B. and Anyanwu, C. I. (2024), Rotational presidency as a veritable tool for sustainable democracy in Nigeria. *International Journal of Development Strategies in Humanities, Management and Social Sciences* 14(2), 132-139 DOI: 10.48028/iiprds/ijdhmss.v14.i2.10
- Eyestone, R. (1971), *The treads of public policy: A study in Policy leadership*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill
- Idowu, B. (2023), *The issues with Africa*. Lagos: Danox Publishers
- Ikelegbe, A. O. (1961), *Public policy-making and analysis*. Benin City: Uri publishing Limited
- Jiboku, P.A. (2022), *The challenge of regional economic integration in Africa: Theory and reality*. Africa's Public Service Delivery and Performance Review
- Odimfe, T. (2022), *Africa and the supra-national authority*. Lagos: Colums Press
- Osilameh, K. (2023), *The issues with economic integration in Africa*. Jos: Dantiny Publishers
- Salisu, A. (2023), *Africa: The economic hub of the world*. Kaduna: Trends
- Uba, O. (2022), *The challenges of African integration and cooperation*. Enugu: Chalums Publishers limited
- Udensi, L.B. (2022), *Africa: A continent of disparity*. Enugu: Oriental Publishers

DYNAMICS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA.

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/a4>

Oluwanifemi Adeyemo

Pan Africa University, Institute of Governance,
Humanities and Social Sciences
Soa, Cameroon

Email: nifeadeyemo@gmail.com

Abstract

Human trafficking, particularly involving children and women for forced labour and sexual exploitation, remains a pressing global issue. Despite international efforts, including the United Nations' Global Program Against Trafficking in Human Beings (GPAT) and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, an estimated 40.3 million people worldwide remain trapped in modern slavery, generating \$150 billion annually. Sub-Saharan Africa, especially West Africa, is severely impacted, with Nigeria being the largest source of trafficked victims. Annually, about 100,000 Nigerians are trafficked for sexual and labour exploitation, often across borders, with the Nigerian and Benin Republic borders serving as hotspots for such activities. This study investigates the root causes and trends of human trafficking along this border, focusing on Oyo State, which shares three recognized international borders with the Republic of Benin. Using snowball and purposive sampling techniques, interviews were conducted with immigration officers, alongside thematic analysis of secondary data from immigration reports and published articles. The findings highlight the role of conflict theory in understanding trafficking, with factors such as border corruption, economic mismanagement, political instability, unemployment, poverty, porous borders, and weak rule-of-law enforcement contributing to the problem. The study underscores gaps in existing policies and calls for coordinated efforts from government authorities, civil society, and international partners to effectively combat modern slavery in Nigeria and Africa.

Keywords: Border, human trafficking, forced labour, Oyo State

Introduction

Human trafficking is a lucrative criminal venture in Nigeria and the African continent in general (Omojola, 2023; Abiodun, Akinlawon, Abah et al, 2020; Chia, 2018). This fact is attested to by sheer value of the criminal act across the globe. According to statistics by Pathfinders Justice Initiative (2023), the trafficking in person crimes stands at over \$150billion. The modus operandi of this dynamic crime is such that while forced labour and sexual exploitation are the core purposes and sources of the financial returns, sexual exploitation which has comparatively lesser victims produces more financial returns (PJI, 2023; Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020). This has undermined both international and national efforts to address and curb the spread of human trafficking globally and across nations (EASO, 2021; Hynes, Gani-Yusuf, Burland et al, 2018; Nwogu, 2014; UNODC, 2006). The collaboration and transnational organized criminal networks on which trafficking thrives have also negatively impacted on the efforts of national and international agencies to curb the menace (Nwogu, 2014). According to recent statistics by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), there are over 50million persons trafficked annually for labour or sexual purposes across the globe (PJI, 2023). This number is more staggering considering that many

African and developing countries do not keep current records on the unofficial and irregular migratory patterns of their citizens across international borders. Therefore, the number of trafficked persons who most likely are underage or adolescents from developing countries may be more than what is internationally acknowledged.

In Nigeria, trafficking-in-person or human trafficking has a long history, according to some records, traceable to colonial and immediate post-colonial times (Ayodele, Olawale, Olubayo-Fatiregun & Adeleke, 2020; Chia, 2018; Olasupo & Ile-Ife, 2012). The rationale for this claim is cultural and historical ties that facilitated the forced migration of many Nigerians from different parts of Europe through land and maritime trade routes (Olasupo & Ile-Ife, 2012). From the reports of irregular movements across the African continent and specifically Nigeria, it could be rationalized that these routes have been rejuvenated for irregular cross-border migration especially those involved in trafficking in person. Irrespective of the motivations and patterns of movement for trafficking, existing national and international reports presents very worrying data on the state of human trafficking in the country especially for sexual exploitation (European Asylum Support Office, 2021; Ibrahim &

Omoregbe, 2020). The motivation for this research however aligns more with the patterns of movement than the motivations for engaging these irregular movements and criminalities. The routes engaged for trafficking in persons in Nigeria vary according to purposes and intent and this will be explored in this study.

Southwest Nigeria and specifically Oyo state is one of the important international border regions in southern Nigeria which borders neighbouring Benin Republic and which has been identified as a major smuggling route over the years (Ogunniyi & Idowu, 2022; Olasupo & Ile Ife, 2012; UNESCO, 2006). The importance of this region however in driving human trafficking has been scarcely researched in the literature especially considering that smuggling constitutes only one of the several crimes through this international passage. Furthermore, several reports have identified towns and cities in the state as a major destination point for domestic trafficking as well as a source transit and destination points for international trafficking (Olayiwola, 2019; Adeleye, 2017; UNESCO, 2006). This paper intends to examine the prevalence of human trafficking in Oyo state Nigeria

The paper is structured for a coherent study along the following pattern. The rest of the paper presents a brief literature review on trafficking in Nigeria and southwest specifically, the methodology for the research, results and discussion and policy recommendations/conclusion.

Literature Review

Statistically, there is a dearth of data on the actual rate of human trafficking in Nigeria and this is attested to in several studies and reports (EASO, 2021; Olayiwola, 2019; Oyebanji, 2017). The best on the stats of human trafficking in the country are approximates and projections from international agencies and few arrests by the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person (NAPTIP). The reasons are not farfetched. Generally, Nigeria struggles with accurate data on criminalities and demography especially relating to patterns of movements and routes engaged by criminals for criminalities (Oyebanji, 2017; Nwogu, 2014). According to existing data from the UN, the EU and other nongovernmental agencies however, trafficking across Nigeria are generally of two types: domestic and international (EASO, 2021; UNODC, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). The former has to do with the migration or movement of adolescents and vulnerable young persons between the ages of 12 and 18 years from their natural location, mostly rural to urban city centers with the promise of better educational and

economic prospects (Adeleye, 2017; Garba & Nik, 2015). This has been reported mostly for villages in the southeastern and south-southern parts of the country where due to pervading poverty and socioeconomic deprivations, many families, communities and homes are convinced to release their young wards to relatives (close or distant) in cities (Chia, 2018; Aderigbibe & Olaleye, 2018). The destination cities for this kind of trafficking according to extant studies are Abeokuta, Kano, Kaduna, Port Harcourt, Abuja, Lagos, Calabar, and Ibadan while the victims are mostly persons from Kano, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Imo, Cross River, Niger and Kwara (EASO, 2021; Duru & Ogbonnaya, 2012). For this form of trafficking however, reports show that the victims are taken to cities and exploited as child labours or sex workers without their consent or knowledge of their parents and can seldom find their ways back to their home towns or destinations (Abiodun et al, 2020; Oyebanji, 2017; UNODC, 2006).

