<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Serial No.</th>
<th>OLE, SUNDAY EKE PG/MA/06/40627</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD IN IHECHIOWA: THE RESPONSE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keyword:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description:</td>
<td>A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION, FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category:</td>
<td>RELIGION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publisher:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication Date:</td>
<td>JULY, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature:</td>
<td>Webmaster</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Digitally Signed by Webmaster’s Name
DN: CN=Webmaster’s name, O=University of Nigeria, Nsukka OU=Innovation Centre

THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD IN IHECHIOWA: THE RESPONSE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA
This project has been approved for the award of Master of Arts Degree in Religion in the Department of Religion, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
REQUIREMENTS

THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD IN IHECHIOWA: THE PRESPONSE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA
BY

Ole, Sunday Eke
PG/MA/06/40627

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION,
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA NSUKKA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ART (MA)
DEGREE IN RELIGION.

Department of Religion
University of Nigeria
Nsukka

JULY 2009

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God who gave me all the strength
and grace to run this programme.
I also dedicate this work to my beloved wife Elder Deaconess Nnenna Eke Ole whose encouragement, moral, financial and spiritual support persuaded me to bring this work to completion.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is imperative at this juncture to recognize the efforts and contributions of the following people whose support and encouragement
led to the actualization of this dream. May I first of all express my profound and immense gratitude to the Almighty God for providing me the finances and journey mercies throughout my course of study in the University. I am sincerely indebted to my supervisor Rev Fr. Dr. H.C. Achunike who drilled me through the entire work. His guidance, understanding and approachability were all good source of strength to me.

I also recognize the efforts of the head of department Rev. F. Dr. H.C. Achunike, whose pieces of advise were of great value to me. The untireless efforts and financial assistance of my dear wife, Elder Deaconess Mrs. Nnenna Sunday Eke Ole cannot be forgotten in this thesis.

I am indebted to Rev. Prof. Agha U. Agha for his counsel and, support in course of this work. Revs. Omaka Ngele and Utaji respectively were very helpful in the production of this thesis. I am indeed grateful to them.

Worthy of mention are the typist, Elder Eke E. Awa, my sibling, Grace and Nkasiobi who assisted me morally in production of this thesis. I am sincerely indebted to all authors whose work I used and cited in the course of the research.

May I finally thank all those I interviewed and those that made useful contributions during the production of this thesis. May God bless all of you in Jesus Name. Amen.
TOPIC: THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD IN IHECHIOWA: THE RESPONSE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF NIGERIA

Title page - - - - - - - - - - i
Approval - - - - - - - - - - ii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION  
1.1 Background of the study-  - - - - - - - -  1  
1.2 Statement of the problem - -  - - - - -  - -  2  
1.3 Purpose of the study -  - - - - - -  - -  4  
1.4 Significance of the study - - - - - - - -  4  
1.5 Scope of the study - - - - - - - -  5  
1.6 Methodology - - - - - - - -  5  
1.7 Definition of terms - - - - - - - -  6  

CHAPTER TWO - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  9  
Literature Review - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  9  

CHAPTER THREE - - - - - - - - - -  32  
THE PEOPLE OF IHECHIOWA - - - - - - - - - -  32  
3.1 Brief Historical background of Ihechiowa - - - - - - - -  32  
3.2 Social life - - - - - - - - - -  34  
3.3 Economic life - - - - - - - - - -  41  
3.4 Political life - - - - - - - - - -  43  
3.5 Religious life - - - - - - - - - -  47  
3.6 Educational life - - - - - - - - - -  50  

CHAPTER FOUR - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -  52  
AN OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES  
4.1 Widowhood in Igboland - - - - - - - -  52
4.2 Widowhood in Ihechiowa Before the Advent of Christianity - 56
4.3 Factors Influencing Traditional Widowhood Practices in Ihechiowa - 62
4.4 Widowhood in the 21st Century in Ihechiowa - 69
4.5 Factors Influencing Widowhood Practices in the 21st Century in Ihechiowa - 73
4.6 Causes of Widowhood - 77

CHAPTER FIVE - 84
THE ADVENT OF PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IHECHIOWA AND THE CHALLENGES OF WIDOWHOOD - 84
5.1 The Advent of Presbyterian Church in Ihechiowa - 84
5.2 The Reaction of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria Towards the Plight of Widows in Ihechiowa - 89
5.3 Widowhood in the Old Testament - 96
5.4 Widowhood in the New Testament - 97

CHAPTER SIX - 100
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION - 100
6.1 Principal Findings - 100
6.2 Contribution of the Work to Knowledge - 101
6.3 Recommendations - 103
6.4 Suggestions for further Research - 106

ABSTRACT
There comes a time in the life of a woman when life itself loses meaning. This is when a woman’s husband dies. The burden of living the rest of her life under a new relationship and responsibility becomes hazardous. This thesis is on the phenomenon of widowhood in Ihechiowa, the
The work was informed by the numerous inhuman treatments like shaving of hairs, sleeping with corpse, wearing of ragas and confinement meted on the widows in Ihechiowa. This work tries to know more about the causes of widowhood and their plight and at the same time discover how Christianity could serve as a vehicle of salvaging humanity in Ihechiowa. Furthermore, the researcher attempted to create an awareness of the immense dangers and implications of inhuman treatments on the widows especially as time and season are exposing people to their rights and privileges. The method of research used in the investigation was oral interview and the use of written materials which includes both primary and secondary sources. The data gathered from numerous journals and other sources from the library and archives were sifted, selected, described and analyzed. Other investigations reveals that widowhood is rampant among the youth and aged people i.e. between (30-60) thirty to sixty years. Moreover, it was discovered that some widows suffered emotional trauma immediately they lost their husbands by death. The research revealed that the plights of widows are being reduced due to the advent of civilization and Christianity. In a related development, it was discovered that the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria has not done much in the areas of helping the widows overcome their plights. Nevertheless, it was confirmed by investigation and data collected that some widowhood experiences are as a result of ignorance and tradition. The work therefore contributes significantly to the increase of people’s knowledge on the causes of widowhood. This will help the young people intending to marry to consider issues like age gap, education, cultural, traditional differences and religious beliefs etc before entering into marriage.
CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Death is a natural phenomenon that binds the peoples of the world together. It is a leveler as it respects neither the king nor the peasant. It reduces both the giant and the midget to the “six-foot measure. It is the ultimate end of all living things.

Widowhood is a multi-faceted tragedy. One aged widow said, I have buried my child, my own parents are dead. In all my experiences of death, none was as painful as the death of my husband. It is pertinent to mention that the candid assessment of death by the old women was elicited only by the strong desire to make peace between two young women. These two women were bereaved. One had lost her child, the other lost her husband. The first one decided to retaliate by not visiting the second one who had become widowed because the later failed to condole with the former when she lost her child. Grief in the form of widowhood is incomparable to any other bereavement, insisted the elderly widow. Otherwise such a treatise on widowhood is unusual in women’s discussion ordinarily.

