

THE WIDOWERS' TRAVAILS IN NIGERIA: THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGICAL CONCERNS

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ABSTRACT

There is no doubt that the travails and challenges facing widows in Nigeria have been well researched and documented, resulting in the setting up of agencies and charitable bodies to mitigate and ameliorate the sufferings of widows. These mitigating agencies and associations are found both in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based groups and churches. However, the concerns for comparable attentions are strikingly absent in relation to the experiences and plights of widowers to that of widows in the same societies. As a result, the idea of the unsung (neglected state of living) widowers draws attention to a forgotten group whose suffering, weaknesses, and coping means are hardly acknowledged. The objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight the plights and the travails of the widower, accentuating the fact that it is not all well with the widower. A phenomenological investigation reveals that the widower suffers a great deal of parenting challenges, including taking on the dual role of mother and father. In addition to dealing with loneliness, a widower may be burdened with the added responsibilities of coping with grief and then dealing with stress and frustration with their new state of living. Using the theological framework of theocentric concerns for the neglect of widowers' realities in present-day Nigeria, the paper concluded that there is a need to take care of widowers just as the widows are being taken care of, especially by the religious institutions. The paper recommends a greater Christian theological and sociological study of the plights of widowers in contemporary Nigerian society with a view to setting up spiritual counselling and psychological mitigating centres that could help in the alleviation of the sufferings of widowers, as is currently the case with widows.

KEYWORDS: Gender Disparity, Family, Theocentric Ethics, Sufferings, and Widowerhood.

INTRODUCTION

Gender disparity in mortality and life expectancy is generally skewed to the advantage of women due to some biological and behavioural factors, even as scientists still struggle to fully explain this disparity (Rochelle, Yeung, Bond & Li, 2015). In some developed countries, the difference between male and female life expectancy is as high as thirteen (13) years (59 years for males and 72 years for females) (UNO 2024).

But in Nigeria, the diversity in longevity between male and female life expectancy is almost at par. According to the *World Population Prospects 2024 Data Sheet*, Nigeria has a life expectancy of 54.18 years for males and 54.74 years for females (UNO, 2024). This indicates that the difference in mortality between the sexes in Nigeria is not only due to natural biological factors but also other intervening social variables.

In Nigeria, social factors such as unsafe living conditions, inadequate nutrition and sanitation, and infectious diseases decrease life expectancy generally. Women, however, face the additional risk associated with childbirth as maternal mortality is still very high in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite these variables, women still generally outlive men in Nigeria. Therefore, the slight difference in life expectancy between men and women aligns with global trends, where women generally live longer than men. Using the theological framework of theocentric concerns for the neglect of widowers' realities in present-day Nigeria, the objective of this paper, therefore, is to highlight the plights or the travails of widowers, accentuating the fact that it is not well with widowers. Such a phenomenological investigation reveals that the widower suffers a great deal of parenting challenges, including taking on the dual role of mother and father. In addition to dealing with loneliness, a widower may be burdened with the added responsibilities of coping with grief and then dealing with stress and frustration with their new state of living.