The latter form trafficking however is more proliferate and delicate often involving some form of consent howbeit deceptive. According to studies across the country, this form of trafficking takes place when trafficking agents approach young men and young women often times engaged in small scale entrepreneurship or employment for better prospects in foreign countries (Ogunniyi & Idowu, 2022; Adio-Moses et al, 2020). According to EASO (2021), this pattern of interaction and engagement has resulted in the migration of countless thousands of unsuspecting young Nigerian women and men who pay to embark on the dangerous journey to Europe only to discover the shocking reality of being kidnapped or manipulated by a criminal syndicate. Reports put the number of persons trafficked annually from Nigeria to neighbouring African countries at an uncertain number but while the closest routes to these international travels are identified as Ogun, Oyo, Anambra, Akwa Ibom and Lagos states. But the Global Slavery Index report ranked Nigeria 38/160 with over 1.6million recorded slaves, the majority of whom are women and girls (Pathfinders Justice Initiative, 2023). According to NAPTIP, between 2019 and 2022, 61% of human trafficking in Nigeria occurred internally while 39% were cross-border trafficking (PJI, 2023). The scarce literature on international traffic routes from the country places two strategic southwestern states Ogun and Oyo (Ogunniyi & Idowu, 2022; Adeleye, 2017; Nwogu, 2014). Other states are however stated in the context of human trafficking both as transit locations and source for victims amongst which are Lagos, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun (EASO, 2021; Garba & Nik, 2015; Hynes et al, 2018).

The place of Ogun and Oyo in the movement of trafficking in persons in Nigeria is not explicitly evident in existing literatures especially as they relate to international trafficking. What is however evident is the fact that by sharing international borders with neighbouring Benin Republic, both states are implicated as obvious routes for illegal international movements especially considering the historical and cultural ties between communities in both states and Beninese communities (Hynes et al, 2018; Adeleye, 2017; Olasupo & Ile-Ife, 2012). Statistics showed that as late as 2003, over 116 children were intercepted from international trafficking and slavery by joint police operations at the border region between Benin and the southwestern states of Oyo, Ogun and Osun (UNODC, 2006). Other studies identify that the majority of child labourers trafficked to the southwest region are used for begging, domestic labour, and farm labours. Interestingly, Ogunniyi and Idowu (2022) posits in his study that of the total number of trafficked persons in the country, 75% are trafficked within states, 23% are trafficked between states and only 2% are trafficked outside the country. Also considering that few studies have identified the southwest states of Ogun and Oyo as destination states for child labours, and prostitutions as well as the international links to cross-border trafficking, there is need to investigate their roles in international human trafficking.

It is established in the literature however that the southern states of Edo and Delta contribute significantly to the population of trafficked persons for sexual exploitation especially to Europe (EASO, 2021; Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020; Hynes et al, 2018). But the routes engaged by these Europe-bound trafficked persons have been identified in the southwestern region in Nigeria bringing considerable attention to the region (Ayodele et al, 2020; Olasupo & Ile-Ife, 2012; UNESCO, 2006). A 2006 UNESCO study also reported that women and children were trafficked from Saki, a town in Oyo state to the neighbouring African countries of Benin, Guinea, Mali and Cote d'Ivoire to work as prostitutes, domestic servants and hawkers (UNESCO, 2006). Many years later and this trajectory has not changed although the dynamics of the movement is yet to be properly documented in the literature (Adeleye, 2017).

The dynamics of trafficking in Nigeria and across the globe have been noted to involve a network of criminals working closely but loosely at various strategic points to successfully transport the victims across national and international borders (Chia, 2018; Hynes et al, 2018). This criminal network is strategic in the perpetrating the crimes because as several

authors have noted, it constitutes members of various immigration and border agencies, police authorities, local criminal gangs, traditional authorities and even government officials (Adeleye, 2017). The modus operandi of this network is such that strategic individuals provide necessary information and resources required to easily transport trafficked individuals without getting caught by government security agencies (Aderibigbe & Olaleye, 2018; Adeleye, 2017). According to Nwogu (2014), this syndicate is usually sponsored by very wealthy persons who supply the financial inducement needed to coo the supports of strategic individuals. This concept is engaged as a framework to understand how the movement of cross-border victims are engaged within the Oyo state international border regions.

Methodology

The study is essentially qualitative research and utilized both primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected through interviews, including in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD), while secondary data relied on existing literature to provide a coherent and concise understanding of the southwest border region's role in driving cross-border trafficking in persons. Findings from the field study were compared with those from reviewed studies and literature on international trafficking in Nigeria, particularly through the border communities of Ogun and Oyo states. The study employed desktop analysis of data, and the findings are discussed below. Participants interviewed for the study were recruited from the study areas, specifically officers of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) in Ibadan, Oyo State. Three in-depth interviews were conducted with a Deputy Comptroller, a Superintendent, and a Deputy Superintendent. Additionally, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held with one Assistant Comptroller, one Chief Superintendent, one Assistant Superintendent I, and three Assistant Superintendent II officers of the Nigeria Immigration Service, Oyo State Command.

Section 4 Results and findings

Stylistic Facts and trends of Human trafficking in Oyo State

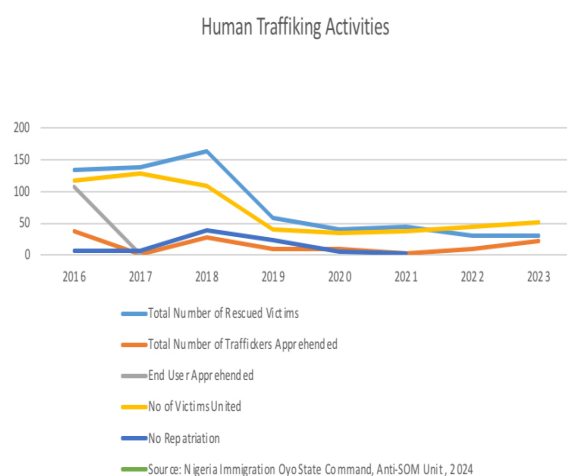
The data provided by the Nigeria Immigration Oyo State Command, Anti-SOM Unit, tracks human trafficking activities over an eight-year period from 2016 to 2023. The table highlights the total number of rescued victims, traffickers apprehended, end users apprehended, victims united, and cases of repatriation.

Table 1: Human Trafficking Activities

Table 1: Human Trafficking Activities

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Total Number of Rescued Victims	134	139	163	59	40	44	31	30
Total Number of Traffickers Apprehended	38	1	27	9	10	2	10	22
End User Apprehended	107	1			28			
No of Victims United	117	128	109	40	35	37	44	52
No Repatriation	6	6	39	24	5	3		

Source: Nigeria Immigration Service, Oyo State Command, Anti-SOM Unit, 2024



Source: Nigeria Immigration Service, Oyo State Command, Anti-SOM Unit, 2024

The results of this study present a comprehensive analysis of human trafficking activities in Oyo State from 2016 to 2023, as shown in Table 1. This period provides critical insights into the trends and patterns associated with the rescue of victims, apprehension of traffickers, and repatriation efforts. The data reveal a fluctuating yet persistent nature of trafficking cases, highlighting the efforts by law enforcement agencies and the ongoing challenges in addressing the issue. In 2016, 134 victims of human trafficking were rescued, representing a substantial number of individuals affected by this illicit activity. This year also saw 38 traffickers apprehended, indicating active operations by criminal networks within the state. Moreover, 107 end users were apprehended, underscoring the demand side of human trafficking. Efforts to reunite victims with their families were fruitful, as 117 individuals were successfully reintegrated. Furthermore, six cases of repatriation were documented, reflecting efforts to

return victims to their countries of origin, particularly those trafficked across international borders.

In 2017, the number of victims rescued increased to 139, but the number of traffickers apprehended sharply declined to just one, suggesting possible lapses in enforcement or changes in criminal operations that made detection more difficult. Similarly, only one end user was apprehended during this period. Despite these challenges, reunification efforts improved, with 128 victims successfully reunited with their families. Repatriation efforts remained consistent, with six cases recorded, matching the previous year's figures.