Under the misery of widowhood, women are the most marginalized in most culture especially in Ihechiowa. While in some part of Nigeria the widow
is forced to drink that water with which the corpse of her dead husband is washed as proof that she had no hand in the man’s death.

Generally, in Nigeria and Ihechiowa in particular women have no right to inheritance and none to land ownership before the pre-Christian era. Consequently, like a mere appendage to men, women must, of cultural necessity be, the widow’s only hope and claim to the fruits of the couple’s joint labour is through her male offspring. Only sons have legal rights to their dead father’s property by the cultural tenants.

However, since religion constitutes the central belief system of human beings, it is a key determinant of widowhood practices. The various religions of the world-Islam, Christian, Judaism, Hinduism etc all influence greatly the people’s attitude to women in general and this treatment of widows in particular. The dispelling of popular or strongly held superstititions and myths surrounding the dead and the place of women in the society can never be an easy task. Be that as it may, there is no gainsaying the fact that societies must learn to adjust to our fast changing world.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Are there widows? Can we estimate how many they are? Who are they? Where do they live? How do they feel? How do they earn their living? How do they cope with life generally? These and many questions which have been raised about widowhood are mind boggling and deserves answers. (Damap, 2007).
Before the advent of Christianity, women in most communities like Ihechiowa were to be seen and not heard and their presence both in the family and religious set-ups were seen as a “necessary evil”. They were not necessarily needed but were only being tolerated.

Her fundamental rights and freedom are suspended. She is subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment. She becomes a prisoner and is trapped by a custom that is repugnant to natural justice equity and good conscience.

Thus, widowhood turns the Ihechiowa woman into society’s whipping-top and a receptacle for all kinds of filth and rubbish. During her one month detention, the widow is subjected to a harrowing experience unbelievable to a modern man and intolerable to contemporary womanhood.

Even when a widow escape this unjust and obnoxious verdict, thanks to the benevolent in-laws. She is still caught by an inhuman cultural practices which are deliberately invoked on her by a vicious and hostile community. She is sentenced and condemned to suffering for the rest of her life thereby subjecting her to perpetual slavery.

The widow is literally exploited by unscrupulous and sadist men and women. She is accused and convicted of being a husband killer by her community. She is then left with the traumatic experience of bringing up her child or children as the case may be. It is consequent upon the above that the researcher decided to delve into this work.
1.3 Purpose of the Study:

In this work relevant literatures will be reviewed, the geography and origin of Ihechiowa will be highlighted, widowhood in the old and new testaments will be examined. Widowhood as is practiced in Ihechiowa and the response of the Presbyterian church of Nigeria will also be examined. Relevant suggestions will be postulated and finally a critical and comprehension conclusion will be established.

The researcher intends to investigate the root cause or causes of widowhood plights in Ihechiowa with the aim of proffering possible solutions to it. This work intends to challenge and motivate the Presbyterian Church to rise up to her responsibilities in the area of widowhood plight. A lot of people have lived in ignorance enveloped by cultural and traditional beliefs for so many years. Some people have practiced what they don’t understand and cannot explain. This research is aimed at exposing those practices which are inhuman and unchristian.

Finally, this research will help to educate both the traditional and Christian communities to rise up to their responsibilities and stop every inhuman practices meted on the widows.

1.4 Significance of the Study

A study of this nature can be an eye opener and a call to the churches, traditional institutions, communities and the society at large to rise and fight, defend, protect and care for the widow within their environment or society by teaching, provision of money and material gifts to the widows and canvassing
for a total stop of all inhuman practices meted on the widows. With the knowledge and concept of widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa, the widows should be able to know that death is an inevitable phenomenon which visits both the rich and the poor not minding their status in the society.

Moreso, this work is aimed at educating the widows to avoid being a nuisance or parasites rather they should try as much as possible to engage themselves in the venture that may keep them busy in order to take care of themselves and the entire family.

1.5 **Scope of the Study:**

This will be limited to discussion or research on the widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa and the response of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria. The research however, does not cover all aspects of plights suffered by widows all over the world but in Ihechiowa.

However, narrowing the scope within the confines of Ihechiowa will make for a more effective study thereby presenting a critical and comprehensive position on the plight of widowhood in Ihechiowa.

1.6 **Methodology**

The researcher collected data through personal communication from people within and outside Ihechiowa. The data collected from both primary and secondary sources helped the researcher to do a detail study of the widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa and the response of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria.

Information from archives, libraries and detailed study of the already existing materials were also used. These pieces of information were carefully sifted, described and analysed. Information from internet was also used.

However, in the organization and presentation of the data, the researcher used both the descriptive and historical method.
1.7 Definition of Terms

Relevant as well as related terms and concepts have been defined for the purpose of clarity.

Widowhood:

According to Adamu (2005) widowhood is a state in life of an individual who lost a spouse to death. Irrespective of the cause of the death and how it happened, once it occurs it separates the death from the living. Okoye (1995) echoed widowhood as a multi-faceted tragedy. Contributing Odili (1998) defined widowhood as a stage of suffering experienced by a woman who is legally married to a man under the statutory, customary law or Islamic law, Christian marriage etc but looses her husband by death.

The Hebrew word for widowhood when translated to English is Almanah, while the root word is Alem meaning “unable to speak”. While Almanah is used especially to refer to the widow as helpless or exposed to oppression and harsh treatment.

The Greek word for “widow” chera means “without” or apart from. According to Mae (1940) chera which is the Greek meaning for widowhood does not only mean a widow but could also refer to anyone who is a destitute, miserable and anyone who lives in solitude.

Continuing, she said that a widow is a woman left without a husband, friend, adviser, protector, supplier and shelter. A situation whereby a woman is experiencing the above difficulties is known as widowhood.
Furthermore, widowhood could further be explained as a situation whereby a woman losses her physical, religious, emotional and economical enjoyment of life.

**Phenomenon:**

Horby (1974) defines phenomenon as a thing that appears to or is perceived by the senses eg. The phenomenon of nature. It could also mean a remarkable or unusual person, thing or happening.

**Ihechiowa:**

This means the ‘Light that holds the world”. It is a community of people with common history and ancestor. It is a community located in the present Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State. It is made up of seventeen villages and occupies a land mass of 216 kilometers approximately. It is flanked by Ohafia in the North and Ututu by the South, Ukwa by the West and Abam by the East.

**Presbyterian:**

In the New Testament PRESBYTEROS means “ELDER” and refers to the custom of choosing leaders and advisers from among the wisest members of the Church. The Presbyterian Church is therefore a Church of Elders, organised in accordance with Calvin’s ecclesiastical ordinances which set forth four officers of the Reformed Church of Geneva namely Pastor, Teacher (of word) Elder and Deacon. (Ukagha 2003).
Presbyterians are therefore a group of Protestants whose church is founded on this concept of democratic rules under the word of God. According to Ferguson (1988) contemporary Presbyterianism originated in the Protestant Reformation particularly in Calvin’s Geneva.