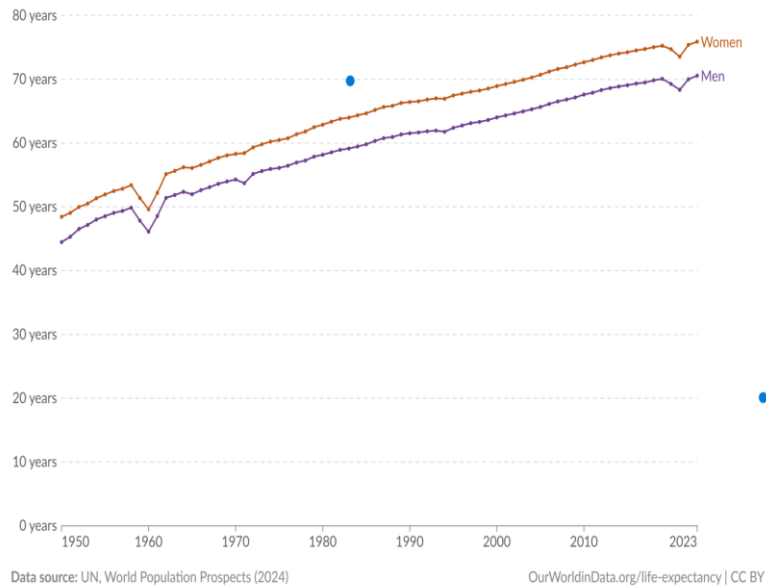
CONCEPTUALISING A WIDOWER

A widower is a man whose spouse has died. The state of having lost one's spouse to death is termed widowhood (*Merriam-Webster*, 2026). The term widowhood can be used for either sex, at least according to some dictionaries (*Oxford Learner Dictionaries* 2026), but the word widowerhood is also listed in some dictionaries as relating to a man who loses his wife (*Merriam-Webster*, 2026). Occasionally, the word 'viduity' is used. The adjective form for either sex is widowed (*Collins English Dictionary* 2026). There is controversy over whether women or men have worse effects from becoming widowed, and studies have attempted to make their case for which side is worse off, while other studies try to show that there are no true differences based on gender, and that other factors are responsible for any differences in their situation (Trivedi, Sareen & Dhyani, 2009).

DEPENDENT REPORT FOR ANALYTICAL CONSIDERATION

The graph below speaks to the empirical fact that there is a longevity disparity between males and females, and that females generally outlive males worldwide. The explanation is that this disparity also exists in Nigeria, but not as widely as in developed countries. This, the authors affirmed, should be one reason to call for equal attention to both widows and widowers in Nigeria.

2024 Life Expectancy by Gender Report (Worldwide)



Despite the difference in mortality and life expectancy between males and females in less developed nations of the world like Nigeria, which shows female longevity more than male, greater studies and attention have, however, been given to female folks after the death of their spouses. This attention is partly because women are generally conceived to be dependent on their men-folks (UNO 2024). Secondly, negative cultural practices against widows in most African countries have also attracted greater attention to the widow. In some parts of Nigeria most widows are made to undergo widowhood rites which subject the widow to physical and emotional abuses such as being made to sit at the back of the door and on the floor, being confined from a month to one year, having their hair scrapped off, not being allowed to observe personal hygiene; being made to routinely weep in public; being forced to drink the water used to wash their husbands' corpse among others, including the loss of inheritance rights and possible eviction (Ogbonda, 2017).

Notwithstanding the ugly situation of widows in traditional African society, the fact must also be maintained that these practices are fast becoming a passing phase due to the influence of Christianity and modern civilization (Trivedi, Saren & Dhyani, 2009). Today, in most urban centres, when a woman loses her husband, she is likely to get more support than vilification and recrimination. Also, the assertion that widows are to be given attention because women are always "men-dependent" may not wholly be a truism because the Nigerian nation today is undergoing an irreversible gender role transaction, which is seeing the women folks in more assertive positions with income-generating abilities more than the traditional African woman. Also, women in Nigeria are becoming more independent of their spouses in terms of job placement and socio-economic survival, as in some cases, women are known to be the breadwinners in families.

Hence, the new gender role transition and the steady abolition of negative cultural practices against the widow call for a rethinking and a new disposition in the attention given to the widow, without a corresponding attention given to the widower (Rushton, 2017). The treatment of widows around the world varies, but the unequal benefits generally received by widows compared to those received by widowers globally have spurred an interest in gender disparities studies. The objective of this paper is to call for equal attention for both the widow and the widower, because the course of the widower is rarely taken when a man loses his wife.

THE WIDOWERS' TRAVAILS IN THE AFRICAN SOCIETY

The challenges and travails presented by the neglect of widowers have not received any meaningful attention in contemporary scholarship. The variable that is actually deemed important and related to the effects of widowhood seems to be the gender of the subject involved (Sossou 2002). In most cases, the burden of care falls inappropriately between widows and widowers in terms of expectation and cultural nuisance. In traditional African society, the care and responsibility for the widow falls on the family of the deceased husband; this is not the case with the widower involved (Sossou 2009). Furthermore, despite the deliration and bastardisation of African traditional culture by armchair scholars as it relates to the treatment of widows, the fact must also be stated that African traditional culture suggests a situation wherein widows are made to go through some exclusive healing rites that are never offered to the widower.