In 2018, the number of rescued victims rose to 163, marking the highest figure within the study period. This increase could be attributed to enhanced enforcement measures or heightened awareness campaigns. During the same year, 27 traffickers were apprehended, indicating progress in identifying and prosecuting perpetrators. However, no cases of end users being apprehended were reported, raising concerns about addressing the demand side of trafficking. Efforts to reunite victims with their families remained steady, with 109 individuals reintegrated. Notably, repatriation cases surged to 39, reflecting a significant focus on international trafficking victims.

A drastic decline in rescued victims was observed in 2019, with only 59 individuals freed. According to the Head of the Human Trafficking Unit of the Oyo State Command, this decrease was not due to reduced law enforcement activities or shifts in trafficking operations but was linked to the intensified launch of anti-trafficking operations by the Oyo State Command (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024). There were no recorded apprehensions of end users during this year, raising questions about the prioritization of demand-side interventions. On a positive note, 40 victims were reunited with their families, and 24 cases of repatriation were carried out, demonstrating continued efforts to support affected individuals.

In 2020, the number of rescued victims further declined to 40. Despite this, 10 traffickers were apprehended, suggesting some level of enforcement continuity. End-user apprehensions resumed, with 28 individuals arrested, indicating efforts to address the demand side of trafficking. Family reunifications slightly decreased to 35, while five repatriation cases were recorded, reflecting limited but ongoing efforts to assist victims trafficked across borders. The year 2021 saw a slight increase in the number of rescued victims, rising to 44. However, no end users were

apprehended, raising concerns about the sustainability of efforts to combat the demand for trafficked persons. Family reunifications remained consistent, with 35 victims reintegrated into their communities. Similarly, five cases of repatriation were recorded, reflecting steady efforts to address international trafficking cases.

The total number of rescued victims showed a slight decline in the following years, from 44 in 2021 to 31 in 2022, and further to 30 in 2023. Conversely, the number of traffickers apprehended exhibited a significant upward trend. In 2021, only two traffickers were apprehended, but this figure surged to 10 in 2022 and more than doubled to 22 in 2023. This sharp increase was attributed to improved efficiency, coordination, and enforcement by the Oyo State Command. Meanwhile, the number of victims reunited steadily increased, from 37 in 2021 to 44 in 2022, and further to 52 in 2023. This trend suggests that despite challenges, concerted efforts have been made to prioritize the rehabilitation and reintegration of rescued victims. The rise in reunifications highlights the success of post-rescue processes in restoring victims to their families and communities.

The findings reveal the dynamics of human trafficking in Oyo State. While significant progress has been made in rescuing victims and reuniting them with their families, the study underscores the importance of international cooperation and resource allocation to address cross-border trafficking effectively. By analyzing these trends, it is evident that a holistic approach is needed to combat human trafficking, involving enhanced law enforcement, community awareness, and comprehensive support for victims.

Dynamics of Human trafficking in Oyo trafficking

The trend in human trafficking activities in Oyo State, as depicted in the table above, reveals notable shifts in the dynamics of trafficking over the years. A respondent stated, "Human trafficking, unlike the trafficking of drugs or goods, is a crime that eludes immediate visibility, making it far more complex to address. The psychological and investigative efforts required to identify victims underline the gravity of this crime" (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024). Foluso Akintola, Assistant Comptroller of the Anti-Human Trafficking and Child Labour unit of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), lamented in 2019 that Oyo State, particularly Ibadan and its environs, has become a hotspot for human trafficking. The annual rise in rescued victims confirms this unsettling trend (Ojoye, 2019).

Nigeria's role as a source, transit, and destination country for trafficking renders Oyo State especially vulnerable due to its strategic location in western Nigeria with three recognized international borders with Benin Republic: Okerete, Anyegun-Wasinmi, and Igbokoko. Despite these vulnerabilities, the intensified operations of the NIS in Oyo State have brought notable improvements, as reflected in the decline in trafficking incidents. This reduction, however, does not signify diminished trafficking activities but rather highlights the effectiveness of the command's counter-trafficking measures.

One officer's reflection on this improvement offers valuable insight: upon returning to Oyo State in 2021 after a previous posting in 2015, the officer observed a significant decline in the number of trafficking victims apprehended during raids (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024). The officer credited this to the continuous sensitization programs and public awareness campaigns conducted by the command. These interventions, aimed at exposing the dangers of human trafficking, particularly at the grassroots level, have contributed significantly to the reduction of the crime (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024).

However, the evolving dynamics of trafficking reveal that child labor has emerged as a major concern, with young children trafficked from neighboring countries like Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, Ghana, and Niger Republic for domestic work and hazardous services. Respondents from a focus group interview indicated an alarming rise in child labor activities in Oyo State, both in urban and rural areas. They noted that among the children involved in this form of labor are Oyo State indigenes, where minors are employed as house helps, shop attendants, and hawkers. A respondent blamed this phenomenon on the collapse of socio-cultural values, pointing out that trafficked children are often taken in by influential individuals under the pretense of fostering but are instead exploited for labor. These children, mostly under 18, are supposedly enrolled in schools to "learn English" and communicate with their guardians' children, masking the true intent of their exploitation (FGD/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024).

The findings reveal that the movement of trafficked persons across Oyo State's borders is marked by sophisticated strategies designed to evade detection. According to interviews, traffickers often transport victims in groups, with young boys and girls either coerced or deceived into compliance. Large groups tend to draw the attention of law enforcement, prompting traffickers to bribe corrupt officers to

facilitate passage. Bribes ranging from ₦500,000 to ₦1,000,000 are reportedly offered to immigration officers. A respondent noted that traffickers strategically separate victims across multiple vehicles to avoid suspicion, with designated meeting points at hotels or remote locations. Security officers' vigilance and collaboration are crucial in intercepting such movements (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024).

This pattern illustrates the desperate attempts of traffickers to deliver victims to end users. It was also revealed that when traffickers move single victims, they use threats to silence them during security checks. However, victims can sometimes be identified through careful observation and compassionate interaction by security agents. For instance, offering food or engaging in casual conversation can help children open up about their true circumstances. One officer recounted a strategy involving taking photographs and building rapport with a child to uncover the trafficker's deceit. Such interventions often reveal that the supposed guardian paid the child's parents for custody under false pretenses, exposing the exploitation at hand.

A respondent shared an example:

You tip those boys...give him food, give him time to rest, play with him. I may bring out pictures, snap him...I want to ask him questions. By the time I finish up with him, he will tell me details like, 'that man is not my father o; he only came to snatch me from my father. He gave my father some money, and my father said I should follow him.' When they are coming, maybe he has not bought bread for them. Maybe he was just giving them snacks like *agbado*. When we get to where they want to use you, they'll give you food. When you see them, give them something let them eat. Sometimes ordinary pure water will make them confess. If

you scare them, you will not get any information. You have to be careful with those children" (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer/2024)

Transit Locations and Cross-Border Implications

Saki, a town in Oyo State, has emerged as a known transit hub for international human trafficking. Studies confirm that foreign nationals from Togo and Benin Republic are frequently trafficked through this route for sexual exploitation and other illicit activities (Adeleye, 2017; Olayiwola, 2019; Nwogu, 2014). Oyo State's strategic location as an international trafficking route underscores its role in both the exit of Nigerians and the entry of foreign nationals for exploitation. Criminal networks operating across these borders collaborate with gangs in neighboring countries to facilitate the illegal movement of persons. Reports indicate that girls and children constitute the majority of trafficked individuals, with traffickers targeting them for prostitution and forced labor (Abiodun et al., 2020; Olayiwola, 2019). A respondent provided further context:

Let me mention like 10 routes. They come through Okerete, Sanisala, there is a place in Saki they call Orita. They also come through Abu Gudu and Exit Togo Mbele along Ijo. There is a place along Ijo—I don't know the real name, but they just bust out and enter Nigeria. Many like that because Nigerian borders are very porous. We have Yerawo and many open, and vulnerable borders routes. (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer 2/2024).