**Church:**

This is an English word derived from the Greek word ekkelesia denoting an “assembly”. Its equivalent is applied by the Septuagint to connote “Congregation”. It could also imply both the individual assembly and the worldwide communion. The church was born on the day of Pentecost. The Church is not primarily the human structure like the political social or economic organism rather it belongs to Jesus Christ. The Church draws its life from Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, but does so through the word of God.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

While discussing widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa. It will be expedient to first of all highlight on the different types of marriage practiced in Ihechiowa before the coming of Christianity. This is because one cannot talk about widowhood without first of all making a comment on marriage. For without marriage there could be nothing like widowhood.

In Ihechiowa, marriage is seen as a sacred ordinance which every man or woman is expected to perform. Failure to do so is tantamount to hindering procreation and enlargement of the size or population of the society. However, before the marriage ordinances are effected, the girl is to be prepared before going to the husband, hence there are many types of marriage ordinances in Ihechiowa.

2.1 Marriage

Hornby, (1984) defines marriage as legal Union of a man and woman as husband and wife; state of being married. Watkins, (1990) described marriage as the ceremony by which a man and woman becomes husband and wife. Adesogan, (1984) defines marriage as a journey by a man and a woman into an unknown. However, marriage could also be defined as a sacred institution ordained by God. It is described as a relationship between a man and a woman who have agreed to become husband and wife. It could also be seen as a ceremony which marks the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife.
So in Ihechiowa, there exists different kinds of marriage institutions which ranges from monogamy, polygamy, exogamy and homosexuality.

**Homosexuality:**

Ekete (2002) postulates homosexuality as the sexual orientation in which one’s primary attraction is to members of the same sex. It could further be seen as sex between males and sex between females. This is practiced in many countries of the world. For instance, U.S.A, Britain, France, Nigeria and Cameroon etc.

This type of sexual relationship is regarded as taboo and abomination in Ihechiowa, hence research and interviews carried in course of this work showed that homosexuality has not been practiced in Ihechiowa.

In view of its existence in some part of Nigeria and most countries of the world as mentioned above, both religious and secular dispositions have aired their views in regards to the implication of homosexuality. Many schools of thought have made different submissions as to the practice of homosexuality viz the conservatives, liberal and moderate.

Before the Christian era in Ihechiowa, the conservative have vehemently condemned both homosexuality and gay marriage, the liberals felt that stopping them from enjoying this acts imply an infringement of their rights and discriminative, while the moderates centered their argument on “love the sinner but hate the sin” gospel.

Nevertheless, with the wave of modernization in Nigeria, there is the tendency that homosexuality may be practiced in Ihechiowa if the spread is not
checked. There should be a legislation condemning the practice of homosexuality in the country. This will help stop it entrance to those part of the country which is still moving to.

**Monogamy:**

Morris (1972) unfolds that monogamy is a form marriage contracted between a man and a woman. This type of marriage is rarely practiced in Ihechiowa. Men who are married to one wife were treated with contempt and regarded as poor and insignificant. This was obvious in land distribution especially as land is communally owned in Ihechiowa. Sale of land in Ihechiowa was prohibited hence, polygamists and “Eze ji” i.e title holders were given larger portions of land while monogamists received smaller portion. Commenting on monogamy Nnanna (1984) asserts that kings, warriors and medicine men got married by capture. According to him, if a king, warrior or medicine man feels attracted to any girl, he sends his men to capture and bring the girl to the Palace or to the Warrior’s house for marriage. Gifts and bride price were later sent to the parents. There was no need or place for negotiation or consultation. The wish of the king or warrior was the people’s command. Ladies who were healed of Ogbanje and other diseases were in most cases married to the medicine man. These acts by the above group of people were regarded as legal marriage.
Polygamy:

Madugba (2008) opined that polygamy is a type of marriage which permits a man to take more than one wife. Under this type of marriage, a man may marry as many wives as he wishes whether his wife gives her blessings or not. This type of marriage was common in Ihechiowa and attracts a lot of influence and prestige as this is one of the ways to demonstrate one’s affluence and power. Polygamist attracts honour and respect N. Kalu, (personal communication, 20 July 2008) asserts that

Polygamists were considered first in any occasion. They were given the largest portion of land. This was because their wives and children were always available to clear and farm their lands.

Rituals could be performed on behalf of impotent men in order to allow their wives have children for the man from men of her choice. Moreso, multiple polygamy was allowed in Ihechiowa. A woman who has no children or has female children only, could be permitted to marry another woman of her choice for her husband to produce males or children for him. Children born from such marriage or union belonged to both of them. A maternal sister was also permitted to marry a wife for her brother. This act was to demonstrate her love for the brother. Both the children and the mother are part and parcel of the maternal family.

Exogamous Marriage:

Etuk (2002) interpreted the concept as a type of marriage that prohibits selection of wife within a certain group of people. Tradition prohibits
individuals from selecting husband or wives amongst members of the same maternal family or blood relations but could marry within the paternal family relation. O. Njoku, (personal communication September 5, 2008) asserts

It was evil and abomination to contract a marriage within the maternal family. If per adventure one contracts a marriage between the maternal family, the entire family will be in danger of losing their lives until the gods of the land are appeased.

**Infant Betrothal:**

Martins (1987) holds the view that this type of marriage was practiced in the traditional Ihechiowa society. Parents choose marriage partners for their children even before they are born. The essence was to be absolutely sure that they have a partner to live with as husband and wife as they grow to maturity. Marriage formalities are later formalized on their behalf by their parents. It was aimed at maintaining a cordial relationship that exists between the two families. Moreso, parents go into such betrothal in order to tap or sustain some important virtue seen in a particular family. These and more reason contributed to the act of infant betrothal in Ihechiowa.

However, today things are not the same again. Consequent upon the advent of modernization and civilization such practice no longer exists. Children decide on whom to marry. Parents do not have full control over their children choice of marriage. This practice has gradually gone to the grave and may not resurrect again. Parents used such activities to maintain a social relationship began by the two families. In this kind of marriage, the young people cannot object the
marital arrangement. Their parent’s choice was regarded as good and supreme for they cannot make a wrong choice for them, hence their wish is final.

**Adult Betrothal:**

Obasi (2006) in vivid manner described adult betrothal as a form of marriage whereby parents choose and carry out marriage formalities for their adult children. Before this choice is made, there is the assurance and conviction that the girl and the boy are disciplined and are from good homes. This type of marriage is aimed at making the right choice for the children with the aim that the children are ignorant of marriage and cannot make a good choice. Girls in those days enter into marriage in a very tender age and in most cases they are immature and incapable of making good choice. Most girls then were illiterate and found it difficult to reason intellectually.

Today, the whole situation has changed following the advent of modernization and Christianity. Most people enter into marriage at a matured stage when they are able to make decision. Parents no longer decide for their wards. This act has reduced divorce and wrong choice of marriage partner in a family.