Makatu, Wagner, and Ruane (2008) maintained that since death hurts the widow, rituals are considered to have therapeutic value that assists the griever in moving on with her life. This is confirmed by Rosenblatt (2016), who suggested that prescriptions through customs may be more effective than prescriptions from an individual. This conviction on the fate of widows in contemporary African society is further confirmed by Sossou (2002) when he alluded to the placement of traditional African widowhood in reference to the understanding of African identity and personality beyond one's gender classification, and posited that: "African grief work can be defined as the patterned ways invented in traditional communities for the successful healing of the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons. It is a healing system grounded in 'ecologically sound rituals and ceremonies that facilitate experiential healing'" (p. 203).

Tase (2003), in his study, opined that the gender disparity between the widow and the widower in the African traditional setting is further exemplified in some mourning rites aimed at removing the bad luck or misfortune surrounding the widow, which makes people discriminate against her or fear her. It is these rites that facilitate her integration with the community, which she desperately longs for. Due to cultural ethos, these same rites are never extended to the widower. Hence, in contemporary Nigerian society, the gender disparity in widowhood care is largely in favour of the widows with the utter neglect of the widowers. For Akinbi (2015), this discrimination assumes that the widower can take care of himself or can always remarry. But these assumptions are no longer tenable as there are many widows today who can hold out on

their own. Also, younger widows are likely to remarry rather than remain single. If this is the case, why is there constant care for the widow in this present dispensation, without a corresponding care for the widower (Tasie, 2018). In Nigeria today, there are thousands of foundations and faith-based organizations championing the plight of widows. These religious and social groups' advocates hardly considered the plight of the widowers.

THE NEGLECT OF WIDOWERS IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Cultural and gender expectations in many Nigerian cultures are that men are socialised to suppress emotional vulnerability. Following the loss of a spouse, crying or expressing grief is discouraged. (Trivedi, Saren & Dhyani, 2009) The society often expects widowers to "be strong for the children." The emotional needs are minimised, with emphasis placed on financial responsibility. Widowers are frequently pressured to remarry even before full recovered emotionally (Rosenblatt, 2016). These expectations exacerbate unresolved grief and may result in long-term psychological issues like emotional detachment, substance misuse, or depression. The widower's situation may be just as difficult as the widow's. These challenges include, amongst others:

Experience a feeling of Isolation

From the survey and experience of a widower, it was found that being alone after a wife's death is difficult, as the widower noted that it was difficult to talk to male friends about the grief experience. According to the widower:

Although I had some good male friends, I just did not feel like I could go over and say, let us have a good cry. It is hard to go to someone's house and say: I really need to talk about the death of my wife. You know, man, just do not do that. So, I ended up working out a lot of things on my own (cf., Umogbai, 2014).

Men are not naturally chatty and do not ask for help easily. The widower was also aware that people have lives of their own and cannot always be as supportive because of their own time and financial and emotional commitments (Tase, 2003). Moreover, the widower had difficulty expressing his grief outwardly, which made the emotions associated with the loss expressed in isolation. In a different survey conducted on eleven widowers, loneliness was the most common feeling experienced by the widowers. They found this emotion to be nearly all-consuming. One adult child commented about her father:

After my mother passed away, he was shut down, almost dark, and extremely depressed. He put on a big front for the family, for his parents, and my mom's family. As soon as the funeral was over, he was left alone. He literally could not work. He locked himself in the bedroom for days. He would not eat (Cf. Rushton, 2017).