Another respondent highlighted the covert nature of these movements:

"It will be difficult for a group of young girls or teenagers or little children to be moved, let's say from Ibadan or Saki, across the border without anybody noticing them, though they will not go through the registered border they will go through the illegal ones" (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer 1/2024).

Ibadan City, Oyo town among other elite towns in Oyo state have also been identified in various studies as destinations for several victims transported from other parts of Nigeria and beyond (EASO, 2021; Okenyodo, 2020; Gabriel & Fayomi, 2012). For cross-border victims smuggled into the country, reports identify Saki as the main entry and exit point (Olayiwola, 2019). The strategic role of Saki is underscored in the literature, which identifies the town as a hub for illegal trade, smuggling, and trafficking in the southwest, connecting Nigeria to the outside world (Adeleye, 2019; Nwogu, 2014). Reports by UNESCO confirm repeated interceptions of traffickers at the Saki border corridor, raising ongoing security concerns about human trafficking in Nigeria (UNESCO, 2006). Border security in this region is therefore vital not only for the safety of Nigerians but also for the local community. While Lagos and Ogun are prominent destinations for internal and international trafficking, the specifics of the criminal networks and the modus operandi of traffickers in these regions remain unclear (Adeleye, 2017; Nwogu, 2014; UNESCO, 2006).

A respondent emphasized the operational challenges posed by the vastness of Oyo State's borders:

The borders in Oyo State are a long stretch, and even if we deploy all the officers in Oyo State along with other sister agencies and work together, we cannot cover that stretch. So apart from the Saki border patrol, we have Igangan, Iseyin, Alemiboro, and other strategic border patrol and forward operational bases in the state. These stations discharge their duties and are involved in our counter-trafficking operations" (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer 1/2024).

Factors Driving Human Trafficking

Human trafficking in Oyo State is driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic and structural factors. Chronic poverty, lack of economic opportunities, ignorance, and weak border controls collectively fuel this illegal enterprise. Each of these themes highlights the systemic vulnerabilities exploited by traffickers and the socio-economic consequences for victims and their communities.

Economic hardship

Poverty is a foundational driver of human trafficking in Oyo State and across West Africa. Families struggling to meet basic needs are more vulnerable to the deceptive promises of traffickers who offer financial security and better livelihoods. Chronic poverty often forces parents and guardians to entrust their children to traffickers under the belief that this will lead to better opportunities. This pattern is

particularly evident in rural areas, where trafficked children frequently end up in forced labor.

One respondent illustrated this connection:

"When there is poverty in the land in the underdeveloped countries, i.e., if there is poverty, there will be trafficking to an underdeveloped country where there is no poverty. And that's where we have people going for *Oloshos* (sexual exploitation), to make money."

(IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer 2/2024)

This perspective aligns with research findings (Abiodun et al., 2020; Onifade, 2017), which consistently identify poverty as a significant driver of trafficking. Victims are often trapped in exploitative conditions, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency. The scarcity of economic opportunities serves as a significant pull factor for individuals who fall victim to trafficking. Many victims are lured by promises of better economic prospects abroad or in distant urban centers. This false promise of economic security perpetuates irregular migration and trafficking. Studies corroborate this finding, noting that young Nigerians undertake risky cross-border journeys due to the allure of supposed opportunities (Oyebanji, 2017; Hynes et al., 2018).

Trafficking has become a profitable business for individuals and networks in both Nigeria and neighboring Francophone countries. In some cases, trafficking is perceived as a trade rather than a crime, particularly in areas with limited awareness of its exploitative nature. One respondent noted:

Trafficking has become a lucrative business for some, particularly in areas dominated by Francophone cultures, where the crime is viewed more as a trade than a violation. Nigerians involved in trafficking often disguise themselves as citizens of neighboring countries, such as Benin or Togo, to evade detection (FGD/NIS Oyo/Participant 4/2024).

Lack of Awareness

Lack of Awareness plays a central role in the persistence of human trafficking. Despite global and national awareness campaigns, many individuals and communities remain unaware of the deceptive practices and exploitative nature of trafficking. Victims often perceive trafficking as a legitimate avenue for achieving economic mobility. Societal misconceptions and limited understanding of trafficking as a crime exacerbate the issue. One respondent emphasized this:

Most of the problem is knowledge. Most of them are not knowledgeable. They are ignorant. They see this trafficking as doing their legitimate business. Some don't know that it is a crime. So, they see us as harassing innocent people. (FGD/NIS Oyo/Participant 2/2024)

Adeleye (2017) similarly noted that ignorance drives the migration of trafficked Beninese and Togolese girls to cities like Ibadan and Lagos, where they often end up in sex work. For children trafficked from neighboring countries, ignorance exposes them to exploitation in farm labor, street hawking, and other forms of forced labor (EASO, 2021; Ibrahim & Omoregbe, 2020; UNESCO, 2006). Although periodic awareness campaigns are conducted by government agencies and NGOs (Omojola, 2023; Olayiwola, 2019; Nwoju, 2014), their effectiveness is limited, as evidenced by recurring trafficking activities in border communities. Additional drivers of human trafficking include the high demand for cheap labor and paid sex. This facilitates the operations of trafficking networks, exacerbating the problem and undermining border security measures.

Recruitment Patterns

The recruitment of human trafficking victims in Oyo State and across Nigeria is facilitated by a combination of poverty, misinformation, familial trust, and societal norms. These factors allow traffickers to operate unchecked, employing manipulative tactics to lure victims into exploitation. Traffickers often prey on vulnerable individuals, exploiting their economic hardships and lack of access to reliable information. False promises of financial security, better education, and lucrative job opportunities are powerful tools used to deceive victims and their families. One respondent emphasized the role of disinformation in recruitment:

"The patterns of recruitment so far have been information and disinformation. This is a powerful tool they use they make false promises and unrealistic lifestyles. If you notice these days, the Nigeria Immigration Service of this command has been issuing warnings and investigating radio stations promoting free travels and unapproved visa lottery slots to the masses, especially in the Middle East, and they only have one goal: to make them *Shagala* [domestic servants] (IDI/NIS Oyo/Officer 3/2024)

It was also revealed that trafficker make use of local radio stations to advertise fraudulent visa lotteries and free travel opportunities, further enticing victims into exploitation. These advertisements often target poor groups, promising unrealistic paths to prosperity abroad.

Parents or guardians, struggling with financial instability, often play an unwitting role in the recruitment process. Traffickers leverage familial trust, with relatives such as cousins, uncles, and aunts frequently acting as intermediaries. This familial involvement reduces parental hesitation to release their children, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation. A respondent from the focus group discussion highlighted this dynamic:

"Parents or guardians, often struggling financially, are complicit in this process. Many victims are coerced into leaving home under the guise of education or employment. Parents are persuaded to send their children with relatives or acquaintances, believing they will receive better opportunities in cities or abroad. In reality, these children are trafficked for domestic labor or prostitution, with traffickers pocketing the profits. (FGD/NIS Oyo/Officer 3/2024).

Another respondent agreed with the statement above stating that the pattern is particularly prevalent among victims from neighboring countries like Benin and Togo. NIS officers often find themselves rescuing trafficked children and returning them to their home countries. (FGD/NIS Oyo/Officer 5/2024).

The recruitment patterns for human trafficking in Oyo State reveal the manipulative tactics traffickers use to exploit poverty, ignorance, and familial trust. The role of disinformation, particularly through local media, and the complicity of trusted family members highlight the systemic vulnerabilities that traffickers exploit.