**2.2 Widowhood Concept in the Pre-Christian Era**

Widowhood is widely recognized as a distressing experience which is strikingly a common stressful phenomenon in Nigeria. Widows in Nigeria especially those in Ihechiowa are under considerable pressure and stress. How the Nigerian widows especially those in Ihechiowa adapt and cope with the
difficulties associated with widowhood, as well as the variable that influence or contribute to the successful or positive adaptation needs to be investigated.

In this work, literature works will be reviewed in order to deduce some vital pieces of information which may be of great importance in the development of this work. The following scholars have commented on the ancient widowhood practices pro to the advent of Christianity.

Kore (2002) devoted much time and space to this subject. According to him before the advent of Christianity when a woman looses her husband by death, his relatives immediately scrambles for the property of the deceased brother before or in the presence of the widow, her children and even well wishers. This, to the relations of the deceased has nothing to do with their consciences, rather they are fulfilling the tradition of the land. The researcher is of the view that women marginalization was only at the instance of culture since culture and tradition are subject to change, the researcher is therefore calling for a change of attitude towards widowhood practices.

Oko ye (1995) contributing to the plight of widowhood said that during the pre-Christian era i.e. before the emergence of marriage law, known as “Community of property”, in South Africa (white), if there was a divorce, the man took everything, the woman went away empty handed. Also if the man died, his property was shared according to his will, the woman’s lot depended on the whims and caprices of her partner. The woman always gets the raw deal in the marriage union as evidenced in these conditions.
In Nigeria, the story is quite different. By tradition, the Nigerian woman has no right to inheritance and none to land ownership before the coming of Christianity. Consequently, like the mere appendages to men, women must, of cultural necessity be the widow’s only hope and claim to the fruits of the couple’s joint labour is through her male offspring. Before the advent of Christianity, only sons have legal rights to their dead father’s property according to the cultural tenets.

Donovan (2005) unfolds that before the coming of Christianity, the joy of marriage lies on having a husband beside a wife always. Expounding his thought, he said that as long as the man is alive, the woman is to some extent protected from outside influences and hostilities, especially from the community, matrimonial homes and relatives of the man. But immediately the husband dies, the woman is subjected to undergo unimaginable horrors in the hands of the husbands family in order to ascertain whether she is the cause of the husband’s death or not.

Agha (2000), submits that before the emergence of Christianity in Africa women and widows were often subjected to the demands of the culture at the death of their husbands. This is so because their rights were never accorded them rather they were greeted with hardship and inhuman treatments.

Ohagwu (1987) simply interpreted the concept of widowhood practices before the advent of Christianity to be that widowhood turns the African women into society’s whipping-top and a receptacle for all kinds of filth and rubbish.
According to him, before the Christian era, during the one month detention, the widow is subjected to a harrowing experience, unbelievable to the modern man, and intolerable to contemporary womanhood. In his opinion the widows are given all kinds of inhuman treatments which no one will like to experience in this jet age. Thus:

Her fundamental rights and freedoms are suspended. She is subjected to cruel and inhuman treatment. She becomes a prisoner and trapped by a custom that is repugnant to natural justice, equity and good conscience. (p.3)

The above submission is seen as erroneous aimed at substituting the service of God to humanity. Instead of “conquering and subduing the world” as commanded by God, man himself has been conquered and subdued by wicked cultures and traditions formulated by men to subdue their fellow creature. These experience by widows have become excruciating and despicable to Nigerian women especially at the traditional community level.

Njoku, (1988) holds the view that in the pre-Christian era socio-cultural practices in most African societies including Nigeria resulted not only in the poverty of widows, but also their social and psychological dehumanization. Njoku (1988) quoting Igwe et al (1992) declares that the traditional widowhood practice in Igboland in the pre-christian era especially in Mbaitolu was powered on the customary belief that “if widows are made comfortable, more husbands will die”.

Nevertheless, the above widowhood practices as postulated by the above scholars in pre-Christian era are not different from the experiences found or practiced in Ihechiowa in the pre-Christian era.

2.3 Widowhood in the Christian-Era 1911 – 1941

Widowhood practices as we see today have undergone a lot of metamorphosis. The advent of Christianity and modernism have in no small way affected the society and exposed people to change. Some scholars have discussed widowhood practices as they affect the Christian era.

Omartian (1997) surveyed and x-rayed the plight of widowhood between 1911-1941 and came out with the view that widowhood is nothing to be ashamed of rather the attitude one manifest towards it is what matters most. If we are filled with anger and bitterness, or insist on complaining and blaming God. It will not change the situation rather we should approach the traditional rulers and leaders of thought to avoid those practices that are inhuman and barbaric in this Christian era.

Scaffer (1989) observed that the burden of supporting a family is difficult for a single mothers not only because of their relative low income but also because their inadequate child support. According him there are different types of widows which includes the middle age, the elderly, illiterate, the low educated, semiliterate widow, the educated widows and the poor. Continuing, he submits that although there are rich widows courtesy of their education and enlightenment, there are still those who cannot make both ends meet. Culture
and tradition should not impose on them those inhuman practices because the present society cannot accommodate such treatments. Sufficient information about widowhood should be acquired by them in order to know how to treat and manage their plight.

Nwaogbo (1998) in a vivid manner describes the nature and treatment allotted to widows in the society. According to him, some widowhood practices in our cultures are clearly a tacit attempt to reduce the dignity of the woman as a human person. These practices are tantamount to deprivation of life as some widows have died as a result of such maltreatment. Many women suffer violence in their matrimonial homes. Many have been disfigured, maimed and many have died as a result of assault. However, with the advent of Christianity, modernism and civilization most of these inhuman practices have paved way for Liberation.

Schiff (1977) noted that death of husband and its accompanying feeling of powerlessness go against the fundamental duty of the husband protecting the wife or widow against the emotion she faces during the death of her husband. According to her the widow is placed on a catastrophic situation. She feels if all were to be in her powers, she would have averted the tragedy. When the feelings of powerlessness begins to set in the woman worries increases as she is faced with many traditional rites to fulfill. Grollman (1980) summarized his feelings about modern widowhood as thus:

“Grief is a common human experience. It is as individual as a fingerprint appearing in widely varying combinations. As one experiences some of the emotions associated with grief, or widowhood, one may feel like a
cork bobbling erratically on a sea of conflicting emotion. Expounding his view, he opined that widows of this modern age do no longer suffer harsh treatment. In some families in this modern time, the widows are allowed to manage all the property of her dead husband. This poses that a lot of relief to the widow on like the widows of the pre-Christian era.

Hess et al. (1985) assert that during the pre-Christian era women were not employed as civil or public servants therefore found it difficult to manage the families at the demise of their husbands. Today, with the grace of education and learning, some widows are employers of labour and are able to manage their families at the demise of their husbands. Some of the widows preferred to stay in the urban areas, where they could make both ends meet instead of staying in the village to observe the cultural and traditional rites for their late husbands.