This survey further found that the widower cried in private, often at night, thinking no one would notice, and tried to remain strong when in public. Also, there is the inability of the widower to talk or think about the deceased wife and to avoid events reproducing memories of the deceased wife. The widower had difficulty defining himself after the death of his wife and was too distressed to take on his children's grief

as well as his own (Umogbai, 2014). Despite the social perception of masculine resilience, widowers go through intense loneliness and identity crisis, especially when the deceased wife handled emotional bonding in the family (Trivedi, Saren & Dhyani, 2009). There are also feelings of guilt or self-blame, parental stress from sudden single fatherhood, difficulty forming new romantic relationships due to fear of criticism or children's resistance, and mental health struggles that are mostly unaddressed because men rarely seek counselling.

Experience of a Stressful Life due to Absence

While women who lose their husbands often speak of feeling abandoned or deserted, widowers tend to express the loss as one of "dismemberment," as if they had lost something that kept them organised and whole. The *Harvard Bereavement Study* in 2012, a landmark investigation of spousal loss, reported that widowers often equated the death of their wives with the loss of their primary source of protection, support, and comfort. This affected their overall sense of well-being; a feeling described as "being lost without a compass," usually due to their profound loneliness but also because widowers often depended on their wives for many things like managing the household, caring for their children, and being their only true confidant (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993). This sense of being lost is more profound when widowers need help but have difficulty obtaining or even asking for it.

Also, the health of widowers can suffer because they lack many of the skills that are important in self-care. Many tasks of daily living that are essential to health and well-being could go unaddressed by widowers if any of them were primarily the responsibility of their deceased wife (Isanbor & Edema, 2024). These could include meal preparation, shopping for adequate food, housekeeping, doing laundry, among other daily chores, all of which, if left unattended for a long period of time, are added sources of stress that could have adverse health consequences.

The division of labour concerning these tasks and skills tends to be defined according to gender, particularly among the older generations, but younger widowers often do not fare much better involved (Sossou, 2002). Although many women participate in the workforce, they are still largely responsible for household management, cooking, and other tasks of daily living important for the care of the entire family (Edema & Isanbor, 2018). Widowers unskilled in these areas not only could find their health compromised, but also might feel less confident to meet the daily challenges of widowed life, which detracts from their ability to cope (Sossou, 2009). Alternatively, those who learn to master many of these new responsibilities often cope more effectively and are at lower risk for poor health because they become more autonomous and eventually take better care of themselves.

Consideration of Remarriage

The growth of the individual as a widower rests on his ability and willingness to adjust to the reality of the state of living, and works towards the consideration of remarriage as a comfortable option of attaining happiness. Generally, when it came to remarriage, a significant difference in opinion exists between a widower and his children (Makutu, Wagner & Ruane, 2018). Most children are usually shocked and

appalled at their father's desire to pursue remarriage. Factors contributing to a desire to remarry included perceptions of loneliness, unhappiness, depression, sadness, and the need for a mother for the children left behind (Trivedi, Saren & Dhyani, 2009). The widowers perceived the need for friendship, companionship, adult interaction, and the longing for the love of a woman.

However, there are some barriers to remarriage, such as not wanting to or not having enough confidence to remarry. There were concerns regarding children from two separate families getting along in the new blended family (Isanbor, 2023). Also, widowers with dependent children are faced with the added burden of approval to remarry. As the children feel that their father is more loyal to his new wife than to the deceased one. They feel that their father had betrayed their mother for the next wife (Isanbor & Ukagba, 2023). Some daughters felt forced to choose between the new wife and rejection or separation from their family. The new wife must develop special adaptive skills to survive this kind of marriage.

Experience of Support provided by the Internal and External Support Systems:

The process of living happily and self-fulfilled is dependent on how the individual has perceived the effects of the departure of his married partner (Trivedi, Saren & Dhyani, 2009). Such growth or an adjustable process due to the life-change is often unseen when the individual is a widower with non-financial and social capacities or capabilities to assume some participatory responsibilities demanded of him (Isanbor & Ukagba, 2023). It is necessarily important that such widowers seek internal and external support systems, just like what is available for most widows in most societies, especially by some religious institutions and NGOs. When these supports are not readily in sight, most widowers rely only on their own personal resources for survival, unlike the widows who generally access support groups for more formal assistance.

