


SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND WELL-BEING



HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Kiingati, J.B. (2022). Widows Human Rights Experiences
<https://afroheritageconsult.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Widow-Human-Rights-Experiences.pdf>

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Human rights, justice, and human dignity

Title: Widow Human Rights Experiences and their Influence on Widow Self-identity

Background

As women age, they are increasingly likely to face widowhood. The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2000), shows the proportion of widows at 7% to 16% of all adult women. While in developed countries “widowhood is experienced primarily by elderly women ... in developing countries it also affects younger women, many of them still rearing children [...and...] in some regions, girls become widows even before reaching adulthood” (Trivedi, Sareen & Dhyani, 2009, p. 37). Widowhood, majorly affecting women ((Fasoranti *et al.*, 2007; Lee, 2002), is noted as one of the most negative life events, coming second to the loss of a child (Bennett, et al., 2005). It is referred to as an integral loss (Matlin, 2004; Vijay, 2010).

In addition to the psychopathological state that these victims of spousal loss experience (Kiingati, 2019; Schaal, Dusingizemungu, Nadja & Elbert, 2011), widows become “discriminated members of society” (Soussou, 2002, p.207). This discrimination against widows is founded on patriarchal attitudes (Chowdhry, 2012), and realized in violence and abuse against the victims (Sleap, 2009). Despite these challenges subjected to widows, they remain a significant population in society (Peterman, 2012) in addition to being a significant part of the same society; “15% of all Dakar's households...are headed by widows” (ANSD, 2013, p.31).

This study seeks to explore the human rights violations carried out against widows. In so doing it aims at shedding light on how these violations negatively influence the widow's efforts to re-create her self-identity and in so doing hinder the realization of SDG five. Despite the challenges, widows struggle to positively deal with the experiences in their attempt to find their position in society, as they help propel themselves and their significant others towards social transformation.

Problem statement

Maximum realization of societal wellness calls for the informed active participation of all persons. With this, the sustainable exploitation of individual talents would culminate in a synergy, whose generativity would positively transform our world. Based on this outlook, gender inclusivity becomes a pre-requisite for a quality of life as defined by the World Health Organization (Skevington, Lofty, & O'Connell, 2004), envisioned in Vision 2030 (Mwaniki, Kibui, & Athiemoolam, 2014) and well-stipulated in the SDGs (Hedlund-de Witt, 2014). The reality in some parts of the world, however, reveals continued practices that hinder gender inclusivity; among them are the human rights violations that widows go through in the developing world. These malfunctionings have a direct negative ripple

effect on the over 15% of the household occupants in Sub-Saharan Africa. In response to this challenge, this study seeks to contribute to social wellness by creating a platform from which widows in Kenya, East Africa can voice out the human rights violations they experience. It seeks to add to the scholarly world, by linking the effects of human rights violations to self-identity. The study hypothesizes that an improper redress of human rights violations negatively influences widows' reconstruction of their self-identity. In so doing, it interferes with their efforts to contribute towards socially transforming themselves, and in turn, hinders their efforts to positively influence those they interact with.

Objectives of the study are:

1. To explore the human rights-related issues of widows in Ngong Sub County of Kajiado County, Kenya;
2. To find out how these experiences influence the widow's self-identity;
3. To identify how the widows deal with these experiences in their attempts to find their position in society; and
4. To evolve a human rights-based, model for widow identity construction (MWIC), guided by Discourse Analysis, for the self and social transformation of widows

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the Discourse theory that makes sense of phenomena, and the social environment (Whisnat, 2012). It makes use of the Discourse Analysis method of studying language as used to disseminate the discourse (Gee, 2011; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002). In this study, Discourse Analysis facilitates socially critiquing human rights violations as experienced by the widows (Faucaldian Discourse Analysis). It does so by analysing the language that the widows use (Critical Discourse Analysis), as they express the violations. In addition, it addresses their feelings and thoughts (Discursive Psychology), as a reaction to the violations.

Methodology

The qualitative research design is best suited for the study since it helps focus on the experiences of the widows. Quantitative data would reduce the experiences to numbers and fail to give voice to the participants (Arlene, 2014). Social constructionism, the prevailing paradigm in Discourse Analysis, allows for the researcher's reflexivity, a position to be acknowledged in this method (Taylor, 2011). This epistemology allows for convenient ways to represent the world through researcher-participant interactions (Hacking, 1999; Keating & Porta, 2008). Ngong Sub County, of Kajiado County, Kenya, East Africa, is the research cosmopolitan site.

It encompasses diverse races, nationalities, and local cultures, as well as the convergence of persons of varied economic and social strata. These factors coupled with the extremities in educational levels, enrich the catchment area of the population. From the KNBS (2013), the population of widows in the area is estimated at 3,300. There being no sampling frame, the snowball process, is used to arrive at 43 participants. This number allows the study to reach satiation, “repetition of stories occur[s] among participants and no new information [is] awarded to the researcher by any new participant” (Ishak & Bakar, 2014, p.2). With authorizations from the necessary research bodies, the study reaches out to the participants. It seeks informed consent from the participants, whose interviews are taped, to generate the discourse. This is later transcribed and analysed following the thematic analysis and coding process (Boyatzis, 1998; Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The Nvivo 12 Computer-assisted Qualitative Data Analysis System is also used (CAQDAS, 2014).

Findings

Two themes emerge from the study: inheritance-related injustices and domestic violence. The significant perpetrators of the former, are the family of the in-laws. There appears to be lust and a subsequent scramble for the wealth that is acquired by the couple before the death of the husband. This robbing from the widow starts from the time the man is pronounced dead. At times this is even instigated when the man is sick in the hospital and is showing signs of death. On the issue of domestic violence, there is verbal and physical abuse on the widow. This is done by the family of the deceased. In some cases, this culminates in rape by the in-laws. A subtle injustice on the widow is the lie that is often publicly issued. When the husband dies while in office, some employers promise (on the day of the burial) to support the widow and the children. The reality, however, is that this at times turns into lies. The public pronouncements lead some relatives to believe that the widow has finances from the employer of the late husband. These injustices are significant to the widow and amount to a violation of her rights. They in turn negatively influence the reconstruction of the widow's identity.

Despite this, widows' reliance on God, sharing among themselves, and working hard keeps them afloat.

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