Okwueze (2003) focused attention on the ethics of human Acts. He stressed that an act is truly human when it is performed with full reason and freewill. If any of these conditions is lacking, the act is simply “the act of man”. He postulated that for action to be truly and perfectly human, it must be done with knowledge, and liberation. They must be truly the result of a free determination of the will; they must be truly traceable to the agent and therefore imputable to him. He condemned the inhuman practice meted on widows during the pre-christian era but advocated for a total eradication of those practices that are anti-christian and modern. According to him, human actions
must be accomplished for some end or purpose. So, the man who acts with the view of obtaining a certain end acts with some degree of deliberation and therefore exercises his understanding for without understanding no deliberation is possible.

Ekanem (1998) having navigated the plights of widowhood during the pre-Christian era advocated for a total cleansing of the old in order to welcome the new. In his opinion, agents like the church, the judiciary and other recognised legal institutions should be used to mount strong campaign against any stress of pre-Christian widowhood practices seen in the Christian era. He reminded his audience that the old had passed and behold the new has come.

Obiakalaije (1998) reviewed the plight of widowhood and concluded that:

Amidst the misfortune of death, there is a way out for widows. With God on their side, one sure survival strategy for widows is self determination, exemplified by dint of hard work and creativity (p.32).

By being self reliant, and meaningfully occupied, a widow finds herself in a better position in this modern time to attract genuine assistance and encouragement from good spirited individuals. He concluded by appealing to modern widows to show a convincing and reasonable level of self-reliance to be able to command respect before people.

Chibundu (2007) is of the view that in this modern time, no society can be progressive without a harmony in the network of activities of what going on amongst her citizenry. In his submission, he highlighted that this harmony must
be done in the way that any practice that reduces a fellow creature as second class citizen should be dropped. So every pre-Christian inhuman practices meted on widows should be dropped for modernism and civilization.

2.4 **Widowhood Today: 1941-1971**

Sequel to the impact of Christianity, civilization and modernism, a lot of people have been exposed to western education. This exposure has automatically brought to light knowledge of their rights and privileges; hence those inhuman and disgraceful practices have been questioned and rejected by many especially those literate widows today.

Martins (1987) in his article, Obnoxious laws and practices against widows, observed that both in the pre-Christian and Christian era, it is obvious that in some parts of Igboland women were not allowed to inherit landed property. The wife were seen as a chattel to be inherited or she could be forced out of her matrimonial home. The idea emanated from the custom which states that death doesn’t terminate a marriage, rather marriage continues by substitution.

He argues that widowhood today should wear a different look as he persuade the government to make laws which will help to check these inhuman treatments meted on the widows. Women are not to be seen or regarded as property which could be shared after the death of a man. Women are created by God and should be seen as fellow creation that has every right to life and property.
Finally, he advocated for redress in case of widowhood abuse.

Kitzinger (1993) holds the view that “women’s” realities have always been ignored, denied or invalidated during the pre-Christian era and under hetero-patriarchy. According to him, the world we live in is indeed a man’s world. Patriarchal or male dominated societies to which most countries of the world belong, usually have negative attitudes towards women. However, since these Belgin conference in 1995, the place and role of women in the society began to gain prominence and the treatment meted on widows began to change for better. The importance of Kitzinger’s view lies on the tradition or culture that has beclouded the world from time immemorial. Expounding his view, he said that some have based their argument on the biblical account of creation story where God created Adam before Eve.

Nevertheless, it is expedient to state that proprietors of this view should note that in the beginning God created mankind in his own image i.e both male and female.

Daves (1962) asserts that among the Hebrews, as well as in IgboLand before the advent of Christianity and civilization, death at young age was considered a calamity, a judgment for sin, and a wife left in this way was a disgrace hence, she had no right of inheritance, if she had no children she would remain with her husband’s family and wait for his brother to marry her. However, widowhood practice today is not the same with the previous years experiences.
Widows are not subjected to those inhuman practices rather widows have replaced them with the thoughtful meditation and thanksgiving to God.

Iwe (2000) contributing to the issue of today’s widowhood practices echoed that personality is perceived as the foundation of man’s dignity and sense of responsibility. This should distinguished him from the other creatures of the universe hence man should not be treated as an inanimate object. He capped his submission by saying that responsibility for action by human person presupposes freedom of action. Therefore, no one has the authority to treat his fellow human as an inanimate object.

Gotar (2002) unfolds that God established marriage as an institution. God felt that man needed a partner, a companion and a friend because it is not good for man to be alone. Genesis 2:2, 18, 21-24, Ephesians 5: 21-33, proverbs 9: 13-18. Man needs a woman to satisfy him sexually, to support him financially and in many other ways. The presence of death in the home brings lineliness, obstruction to budget plans and a stop to mutual fellowship. The question that is begging for answer is “if God created all human beings, why does it seem as if God is treating people differently? Why do people have different kind of experiences? However, since man’s know-how is greatly limited; no man on earth ever plays monopoly of knowledge, for God the omniscient knows all solution to all the problems could only come from him alone. He therefore called for a total abortion of all inhuman practices to widows.
Adamu (1994) in an introductory manner comments that with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and social vices around us the number of widows and widowers are fast growing in our society. In his input, she presented some veracious guideline for human widowhood in general and for the Christians in particular. Nothing contrary to the scripture can be true and nothing in addition to the truth can be binding. Expounding her view she said that every trial that we undergo will help to comfort those who are suffering similar grief and pains. She therefore called on widows and widowers to depend on God for grace to overcome the ordeal.

Usman (2006) simply interpreted the concept of widowhood as gender discrimination. She is of the view that whenever and wherever questions of economic prosperity or wealth creation, political stability and harmony are raised, there are always the inclinations among some people to argue that the world is a man’s world. He decried the inhuman treatment meted on widows before the 1970s but submits that women be given rights as seen in most developed countries of the world like USA, Britain, France etc. This is a condition which unfortunately has found its way out of the dynamics of homes and family setting and all the spheres of the society.

Gender discrimination and resultant effects of inequality and right and opportunities have been topical issues in recent times at national, regional and international levels.

Okereke (1998) discussed the plight of widowhood today by first of all redefined the status and responsibilities of a woman in the society. When the
society was in a state of innocence, various traditional practices were put in place by different societies to demonstrate public concern for the misfortune as well as to drive home the importance of the women new roles and responsibilities to her home. Some of these practices were inhuman and requires some changes in this 21st century. According to him, widows should be pitied and not maltreated. They should be allowed to manage the property of their late husband without family interferences.

Ifeagwazi (2007) in Ikenga International Journal of African studies wrote a fascinating article on the roles of social support, and age in psychological adaptation of the Nigerian widow. He unfolds that before the (1970s) in Igboland, a widow was generally regarded as ritually unclean and defiled following the death of her husband. According to Afigbo in Obinwa, (1992), the widespread cultural practice is that of treating a widow as being in a state of ritual contamination or impurity following the death of her husband. Being considered as filthy, impure, defiled, and untouchable, people avoided coming in contact with the widows. The irony of this notion is that some of the men that claim purity over the widows still go to them at night for sexual relationship.