Widows experiencing greater difficulty could access interventions like support groups and one-on-one help programs, which are not available to the widower. Also, counselling intervention services are designed primarily for women involved (Sossou, 2002). Widowers are typically uncomfortable with environments where the open expression of emotion is encouraged because it is not consistent with their preferred way to grieve (Sossou, 2009). Instead, researchers and practitioners suggest that bereaved men are more suited to active coping mechanisms that may include being engaged in meaningful activities.

THE THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE WIDOWERS AS HUMAN PERSONS IN CHALLENGING SOCIETIES

The theological framework of sociological concern is centred on the employment of Christian theology and ethics in understanding the widowers as human persons. This is theocentric-ethical model of analysis. This model of understanding of the human person is referred to as an ethical framework in which God (*theos*) is the ultimate centre, source, and standard of moral value. Thus, theocentric ethics literally means "God-centred ethics." Moral obligations, virtues, and laws derive their authority from God, not from human autonomy. From a theocentric perspective, widowerhood is

not only a sociological category but a moral and spiritual condition that calls for discernment, patience, and faith. The widower stands at the intersection of grief, responsibility, and moral agency. His loss disrupts personal identity, family structure, and social roles, yet this disruption becomes a site of ethical formation rather than moral suspension. Theocentric ethics resists viewing the widower as morally “neutral” or “exempt.” Instead, it recognises that suffering intensifies moral responsibility by inviting deeper trust in God and renewed commitment to virtuous living (Augustine, *Confessions*, 1991; cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Micah 6:8).

Central to theocentric ethics is the conviction that suffering is not meaningless. While not willed by God as evil, suffering is permitted within divine providence and can become transformative. For the widower, grief is ethically significant insofar as it shapes responses such as despair, resentment, hope, or trust. A theocentric ethical analysis rejects fatalism and rejects purely therapeutic interpretations of grief. The widower’s suffering is ethically oriented toward: dependence on God rather than self-sufficiency, moral perseverance rather than withdrawal, hope grounded in divine faithfulness rather than emotional closure (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II–II, q.17, a.1–4). Thus, such grief becomes an ethical space where faith is enacted rather than merely professed. Theocentric ethics legitimise emotional expression and dependence on God as morally virtuous responses, not signs of weakness. By doing so, it critiques cultural narratives that equate grief with moral failure or spiritual deficiency.

Notably, in some Nigerian religious settings, especially within certain traditional belief systems, spousal death is occasionally interpreted through lenses of spiritual causality, including accusations of negligence or hidden sin. Such interpretations impose an unjust moral burden on widowers. Both widows and widowers are victims of death, and each of them has no option but to integrate with the outcomes of the death of their partner, and adapt to the new classification of societal identity (Edema & Isanbor, 2018). Hence, a theocentric ethical framework rejects moral blame that is not grounded in divine justice and love. It affirms that death is part of the fallen human condition, not necessarily the consequence of individual moral failure. Ethical responsibility, therefore, lies not in self-condemnation but in faithful endurance and moral integrity after loss.

One of the key ethical tensions faced by widowers concerns their fidelity. This is not only marital fidelity in the strict sense, but fidelity to shared history, vows, and moral identity. In Nigeria, widowers are often expected to remarry quickly, sometimes even pressured by extended family structures, especially where children are involved. Conversely, delayed remarriage can provoke suspicion regarding sexual morality or social competence (Makutu, Wagner & Ruane, 2008). Theocentric ethics reframes remarriage as a matter of discernment before God, not merely cultural convenience or moral surveillance. Ethical legitimacy lies not in speed or conformity but in prayerful reflection, healing, and responsibility toward children and community. Both remarriage and continued celibacy can be ethically sound when aligned with divine calling (Makutu, Wagner & Ruane, 2018). Theocentric ethics affirms that the moral bond of marriage, though transformed by death, continues in the form of faithful memory and moral continuity. This fidelity is not an idolization of the past but a recognition that love participates in God’s enduring covenantal faithfulness. Ethical living for the widower

includes honouring the deceased spouse through integrity, responsible parenting (where applicable), and moral consistency (Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, I.27–28; Mbiti, 1990).