Conclusion

The dynamics of human trafficking in Oyo State are deeply rooted in its strategic location, entrenched socio-economic challenges, and the adaptability of criminal networks. While efforts by the Nigerian Immigration Service and other stakeholders have achieved some success in curbing trafficking activities, the persistence of systemic issues such as chronic poverty, widespread misinformation, porous borders, and institutional corruption continues to fuel this illegal enterprise. These factors, combined with familial complicity and the manipulation of cultural and economic vulnerabilities, have entrenched trafficking as a complex and multifaceted problem in the region. To effectively combat human trafficking in Oyo State, a holistic and sustained approach is essential. This requires not only enhanced border patrols and stricter regulatory measures but also the empowerment of communities through targeted sensitization campaigns that educate the public on the

realities and risks of trafficking. Addressing the root causes, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunities, is equally critical. Comprehensive community-level interventions must aim to rebuild socio-cultural values, foster economic resilience, and create viable alternatives for at-risk populations. Ultimately, combating human trafficking demands a coordinated, multi-sectoral effort involving government agencies, non-governmental organizations, local communities, and international partners. By addressing the structural vulnerabilities that enable trafficking and promoting sustainable socio-economic development, Oyo State can take significant steps toward dismantling trafficking networks and protecting its most vulnerable populations.

References

- Abiodun, F. T., Akinlawon, A. F., Abah, O., Ajayi, O. J. et al. (2020). Cross-Border Trafficking of Women in the face of Displacements in West Africa. *World Journal of Innovative Research*, 8(1):69-76.
- Adeleye, M. (2017). Victims, Actors and Violence: Human Trafficking and Prostitution in Communities along Nigeria-Benin Republic Border. *Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation in Nigeria*. Ibadan: IFRA, 26-50.
- Aderibigbe, O. M. & Olaleye, Y. L. (2018). Influence of Community Support Service Providers on Human Trafficking of Young People in Nigeria. *Clinical Depression*, 4(128):1-7. DOI: 10.4172/2572-0791.1000128
- Adio-Moses, R. O., Agbaje, F. & Eselebor, W. (2019). Health and Safety Risk of Female Trafficking in Nigeria: Implications for Border Security Transformation. *6th International Conference on Research in Behavioural & Social Sciences*, 26-28 July 2019.
- Ayodele, R. B., Olawale, J. O., Olubayo-Fatiregun, M. A. & Adeleke, O. R. (2020). *Cause-Form-Impact Analysis of Girls' Trafficking in SouthWest, Nigeria*. Available at <https://www.GirlsTraffickingcorrected2020.pdf>
- Chia, B. A. (2018). Human Trafficking in Nigeria and its Effects on the National Image: A Moral Appraisal. *Igwebuike: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 4(2):1-16.
- Duru, C. E. J. & Ogbonnaya, U. M. (2012). Combating Human Trafficking in Nigeria: An Evaluation of State Policies and Programmes. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 3(3):161-164. DOI: 10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n3p161
- European Asylum Support Office (EASO). (2021). *Nigeria Trafficking in Human Beings. Country Origin Information Report*, April 2021. DOI:2847/777951
- Gabriel, L. A. & Fayomi, O. (2012). The Political and Security Implications of Cross Border Migration between Nigeria and Her Francophone Neighbours. *International Journal of Social Science*, 1(3):1-12.
- Garba, U. K. & Nik, A. K. N. M. (2015). Child Trafficking and Religion: A Case Study of Almajiri Education in Northern Nigeria. *International Journal of Business, Economics and Law*, 8(4):113-122.
- Hynes, P., Gani-Yusuf, L., Burland, P., Dew, J. et al. (2018). 'Vulnerability' to Human Trafficking: A Study of Viet Nam, Albania, Nigeria and the UK. *Report of Shared Learning Event Held in Lagos, Nigeria*, 17-18 January 2018.
- Ibrahim, I. M. & Omoregbe, I. I. (2020). Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Causes, Efforts by Nigeria Government and the Way Forward. *Nigerian Journal of Social Studies*, 23(1):128-140.
- Nwogu, V. I. (2014). Anti-Trafficking Interventions in Nigeria and the Principal-Agent Aid Model. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 3(2014):41-63.
- Ogunniyi, D. & Idowu, O. (2022). Human Trafficking in West Africa: An Assessment of the Implementation of International and Regional Normative Standards. *The Age of Human Rights Journal*, 19(2022):165-185. DOI: 10.17561/tahrj.v19.6851
- Ojoye, T. (2019, June 9). Oyo becoming the hot spot of girls trafficking – NIS. *Punch: Nigeria*.
- Okenyodo, K. (2020). Dynamics of Trafficking in Africa: A Comparative Perspective. *Paper presented at the Countering Transnational and Organized Crime Seminar*, Niamey Niger. 13-17 January 2020.
- Olasupo, F. A. & Ile-Ife. (2012). Trafficking in Women and Children in Yoruba Land: The Pre-Colonial, Colonial and Post-Colonial Situations Compared. *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, 12(11):48-63.
- Olayiwola, P. (2019). "Killing the Tree by Cutting the Foliage Instead of Uprooting It?": Rethinking Awareness Campaigns as a response to Trafficking in South-West Nigeria. *Anti-Trafficking Review*, 3(2019):50-65. <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.201219134>
- Omojola, O. (2023). Protection of Victims of Human Trafficking in Nigeria. *NAUJILI*, 14(1):76-88.

- Onifade, S. D. (2017). Community Perception of Effectiveness of NAPTIP in Lowering Child Trafficking in Ibadan Metropolis. *BA Thesis*, Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan.
- Oyebanji, K. F. (2017). Human Trafficking across a Border in Nigeria: Experiences of Young Women who have survived Trafficking. *MA Mini-Thesis*, Department of Women's and Gender Studies, University of the Western Cape. November 2017.
- UNESCO. (2006). Human Trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations. *Policy Paper Poverty Series no 14.2*. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (2006). *Measures to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings in Benin, Nigeria and Togo. September 2006*. Geneva: UNODC.

A REVIEW OF THE PSYCHOSOCIAL EFFECTS OF WIDOWHOOD AMONG OLDER WOMEN IN NIGERIA

DOI: <https://10.69778/3007-7192/2025/1.1/a5>

Akinwale, Gbenusola A., Amodeni, Oluwatobiloba S. & Oke, Onome S.

Department of Psychology
Faculty of Social Science
University of Lagos
gakinwale@unilag.edu.ng

Abstract

Widowhood is a momentous life event that could affect the psychological, social, and financial well-being of widows. This study investigated widowhood and its effects on older women in Nigeria. It explored widowhood from a global perspective and was narrowed down to the perspective of widowhood in Nigeria and reviewed statistics which revealed that a staggering number of elderly women are widows, yet, so little has been done in terms of social relief, financial, or psychological aid all over the world. For this reason, this research was done to better understand widowhood and its all-round effects. With the aid of existing literature, this study examined how widowhood affects psychological well-being, financial stability, and even the social status of widows. It also pointed out common cultural practices done to widows that are detrimental to their well-being. Guided mainly by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which highlights the developmental stages an individual must attain psychosocially, this study pointed out how widowhood could 'drown the work done in previous stages of development and make it difficult for widows to go through the rest of their lives with fulfilment. The study also reviewed the conformity theory as a factor influencing widows' blind adherence to the detrimental cultural practices meted out to them. This paper contributes to the understanding of the complexities and effects of widowhood and suggests interventions to reduce its impact.

Keywords: Widowhood, Psychological Well-Being, Social Status, Economic Instability, Cultural Practices.

Introduction

Widowhood is a global experience for women, with millions of women around the world finding themselves widowed, and facing the ensuing social, economic and psychological difficulties. Widowhood looks very different around the world due to differences in age, gender roles, and legal systems. Such contextual understanding of widowhood is important because it can inform interventions that support widows while providing them with a safe space to express their suffering and discuss strategies for coping and empowerment.

Widowhood is not just a deeply personal loss; it is also a challenge that ripples through families and communities. When someone loses their spouse, the effects often extend far beyond the individual, touching loved ones and even the broader society. Many widows struggle with finances, feelings of loneliness and emotional pain highlighting the need for greater support and understanding on both personal and societal levels.

The study tries to give a multidimensional view of widowhood in its global, regional and local aspects. It also examined the cultural, legal and economic parameters that shape the experiences of widows especially older ones in Africa and Nigeria where traditional practices and legal barriers usually exacerbate their plights.