Today widows are no longer considered as uncleaned or impure. The widow decides whether to stay alone or to remarry. She is not under any obligation to do something against her will.

2.5 The Presbyterian Church and Widowhood 1971-2001

The church as a vehicle of change and revival has the mandate of Christ to carry out a wholistic ministry as commanded by her master Jesus Christ. In
applying this mandate, the researcher considered the various submissions made by different scholars as to the role of the church towards salvaging the widows from their plight.

Akan (1999) simply gave an interpretation of the concept of widowhood and the role of the church. He opined that it is the role of the church to render help to the widows especially in times of need. While charging the church to rise to her responsibility, he reminded the church that there are different classes of widows, for instance, the young, the middle aged and the elderly ones. The Presbyterian church of Nigeria should as a matter of fact should consider some gainful programmes she could organize to help the widows in the society especially those of her number.

Yilkangnna (2005) insisted that the impact of the church is not felt in the welfare of the widows. Some congregations only organize collection or offerings for the widows and the needy ones. Provision of job opportunities or empowerment could yield better dividends. Thanks to Nsukka dioceses of the Roman Catholic Church that packaged programmes like health care development, promotion of girl education, funding the Sisters of Immaculate Heart of Mother of Christ and the establishment of women organization charged with the responsibility of making the widows feel comfortable. The Presbyterian church of Nigeria could as well borrow a leave from the above church in other to better the condition of her widows by providing job
opportunities and preaching the gospel of Christ to them. Meanwhile she has not done anything reliable on this issue.

Holnfield (1990) holds the view that the problems following the loss of a partner are physical, psychological, social and religious etc. He added that the church should have regular worship services, prayer group, youth programme, men and women’s groups and other congregational activities aimed at encouraging widows to participate in it in order to avoid idleness.

Laesen (2000) echoed Shamiso’s view that relatives and the church should take up their responsibilities seriously and show respect for widows who are really all alone. He further suggested that the local church should be an outpost of shalom and reconciliation network. Moreso, fellowship of concern and pastoral care cannot properly function or flourish in an un-conducive atmosphere.

Continuing he argued that every church needs a regular programme to evangelize and educate the members on the role of widows in a given society. The Presbyterian Church should not be left out in this business. The church should be encouraged to render all the necessary assistance to the widows especially in times of need.

Hall (1983) holds the view that God’s care for widows shows that God through scriptures has a plan for each of them. He also has a special plan for the older widows and another plan for the younger widows. God becomes the husband and will fill her life if she will only listen to what he has to say to her through his word. God not only has a plan for the widow’s life but He also has a
plan for Christians to follow in order to help a widow adjust to her new life. The Presbyterian church of Nigeria should fix herself in this plan of God to be a vehicle of actualizing this mandate. Finally he argued that one’s victory or defeat in life is consequent upon his or her obedience to the word of God.

Anyanwu (2005) similarly discussed the role of the church in arresting the plight of widowhood in the society by advocating that the churches in Nigeria should stem the tide of unemployment in the country by engaging in employment giving projects. I make bold to say that in the Federal Republic of Germany, the church is the second largest employer of labour. The church in Nigeria as well as the Presbyterian church should do well in making a legislation that will make all the parishes within the country to open or establish agricultural farm, carpentry workshop, schools and orphanage homes. This will help alleviate the plights of widows.

Agu (2009) Contributing to the plight of widowhood submits that the rate at which man’s inhumanity to man is rampaging all creatures of the world today is quite disheartening. He observed that women especially the widows are the most vulnerable. He therefore called on the church to give God a chance in this 21st century. Furthermore, there is no amount of pastoral care that would alleviate the suffering of the widow today without God. Any progress without God is retrogression. He therefore reminded the church that the condition generally will change for the better if the progress attained in science and technology is matched with rapid growth in the acquisition of moral values.
Damap (2007) approached the issue of widowhood from the angle of what is expected from the Christian community i.e (church), According to her, widowhood is a traumatic and excruciating experience that a widow goes through following the death of her husband. Her period and stages of grief are further exacerbated by traditional and social demands. The Christian community i.e the church should stand firm and speak against those vices. The Presbyterian church should champion this crusade as she did in champing the coming of Christianity in Ihechiowa and environs.

2.6 **Summary of Literature Review**

In the process of reviewing the literatures written by the different authors or scholars on widowhood phenomenon in the pre-Christian era, widowhood in the Christian era, widowhood today and the Presbyterian church and widowhood, the researcher made some observation that authors like Koye, Donoran, Ohagwu and Njoku etc condemned the treatments meted on the widows while scholars like Scaffer, Nwaogbo, Omartian and Grollman etc opined that the advent of Christianity and Civilization made a remarkable impact and improvement on the widowhood practices. Nevertheless scholars like Iwe, Ekanem, Obiakalaige, Okwueze etc submits that today the widowhood practices have changed in favour of the widows since most widows now in conjunction with their late husband’s family decides on how to mourn their dead husbands. In a related development . scholars like Akan, Hall Laesen and Anyanwu summarised their views on the church by calling on the Presbyterian
church of Nigeria to rise up to her responsibilities in caring for the widows. They encouraged those churches that have been doing well in the aspect of caring especially the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches respectively to continue their good work on the widows while they called on churches like the Presbyterian and other denominations that are lacking in this aspect of caring for the widows to rise up to the challenges of widowhood.
CHAPTER THREE

THE PEOPLE OF IHECHIOWA

3.1 Brief Historical Background of Ihechiowa

According to N. Origba, (personal communication September 5, 2008) Ihechiowa means “The light that holds the world” Ihechiowa is an Igbo community located in the present Arochukwu Local Government Area of Abia State. It belongs to the Colonial Administrative unit of Aro district, renamed as Arochukwu Division of Calabar province. Arochukwu was subsequently carved out of Calabar province and included in Umuahia province.

Ihechiowa is classified as a tribe, a village and a clan. According to a dictionary definition, a clan is a group of people with a common ancestor. It could also mean a large family forming a close group.

Ihechiowa is made up of seventeen villages and occupies a land mass of 2.6 kilometer approximately. These villages had a population of about 30,773 according to 1963 census figure but by the recent population figures, they have tripled their number to about 95319 persons. She is situated within the latitude 5° 15 and 5° 30 North and longitude 7° 5° and 8° 5 East. She is bounded on the North by Ohafia, on the East by Ukwa of the Ibibio clan, of Cross River State while on the South by Ututu and on the West by Makor village in Cross River State.