Theocentric ethics approaches the question of remarriage not as a right or taboo, but as a matter of discernment before God. The widower's freedom is real, yet it is a freedom shaped by prayer, conscience, and responsibility. Ethically valid options include remarriage, when it aligns with vocation, healing, the sense of common good, and continued celibacy, when embraced as a form of witness, service, or spiritual dedication (Makutu, Wagner & Ruane, 2018). Theocentric ethics resists both cultural pressure to remarry quickly and moralistic pressures to remain permanently alone. The decisive criterion is obedience to God's call as discerned in conscience (1 Corinthians 7:39; Romans 7:2–3; Barth 1960: 50–60).

A theocentric ethical analysis extends beyond the individual widower to the moral responsibility of the community. Since God's concern includes the vulnerable, the widower occupies a biblically significant moral space. Communities that marginalise, exploit, or ignore widowers fail ethically. Ethical obligations of society include: protection from social and economic injustice, recognition of emotional and spiritual vulnerability, inclusion in communal life, and moral deliberation. Thus, the widower is not merely an object of charity but a bearer of moral dignity rooted in divine image (Megesa, 1997; cf. James 1:17). Traditional African ethics emphasise communal responsibility, yet in practice, widowers often experience social withdrawal and neglect after initial mourning rituals. This ethical contradiction reveals a gap between professed communal values and lived moral practice. A theocentric ethical critique calls Nigerian communities: churches, mosques, and traditional institutions, to institutionalise care for widowers through counselling, economic support, and moral accompaniment. Failure to do so constitutes not merely social neglect but ethical infidelity to God's justice.

Also, theocentric ethics situates the widower's moral life within eschatological hope. Ethical perseverance is sustained not by present circumstances but by trust in God's ultimate justice and restoration. This hope prevents grief from collapsing into nihilism and anchors ethical action in the promise of divine fulfillment. The widower's ethical life becomes a testimony that love, faithfulness, and responsibility are not defeated by death but transformed in hope (Cf, Romans 8: 18–25; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–14; Barth, IV/3, 3–20; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 29–32). A theocentric ethical analysis of widowerhood reveals that the widower's life is neither morally suspended nor ethically diminished. Instead, it is reconfigured around God's presence in suffering, fidelity beyond loss, and hope beyond death. Widowerhood becomes a profound moral vocation, one that calls the widower and the community alike to ethical faithfulness grounded in God's enduring will (1 Corinthians 15:54–57; Augustine, *Confessions*, IV.12; Aquinas, II–II, q.17; Barth, IV/3; Mbiti, p.133–139).

Erwin (2014) stated that the Bible places a high value on the widows. The concern for the love and protection of widows in reference to the fatherly and husbandly personality of God as a loving creator is evident in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew Scriptures, therefore, give a clear command to God's people not to oppress widows and orphans (Zechariah 7:10) but to take care of them as God does (Deut. 10:17–18). In the New Testament, in the letter of James (1:27), the care of widows is

amongst the deeds that are said to constitute pure and genuinely undefiled religion. The God of Christians has from the time of Israel's inception as God's people declared Himself the defender of widows (Deut. 10:18; 24:17). The care of widows therefore became the true measure of justice amongst God's people (see, Isaiah 1:17). God's compassion for widows was to become his covenant people's accepted responsibility (Acts 6:1; James 1:27). Both testaments warn that any discriminatory and oppressive action against widows and orphans contravenes God's law relating to love (Manala, 2017).

The faith of the widower is to be sustained with the help of the Christian community. This is where faith makes its appearance in the histories of human values that are made more relevant and potent with sexual relationships, taking the responsibility of sustaining the well-being of both widows and widowers (Makutu, Wagner & Ruane, 2018). Therefore, it is clear from the Bible that God sets Himself as the protector of widows. Erwin (2014) further states the following: "The church that takes its biblical responsibility for the care of and support of widows seriously, will, in obedience to our Lord's plan, prepare, and implement an ongoing ministry to them after their bereavement."