Background of the study

The issue of widowhood is a global one as it affects women worldwide regardless of age, race, or profession. According to the United Nations, there are an estimated 258 million widows globally. (UN, 2024). As at 2024, India holds the position for the country with the highest number of widows, with an estimate of 46 million widows and the global inevitability of widowhood makes it hard to ignore its implications. Widows around the world face emotional instability, financial insecurity, isolation, stereotypes, and even some harmful cultural and traditional practices. While battling with their grief due to the loss of their significant other and other consequential psychological issues, many widows face detrimental practices or traditions, which they often find themselves unable to speak again.

Fortunately, developed countries have overcome dehumanizing traditions and put certain structures in place to aid the women in their transition to widowhood.

- The United States, offers social security survival benefits paid monthly to the widows based on the work history of their deceased spouses.
- The United Kingdom, under the provision of bereavement support payments, gives widows access to bereavement allowance to help ease the financial burden.

- Australia offers support groups for widows, with free or subsidized therapy sessions.
- Japan promotes social integration of widows through part-time jobs by the Silver Human Resource Centers, where these jobs are specifically for older people to improve their health conditions.
- And in Canada, certain groups such as the Soaring Spirit provide resources and tools for widows to rebuild their lives.



Figure 1: American widow receiving Social Security support.

These initiatives do not entirely take out the sting of grief, loneliness, and other emotions that come with widowhood, but rather they help to cushion the blow.

In developing nations, however, widows are still subjected to unfair traditions, biased inheritance laws, and stereotypes. In India, some conservative Hindus throw widowed women out of their houses with the belief that they should not have a reason to live so as they could not retain the souls of their husbands. Due to their advanced ages, most of these women cannot find well-paying jobs, so they live together in **vidwa ashrams**; clusters of widows mostly located in a pilgrimage city, Vrindavan. They are dressed in white garments without accessories or makeup, and they stay together knowing they cannot return to their families. These widows are subjected to a life of isolation and mourning, with faith being their only comfort.



Figure 2: Indian widows in vidwa ashram.

In Malawi, many widows struggle with land-grabbing and unfair inheritance laws, where the relatives of their late husbands disinherit them from their property and sell or destroy their properties.

In Croatia, widows are traditionally expected to tie a black scarf under their chin for the rest of their lives to symbolize perpetual mourning.

Some initiatives like Global Funds for Widows have been founded to help widows in these situations. Older widows have little or no knowledge about such initiatives that could help them. And even if they do, the mindset that their relatives have the final say has been so ingrained into them that they are too afraid to seek help. These issues leave aged widows in a state of poverty, at risk for health complications and mental or emotional breakdown. The practices of isolation and restriction lead to not only mental health issues, but also physical issues like cardiovascular diseases, cognitive decline, and many other issues. The alarming number of widows subjected to these harsh experiences all over the world poses a threat to even the economy, as widowhood in areas where there are cultural practices that put the widow in financial jeopardy could exacerbate poverty in nations, place strains on government health care facilities, promote violation of human rights, and increase the dependency of the citizens on the government of such nations. All of these factors promote economic and social crises for countries all over the world.

Widowhood in Africa

This gives the phenomenon of widowhood its complexity and multifaceted features driven by an array of cultural, social and economic forces. Experiences associated with widowhood vary from one region to the other because there exist differences in cultures, legal systems and socioeconomic conditions.

Widowhood prevalence and demographics: One in ten African women aged 15 and older is widowed. In some African countries, as many as 3 of 10 women in the reproductive age of 15-49 years are widows including those who remarry. More than 5 widowed women are under age 49 years. The prevalence of widowhood rises with advancing age thus by age 80 years, many women will live in widowhood.

Cultural and social issues: The status of widows in Africa is often defined by deep-seated prejudices embedded in cultural traditions, societal norms and legal systems. Widows are usually denied their rights, access to resources and opportunities which increases their vulnerability and makes it very hard for them to take care of themselves and their families.

In Africa, widows face severe economic disadvantages and have poorer nutritional status compared to women in other marital statuses. For example, a study done in Mali showed that widows are more likely to head the poorest households and this disadvantage does not seem to disappear even after remarriage which has negative implications for the health and educational status of their children.

Regional variations: The experience and prevalence of widowhood vary throughout the African continent. For instance, there are comparatively low rates of early widowhood in Ghana which can be explained in part by the possible practice of forced widow remarriage in some regions. On the other hand, South Africa has high rates of early life widowhood which is possibly driven by factors like HIV/AIDS and violence.

Effects on economic stability and well-being: In Africa, widowhood hits hard on their economic stability and health outcomes as most of the time, these women have limited access to major productive resources such as land and are subject to discriminatory inheritance practices which further deteriorate their economic situation. The many challenges that the widows face in the African region call for a holistic approach where policy changes ensure that rights are protected and access to resources is increased. Such changes include challenging various harmful traditional practices and establishment of legal systems that will promote inheritance rights and economic empowerment for the widows. Changing cultural attitudes towards the widows can also be done through public campaigns that encourage respect and empathy towards them. The impact of patriarchy of the sociocultural systems in Africa often push women into subordinate positions thus stripping them of their self-determination and ability to make decisions. Widows in particular face a structural system that does not seem to fully recognize them as independent individuals.

This lack of recognition is further deteriorated by the lack of data on widows which poses challenges to the formulation of relevant interventions.

Widowhood in Nigeria

In Nigeria, marriage is a very significant part of the customs and tradition. It is one thing that most Nigerian girls are taught to aspire to. And any delay in marriage beyond the early twenties, the societal and family pressure begins. When a woman eventually gets married, there is a huge celebration for the family of the couple. And the marriage is often seen as the union of not just two individuals, but two families and even communities at large. And traditionally, marriage lasts till death parts the couple.

When a marriage ends in the death of the man, the grief and anger is even more intense and palpable than the joyful experience during the celebration of the marriage. And in most cases, all of these negative emotions are burdened on the widow. Nigeria, which is also a still-developing country, has traditions that do not benefit the widow. In fact, many Nigerian cultural practices towards widows are detrimental to their psychological and physical well-being. And according to the International Woman's Society, 15 million Nigerian women are widows living in abject poverty.

Just like in every other part of the world, widowhood comes with complex psychological, social and even physical challenges. But due to Nigeria's cultural diversity and uniqueness, widowhood in Nigeria comes with its own unique experiences, which may not necessarily be positive.

In Igbo land, South Eastern Nigeria, it is believed that the dignity of a woman is her husband, and once her husband dies, the dignity of the woman is shattered. When the woman becomes widowed, her hair is shaved by her fellow widows to signify that her husband, who was her glory and dignity, has departed from her. Then for a period of minimum of three months to a year, the widow is required to wear only the colour white, to commemorate her mourning period. This sets her apart from the rest of the community, and she is easily identified as a woman in mourning.



Figure 3: Igbo women cutting a widow's hair.

Sadly, the widow may face disinheritance of her husband's property, because it is believed that since she is not related to her husband by blood, she is not to inherit his property. The widow's only saving grace will be if she birthed male children that can inherit their father's property, as daughters also are not allowed to inherit their father's property. But still, in some adamant families, even when the widow has male children, they may have their own traditions that prevent the children from inheriting their father's property. These practices leave the widow at risk for psychological, physical, and financial problems.

Consequently, there are issues of severe loneliness, as their spouse, who was their major source of companionship, has died and their children have most likely moved out. Similarly, in regards to finances, the widow who has been stripped of her husband's properties will be left to start with nothing. And due to her age, it will not be easy to get suitable employment, leaving her financially dependent on her children or relatives.

The Igbo land is not alone when it comes to traditions towards widows. In the Isoko tribe of Delta State, South-South region of Nigeria, widows are also not allowed to inherit their husband's property, but they are in fact inherited by the designated family member as their own wife. If the widow does not want to be inherited by any of her husband's relatives, she returns the bride price and goes back to her father's house. If she doesn't choose any of the above options, she can decide to choose one of her sons to stand as her husband, and if she has no son, she picks an underage boy in the family. This is because in the Isoko land, when a woman gets married, she doesn't marry just a man but his family. Usually, because she cannot inherit her husband's property, she is often at the mercy of her children and other relatives, and these relatives ordinarily do not make it easy for the widow.