The search for fertile agricultural land brought Chiowa and his people to a new settlement called “Ihenta” in Ohafia. This migration from “Ihe” in Umuahia
Ibeku to Ihenta in Ohafia was as a result of hostility from near by communities. Here, at Ihenta, shortage of agricultural land and external aggression forced the children of Chiowa to look for another place for settlement, hence, they moved from Ihenta in Ohafia to “Ogige Ihe” near the present day Ndi Okpo Ihechiowa. O. Ndu, (2008 personal communication September 5, 2008) asserts that the land was found to be fertile for farming. The settlement at “Ogige Ihe” was meant to be of permanent nature. Here, at “Ogige Ihe” the people of Ihechiowa had an encounter with the pygmies. They were called “Ndi Oha-Odu”, “that is people with tails”. The Pygmies served useful economic purposes to the people of Chiowa. They supplied the people with farm implements such as hoes and cutlasses. They also bought agricultural products for them. The Pygmies were seen only on market days. They were the first set of people to arrive to the market and the last to leave the market place.

Conflict arose between the Pygmies and the Ihechiowa people which led to the disappearance of the Pygmies. This had economic and social implications. Nnanna, (1984) said that the economic needs which the Pygmies served the people of Ihechiowa disappeared over night. Settlement at Ogige Ihe therefore became unbearable. There was an urgent need for alternative settlement. “Agbor” was discovered to be the most suitable alternative place.

At Agbor, the economic benefits which the people enjoyed at “Ogige Ihe” resulting from their encounter with the Pigmies were no longer forthcoming. Contradictions within the kindred at Agbor led to the various families opting for
separate and independent settlements. This movement of various families to distant locations for settlement formed the genesis of the foundation of the present day seventeen villages in Ihechiowa. The said seventeen villages are the descendants of the early families of Chiowa which resulted into the formation of Ihechiowa into Ikwun and Eleoha. The separate existence of each of the present day seventeen villages in Ihechiowa and the resultant Ikwun-Eleoha dichotomy are the products of the inability of the early families of Chiowa to live, work, suffer and die together for a common cause because of the misunderstanding that arose amongst them.

3.2 Social Life:

The Ihechiowa people involved themselves in diverse social activities which were portrayed in their culture and traditional values. Culture and tradition are the basic ingredients explaining the essence of the integrity of Ihechiowa people. If a man is found worthy, he pays the initiation fee of hundred naira (₦100.00) to be initiated into Nrichi cult. The initiation period was six months in which the man was kept in fattening room for six months traditionally called “Ino Nghigha”. During this period the man is fed on pounded yam and yam porridge with which he entertained friends and relatives with and undiluted palm wine.

Njeghari Ndi Nrichi (The honourary tour):

This period marked the commencement of the Nrichi initiation. During this tour he is not expected to put on cloth except white wrapper called “Ngere”. He has
a male servant with whom he visits family heads in all the seventeen villages. This tour is executed during the last week that terminates the fattening period. This event lasts for one week and one day that is “Otu izu na otu ubochi”. This special visit is carried out only on “Eke days”. This is because all the villages would not gather in a day to confer on the candidate the Nrichi title, rather as he goes around he automatically presents himself to the living and the dead ancestors of the community and as well as undergo the Nrichi initiation.

In each compound he enters, the compound head presents him to the ancestors through prayers by pouring of libation on his behalf. The compound head presents to him kolanuts and five pence. As he walks along, he is usually asked by admirers to beat the iron gong for them to hear the sound “Onye Nrichi kuturum Ogene o-o-o. In response, he beats the gong – gbom! Gbom!! Gbom!!!. It takes the candidate two walking days to carry out the tour.

However, this practice is no longer gaining grounds in Ihechiowa. People are no longer interested in undergoing such tours. The advent of motor cycle and motor cars have made people weak to travel a long journey by leg. Religious leaders in Ihechiowa have been preaching against this practice hence, peoples zeal and commitment to this cult have been very weak. In view of the above situation, the Nrichi cult is gradually dying with a little hope of surviving.

Ichupu Nrichi (End of Nrichi). The newly initiated candidate with other members goes to his yam barn selecting sixty tubers of yams (60) to be cooked for “Ekan” members in the night. He pays some money which is shared
immediately by the members. At about 1.00 a.m, food is ready for consumption. The Ekan arrives and cries till dawn.

Before dawn, he is officially admitted into the institution, in every track road of the village, he throws away one tuber of yam, saying I am through Oh! Oh!! Oh!!! (Ezerem ya O! O!! O!!!). This is an expensive exercise which is conducted with a four gun shots marking the official end of the initiation.

**Iyamba:** This title is taken only by married women.

K. Mba, (2008 personal communication, June 10, 2008) asserts that “the only qualification into this society is to be a woman. Culture defines people’s mode of living, determines the mode of communication, sets limits to people’s interaction in terms of love and friendship, and at the same time defines accepted norms of behaviour. It’s a symbol of identity which include cultural dances, inter personal relations etc. Hence, Ihechiowa social life is showcased in these activities.

**Nrichi:** This is a cultural symbol in Ihechiowa. It is a traditional title which any man aspires to attain. Only those who have acquired certain traditional position in the community and are wealthy enough to meet the requirements that are initiated into “Nrichi Title, an equivalent of “Ozo Title”. The initiation is open to men folk. Its origin is difficult to trace. None of my informant could say with certainty when it started. They all simply agreed that “it is a cultural heritage transmitted from generation to generation and that they are under obligation to preserve and guard it jealously.
A man who desires the title must be a free born, married with male children, and must have plenty of yams, money and must have been initiated into the “Ekan Society”.

There are two kinds of “Nrichi” – “Iwu ngene n’elu akirika”. This is done when one wants to reclaim the missing share of his compound or village. This is simply a formality when the traditional cloth tied during the tour is placed on the roof of the individual concerned. Some call this type “Nrichi Ogbei” (poor man’s initiation.)

The second type is called “Nrichi Omadi” (Rich man’s initiation). This is taken by the individual himself in his life time. Initiation with Nrichi society has various stages.

- **The Enyichi stage** (childhood best friend):

  This has to do with the initial consultation with the entrant’s childhood best friend who acts as the legal adviser. Secondly, the man who is to be initiated is taken to the entrant’s compound where he attempts to locate his father, “A chorom imara Nnam”. At this juncture, he will be advised to see the entire village. He will be disqualified if investigation proves that his father was not a member of the society but if he was a member, he would commence the next stage traditionally called “Ibu anu Nrichi”

  The initiation fee is Fifty Naira and twenty fat tubers of yam. On the initiation day a goat is slaughtered and the women cook all kinds of local food, for both the initiated and non initiated members. The man is finally initiated into
the guild by dully initiated men. This also demonstrated how wealthy a man was and served as part of the government of the people. This by implication suggest that wealth is used at the determining factor in belonging to the ruling class. This practice seem not to be good because there could be intelligent people who may not likely to be rich and so reject this rich contributions they would have made in the governance of the society.