Hence, a critical examination of the Christian scripture shows a preferential option for the widow, while exhibiting deafening silence on the plight of the widower. Scripture scholars, therefore, find it problematic to situate specific biblical teaching on the widow, but most often, must re-read and re-interpret these passages dealing with the widow as also applying to the widower. The lack of specific teaching on the treatment of widowers by the Christian scriptures could also be a contributing factor to the contemporary neglect of widowers in present-day Christianity and society at large. However, a more Theocentric understanding should sensitise the Nigerian Church and society to be compassionate not only towards widows, but to the widower as well. Both the Nigerian Church and members of the civil societies are therefore equally guilty of discriminatory conduct between widows and widowers. The church as an organisation should attempt to correct this situation and usher in a more humane and caring dispensation to the widower. Widowers' membership in their established religions should therefore be instrumental in the widowers' coping with their wives' deaths. In the Nigerian church, there should be faith-based groups responsible for the care of widowers. Membership and understanding of these faith-based groups will provide hope and strengthen the widower's ability to cope, through the love they felt from family, friends, other church members, and God.

CONCLUSION

The widower in Nigeria is indeed unsung, grieving silently under the weight of cultural stereotypes, emotional suppression, and social neglect. Recognising and addressing the struggles of widowhood does not diminish the well-documented pain of widowhood; instead, it promotes inclusive and human-centred social support. Every bereaved spouse, male or female, deserves acknowledgement, empathy, and practical assistance. Hence, this paper has critically examined the disparity between the widow and the widower in terms of care. The phenomenological presentation of the problem

indicated an overwhelming neglect of the widower by both faith-based organizations and the public. Therefore, the study calls our attention to the plight of the widower. It found no other reason for the disparity of attention between widows and widowers, other than such attention is partly because women are generally conceived to be dependent on their men-folks. Secondly, it was observed that some negative cultural practices against widows in most African countries have also attracted greater attention to the widow. Furthermore, the paper has established that an authentic theocentric understanding should abolish the preference for care for only the widow, without any consideration of the widower. This discriminating gender imbalance between the care for the widow and the widower cannot be left unchallenged, considering the life-giving values of post-lost care and the gracious demands of a Theocentric approach in respect of the care of widowers.

Given the contents of the analysis made and the conclusion reached above, the following suggestions are made for the Nigerian Government and the Nigerian Church, where they need to:

- a. deliberately and visibly prioritise and work towards the implementation of the care for widowers, which requires intentional recognition of widowerhood as a significant social and moral concern rather than a private or marginal issue. Deliberate prioritisation must begin with policy acknowledgements, where widowers are explicitly identified as a vulnerable group in social welfare frameworks, pastoral care programs, and community development initiatives.
- b. single out widowers' plight for heightened focus to increase widowers' protection and care. Singling out widowers' plight for heightened focus is a necessary corrective measure to longstanding patterns of social neglect and institutional silence surrounding male bereavement.
- c. redefine, reinterpret, and be reoriented towards a true balanced care between widows and widowers. Redefining and reinterpreting the care framework to achieve a truly balanced approach between widows and widowers is both a moral and social necessity. Historically, care structures, particularly within African societies and faith-based institutions, have rightly focused on widows due to their well-documented experiences of economic deprivation, social marginalisation, and harmful cultural practices. However, this well-intentioned focus has often resulted in the unintended exclusion of widowers, whose vulnerabilities are rendered invisible by gendered assumptions about strength, independence, and emotional restraint.
- d. continually discuss the plight of widowers at faith-based gatherings and amongst civil society groups with a view to positively influencing and transforming the situation of widowers about their ultimate fulfilment.
- e. conduct more research to strengthen the evidence base on widowerhood in Nigeria. This is a vital step toward informed policy-making, culturally contextualized intervention design, and effective advocacy. At present, scholarly and empirical work on bereavement in Nigeria has predominantly focused on widows, often overlooking the distinct experiences, needs, and challenges faced by widowers.

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