In many cultures across Nigeria, widows are made to go through extreme lengths such as drinking the water used to wash her husband's body, just to prove their innocence in the death of their husbands and some are forced to lavish their husband's property on a stupendous burial, leaving them alone and poor afterwards. They may face rejection or social isolation, as some cultures deem widows to be 'unclean people' for a period of time. These unkind cultural practices toward widows add to their burden of grief and gives them extra stress. In aged widows, such traditions put them at higher risk of financial ruin, physical problems, stigmatization, and disrespect from others.

It is obvious that in Nigeria, treatment of widows is deeply intertwined with cultural traditions, and legal practices are yet to catch up on the violation of fundamental human rights, and the deprivation of widows' respect and dignity continues fearlessly. If lawmakers can invest in proper legal protections and social welfare for widows, then a society can be created where widows are allowed to thrive.

Implications of widowhood

Widowhood significantly impacts the psychological, social, and financial well-being of older women, particularly in culturally diverse contexts like Nigeria, where traditional practices exacerbate their challenges. Siyanbade et al (2023) in a study recommends that the government at all levels be more active in terms of ensuring safety, eradicating poverty among youths and vulnerable members of the society which includes the women and youth through the provision of agricultural infrastructure like modern storage systems and tractors, as well as improving social amenities such as roads, electricity, health, and education so that job creation can be a reality for the young people.

This particular topic is being reviewed to understand the multifaceted effects of widowhood on older women and for developing targeted interventions that address their unique challenges and improve their quality of life. This exploration is particularly pertinent given the increasing number of widows globally and the specific cultural practices that affect their status and well-being.

Akinwale et al (2024) study on the burden of energy crisis among women and in rural communities of Lagos State, as predicted, the study revealed that all the challenges that comes with lack of access to basic and clean energy has severe implications for children and women, the study noted that clean and modern energy is not a luxury for city dwellers or the rich alone, but a necessity for every individual irrespective of age, status and educational background. Widows are considered to be a vulnerable

group; the death of their spouse will add to the burden of daily living thus making life and living condition difficult.

Similarly, a study conducted by Akinwale et al (2024) among women and children in Osun State revealed that many young women are already widowed in their early years due to the activities surrounding risk taking in mining sites. A significant number expressed hoe poverty has been their major nightmares because of the demise of their spouse.

Lack of masculine influence can affect the children's discipline and morality, thus making them nuisance in the community. The child's social environment is less enriched and Saba (1997) pointed out that this could lead to lower self-esteem, economic insecurity and feeling of inadequacy in the children which are indicators of underdevelopment. Oreh (2005) advised that even though the absence of a male figure in the home can affect the boys' identification with the male role, the widow must remember that she can only be the best mother and never mother and father.

Stillion (1998) pointed out that with the death of a husband, the social status of the widow is largely reduced and this will result to loss of self-esteem. No one who has lost her self-esteem can contribute meaningfully to community development.

Theoretical Review

As it is already established, widowhood has deep implications for the widow and her general well-being. Therefore, it is important to explore some theories that could provide insight into the implications of widowhood especially in the psychological aspects. This review focuses on three theories of psychology:

Erik Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

According to Erik Erikson, there are eight stages of psycho-social development that span from the beginning to the end of life. In each of these stages, an individual resolves internal conflicts in order to achieve the best possible outcome before moving on to the next stage of development. The stages are demarcated by age.

In this paper, we will be exploring stage 6 which lasts from the ages of 19 to 40 and aims to resolve the conflict of intimacy versus isolation. According to Erikson, this stage is for building quality relationships, both romantic and platonic. It is at this stage that many individuals form meaningful connections and long-term partnerships. A successful completion of this stage of psycho-social development leads to healthy and secure relationships while an unsuccessful outcome results in loneliness and isolation.

It is worth noting that one of the great successes of the intimacy versus isolation stage is a healthy marriage. When this marriage ends due to the death of the man, it can affect the woman's resolution of further psycho-social conflicts necessary for development.

Women over 60 are in one of two stages, either generativity versus stagnation stage or the stage of integrity versus despair. In the generativity versus stagnation stage, an individual tries to use his or her resources and knowledge to help younger generations. The confidence to do this usually stems from a successful completion of the previous psycho-social stages.

In the case of a widow, her husband's death could drown the work done in the intimacy versus isolation stage, taking her from someone who was previously in a secure relationship to someone who is alone and possibly even socially isolated. Such widows may experience isolation, and sometimes a loss of identity and self-esteem. All these factors can make it difficult to mentor younger generations, and the widow might end up leaving this stage feeling unproductive and having no impact on younger generations.

This perceived lack of impact could affect the final stage of psycho-social development, which is the integrity versus despair stage, where most people begin to look back on their life and determine if it was successful. The death of a woman's husband, which resulted in isolation and lack of generativity in the later stage, would leave a sense of regret in her as she may not have achieved all that she hoped to achieve. This may result in despair instead of integrity in the final stage of psycho-social development.

Erikson's theory can be compared to a ladder. If one rung is removed, it becomes difficult to ascend to higher steps. In widowhood, the rung of intimacy has been removed, making it difficult for a woman to successfully resolve the remaining two conflicts in her psycho-social development.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Abraham Maslow's theory involves the hierarchy of needs, where he believed that human needs can be arranged into a hierarchical format and are solved sequentially. According to Maslow, satisfaction of human needs begins from physiological needs, then safety needs, to love or belonging needs, esteem needs, and ends with self-actualization needs.

When a woman is in a healthy marriage, she is protected and provided for, fulfilling her physiological and safety needs. She is loved and loves others, achieving her love and belonging needs, and she is often respected and recognized properly in society,

achieving her esteem needs. When her husband dies, however, the woman becomes vulnerable and may lack in one or all of the highlighted needs. She loses the love of her life, causing her to lack in regards to love. She may be in financial trouble, causing her to lack in physiological and safety needs. And the terrible cultural practices towards widows are humiliating and may result in a loss of self-esteem.

In widows over the age of 60, these effects are even worse because at such a stage in life, it may be difficult to rebuild one's self and recover all that they have lost. This proves that after the death of a spouse, a woman is never really the same again.

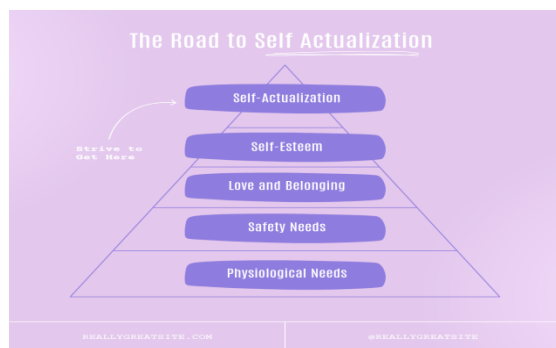


Figure 4: Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Conformity Theory by Solomon Asch

Conformity theory posited by Solomon Asch means that individuals are motivated to adopt the norms, attitude, beliefs, and behaviour of a group they want to be part of. When a woman gets married, she enters into her husband's family and conforms to their practices. She accepts their culture and tradition because she is not part of them.

Unfortunately, it is this culture and tradition that make provision for the maltreatment of a woman. After the death of her husband, based on the excuse of culture, many families and tribes have practices that isolate and scar a widow for the rest of her own life. And the widow is unable to refuse most, if not all of these traditions because upon her marriage, she has agreed to conform.

For instance, if an Isoko woman marries an Igbo man, she must shave her head upon his death, despite the fact that she is not an Igbo woman.

Social Exclusion Theory

Walker, (1997) and Duffy (1995), stress on the multidimensional nature of social exclusion. According to them, social exclusion relates not simply to a lack of material resources but also matters like inadequate social participation, lack of cultural and educational capital, inadequate access to services and lack of power.

Social exclusion theory refers to persistent and systematic multiple deprivation of individual or group resulting to disempowerment and alienation and the way the resultant dynamics affect the individuals or groups in the society (Hills, 1998).

Thus, in widowhood practices, widows are excluded by their late husband's relatives from inheriting their husband's property thereby plunging the widows into a sudden state of powerlessness leading to lack of material resources and inadequate social participation thereby making contribution to community development difficult.

Limitations and future directions

This research highlights the complexities of widowhood and the need for comprehensive interventions to support widows however there are several limitations and areas for future research that should be considered;

Data limitations: There is a need for more comprehensive data on widowhood especially in developing countries. Current data often under report the prevalence of widowhood and its impacts particularly among marginalized communities. This lack of data complicates efforts to develop targeted interventions and evaluate their effectiveness. Future studies should prioritize collecting detailed and reliable data on widowhood including its socioeconomic and psychological impacts. Additionally, data collection should be sensitive to the cultural and legal contexts of different regions.

Future research should consider the cultural nuances of widowhood experiences across different regions. This involves understanding local customs and legal systems that influence the lives of widows. Cultural sensitivity is crucial for developing interventions that are relevant and effective in diverse contexts. Researchers should engage with local communities to ensure that their perspectives are integrated into the design and implementation of interventions. Moreover, cultural sensitivity requires acknowledging the diversity within cultures and avoiding assumptions based on generalizations. This involves recognizing that cultural norms can vary significantly within a single society and interventions should be tailored to address these variations.

Intervention studies: More studies are needed on the effectiveness of interventions aimed at supporting widows. This includes evaluating the impact of empowerment programs and policy reforms on improving the socioeconomic status of widows. Intervention studies should employ rigorous methodologies such as randomized controlled trials to

assess the outcomes of different interventions. Furthermore, future research should explore the long-term effects of interventions examining whether they lead to sustained improvements in the lives of widows. This involves conducting follow-up studies to assess the durability of intervention impacts and identifying factors that contribute to successful outcomes.

Interdisciplinary approaches: Future research should adopt interdisciplinary approaches combining insights from psychology, sociology, economics and law to provide a comprehensive understanding of widowhood. This involves collaborating with experts from different fields to develop interventions that address the multifaceted challenges faced by widows. Interdisciplinary research can help identify the most effective strategies for empowering widows considering both the immediate needs of economic support and the long-term goals of social and legal change by integrating perspectives from various disciplines. Researchers can develop more holistic interventions that address the root causes of marginalization.

Global collaboration: Collaboration between researchers, policymakers and practitioners across different countries is essential for addressing the global challenges faced by widows. This includes sharing best practices in empowerment programs, advocating for policy changes at the international level and mobilizing resources to support interventions in developing countries. Global collaboration can facilitate the exchange of knowledge and expertise ensuring that interventions are informed by successful models from around the world.

Conclusion

From the different parts of this paper, we have explored widowhood, its effects on the widow, its psychological impacts, and also the tolerable and intolerable practices towards widows, especially those older women

We have looked at statistics and global trends concerning widows and how different societal structures and culture could affect a woman's transition into widowhood and her quality of life afterwards. We have also explored how the rates of widowhood could even affect the economic state of nations.

The paper underscored certain negative cultural practices towards widows and pointed out the results which include: isolation, vulnerability, financial, emotional and psychological burdens that widows are made to bear. It has highlighted the need for favourable practices towards widows, and clamoured

for an end to the harmful cultural practices done to them.

The paper also analysed the effects of widowhood from a psychological point of view by reviewing three psychological theories; Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory and The Conformity theory. The reviews of these theories revealed that widowhood could disrupt an individual's personal development and affect the satisfaction of basic needs.

There is a need for understanding, kindness and empathy towards widows and creation of favourable policies that firmly discourage maltreatment of widows with legal consequences for defaulters. The society and state should be able to protect its weak and vulnerable members which widows make up a large percentage.

References

- Akinwale, G.A., Ojajorotu V. & Costa, H. (2024). An Exploratory Study on the Psychological Effects of Illegal Mining on Women and Children in Suburb Area of Osun State, Nigeria. *Zhongguo Kuangye Daxue Xuebao*, 29(4), 175-181. <https://zkdx.ch/journal/zkdx/article/view/187>
- Akinwale, Gbenusola & Victor Ojajorotu. (2024). Gender and the Energy Crisis: Unveiling the Burden of Energy Crisis on Rural African Women in Lagos, Nigeria. *TWIST*, 2024, (19), 2, pp. 576-582
- Anuforo, P., Zoucha, R., Salman, K., & McFarland, M. R. (2024). Influences of widowhood cultural practices, values, and beliefs on the health and well-being of Nigerian women: An integrative review. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10436596241286244>
- Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological monographs: General and applied*, 70(9), 1-70.
- Dube, M. (2023). The challenges facing widows in African contexts: A literature review. *International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science*, 12(7), 452-459. <https://doi.org/10.20525/ijrbs.v12i7.2775>
- Erikson, E. H. (1959). *Psychological issues*. New York, NY: International University
- Fakoya, O. A., McCorry, N. K., & Donnelly, M. (2020). Loneliness and social isolation interventions for older adults: A scoping

- review of reviews. *BMC Public Health*, 20, Article 129. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-8251-6>
- Hayes, A. (2021). In Malawi, widows are still being left behind. *Global Fund for Widows*. <https://www.globalfundforwidows.org/news/malawi-widows-left-behind>
- Li, S., & Song, L. (2023). The impact of widowhood on the mental health of older adults and the buffering effect of social capital. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, Article 1107683. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.1107683>
- Mannaerts, P. (2022, February 25). The widows who can't return home. *BBC Travel*. <https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20160907-the-widows-who-cant-return-home>
- Maslow, A. H. (1970a). *Motivation and personality*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Nwaoga, C. T., Uroko, F. C., Okoli, A. B., & Okwuosa, L. (2021). Widowhood practices and the church in south-east Nigeria. *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, 77(4), Article 6528. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6528>
- Oreh, C.I. (2005). "Surviving As A Single Parent" in: Mothers' Forum, The Christian Woman in the 21st Century, Prospects and Challenges. Christ Church Women's Association (CCWA) Publication. Christ Church Chapel, UNN.
- Orenstein, G. A., & Lewis, L. (2022, November 7). Erikson's stages of psychosocial development. *StatPearls*. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556096/> Press.
- Saba, K.O. (1997). "Psychological Effects of Widowhood on Women and Children: Findings from a Pilot Study in Nigeria". Being a paper presented during a workshop on the Rights of Widows in Nigeria organized by Human Development Initiatives (HDI) under the auspices of Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos.
- Shiyanbade, B. Akinwale, G. & Odunlade, A. (2023). Analysing the Mode of Implementation of Social Intervention Scheme in Job Creation in Nigeria: Insight from The Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme. *African Renaissance*, SI, 279-302. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2516-5305/2023/si1n1a13>
- Srivastava, S., Debnath, P., Shri, N., & Muhammad, T. (2021). The association of widowhood and living alone with depression among older adults. *Scientific Reports*, 11, Article 1238. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-021-01238-x>
- Stillion, J.M. (1998). "Women and Widowhood: The Suffering beyond grief". In J.O. Freeman (ed.) *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, Mayfield Publishing Company, California.
- Suzuki, K. M., Uehara, M. N., & Ishibashi, T. (2023). The improvement effect of working through the Silver Human Resources Center on pre-frailty among older people: A two-year follow-up study. *BMC Geriatrics*, 23, Article 3978. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-023-03978-z>
- United Nations. (2024). *Invisible women, invisible problems*. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/widows-day>
- Zhang, W., & Liu, Y. (2024). The impact of widowhood on the quality of life of older adults. *BMC Geriatrics*, 24, Article 5244. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12877-024-05244-2>