**Ekan Society**: This is meant for boys. It is of two kinds – “Ekan Nta” and “Ekan Ukwu”. The “Ekan Nta” is meant for children between the ages of 2 – 10 and “Ekan Ukwu” is between the age of 11 and above. For the Ekan Nta the boy must remove his teeth before he could be initiated. The initiation fee was two naira (₦2.00), 30 tubers of yam, six sticks of dried fish and a large pot of palm oil. These are cooked on the initiation day for consumption. After which the initiated is shown the Ekan after dancing round the village compounds. Women and non-members are not permitted to be around during the initiation. The new members enter into a covenant relationship with Ekan not to disclose it to women and non-members otherwise Eken would strike them. The same process is applicable to “Ekan Ukwu”. This fear imposed on the membership of the group could be likened to other cults in our present day. Members are enveloped with the fear of death if they dare disclose the secret of the society. The Church is making frantic effort in diverting people’s interest from belonging to such cults as they are seen as ungodly and unclean for to belong.
**Ekpe and Obong:** These are not part of Ihechiowa culture but were borrowed from the Calabarians and instituted officially among the people. They are secret cults specifically meant for the wealthy and nobles. They served as the governing power of the people and instrument for settling disputes. Members used them to threaten people’s lives. The Ekpe and Obong cults are showcased during the “New Yam Festivals through dancing by a masquerade called “Okonko”. This Okonko is meant for the men’s folk and the mysteries about it’s functions must not be disclosed to non-members. The language of this Cult is Effik. Most of the Elders of Ihechiowa lived in Calabar and were greatly influenced by the Effiks. Most of the Ihechiowa youths don’t understand Effik and so find it difficult to belong to the Ekpe and Obong Cults. The advent of Christianity in Ihechiowa affected the membership of these cults hence, the decline of its membership.

**Festivals and Ceremonies:**

Before the planting season commences, Ihechiowa elders have the sole obligation of appeasing the gods of the land in order to invoke the blessings of the “god of plenty”. Certain rituals are performed and sacrifices are offered.

O. Okwun, (personal communication September 8, 2008).

Land means everything in Ihechiowa. It is not sold. It is the supreme symbol of the powers of the ancestors. They have the power to create and to destroy. To act against land is to act against the very essence of one’s existence.

When the elders are satisfied that the necessary rituals have been performed, planting commences with “Ezeji” on the lead. The womenfolk have their own
part of the obligation to fulfill. Before the planting of maize, vegetable, local beans etc, they are expected to perform some rituals. The above crops are gathered into what is called “a basket of materials” (Abo Ngwo-ngwo). A successful performance of the rituals results to bumper harvest. This is the secret behind the success of Ihechiowa as the main prosperous agricultural community among her neighbours.

The main features of Ihechiowa culture are ceremonial. The New Yam Festival is an occasion of merry-making, heralding the arrival of the New Yam. It precedes the period of scarcity call “Nlubiri” and Onwu”. These periods are characterized by shortage of food, a period when yams are completely scarce from the family menu. The New Yam Festival is an occasion of celebration, heralding a new season of plenty. The period adds new life to the people. It is full of sacrifices to thank the god of yam “Nfijoku”. Cultural dances are displayed to colour the occasion. Today, the story is not the same. Many people are no longer moved by the advent of new yam. Alternative to yams like rice, cocoyam, potatoe etc are provided by wealthy families during the “Onwu” period.

To some, the New Yam Festival is a period of great activities. Girls were expected to dress in a peculiar manner with beads tied round their waists and their bodies beautifully decorated. It offered the men folk the ardent opportunity of choosing their future wives. It was also the beginning of fattening period for those girls already engaged, thus preparing them for marriage.
Ihechiowa is very rich in cultural dances. Each village is distinctively known for at least one cultural dance or the other. For instance, Umuye village is known for her ingenuity in three main cultural dancers namely Akang, Ovuwa and Use. Umuchi-Akuma is known for Okanga and Obiro. Amamiri is known for Akama, Ndi Okpo is known for Ojojo, Atan is known for Ekwambe, Ighaoma and so on.

3.3 Economic Life: Different people organize their society in different ways and around different economic activities. The Ihechiowa people were mainly agriculturalist with hoe and machete as their farm implements. Farming was the major occupation of the people of Ihechiowa, including children, men, and women. Everyone contributed to the common stock. Idleness was a taboo, hence there were few beggars in the community.

Farming was the pivot around which other activities revolved. It influenced interpersonal relationships and social perception of individual members of the community. It also influenced the choice of marriage. A young woman known to be industrious in farm work was seriously sought for by young men in marriage.

According to N. Clement, (personal communication, October 6, 2008) “Yam” is regarded as the king of all crops and specifically meant to be cultivated by men. Other crops like cocoyam, three leaved yam, aerial yam, okro, maize, melon, cassava, were exclusively reserved for women and were
treated as secondary crops. Yam was associated with “Nfijoku”, hence every significant stage in yam cultivation is preceded with yam rituals.

Yam was never refused, no matter how strained the relationship between the giver and the recipient may be. Anyone who refuses yam, gives a cock which was sacrificed to “Nfijoku” the god of yam.

According to E. Okoro, (personal communication, August 30, 2008) wine tapping is a lucrative occupation on the ground that wine is very important in both culture and traditional rites of the people. This implies that important occasions could not go on without the presentation of wine. No very serious talk involving heads of families can go on without wine. To this effect owners of palm trees were very rich.

Animal husbandry and hunting featured prominently in the people’s economy. Animals reared include goats, sheep, fowls etc. Those who showed prowess in hunting attracted names such as “Dinta”, “Ogbu anu”, Ogba egbe”.

Trading also featured greatly in Ihechiowa and some engaged themselves in the selling of gins, palm wine, cloth and human beings. Those who distinguished themselves in this act of trade attracted names such as “Ozuu or “Ozuafia”.

Many depended on craft works such as making of mat, raffia, local baskets etc. Fishing was not a major occupation as there were no big rivers around, it was only engaged by people as a hobby. Most of the people that engaged themselves into trading were at the instance of the contact with effiks and the
whitemen in Calabar. Today, many sons and daughters of Ihechiowa have abandoned trade for Western education.

3.4 Political Life:

The Ihechiowa people had a spectacular political organization before the advent of Christianity. It was a democratic form of government. According to N. Kalu, (personal communication, July 10, 2008) “Each of the villages had autonomous democracy, exercising the highest level of effective political control. Thus, Ihechiowa is described as a segmentary society which acknowledged her primary source “Agbor”. The Ihechiowa traditional system of government combined gerontocracy with personal achievement. This was because leadership came from Elders of the land. The traditional political arrangement was divided into three main levels of political organization and control. These include the family, compound and village system.

(a) The Family System: This is the lowest level of political control in Ihechiowa. It is the nucleus of any community organization.

K. Nwankwo, (personal communication, July 25, 2008) opined that every nuclear family consists of a man, his wife or wives and children. The man is the head of the family. He exercises authority and control over the family members. He regulates and conducts the affairs of the family. He settles disputes and represents the family in the compound affairs. The nuclear family remains the foundation of Ihechiowa people. If the family is in order, the “Umunna” group or compound administration will have less problem in administering her affairs.
Every lineage was also made up of a number of territorial kindred which is based on extended family called “Ikwu”. The oldest person is always appointed the head of each lineage. He is believed to be the channel of communication between the living and the dead. He is expected to maintain peace in the extended family system, settles minor disputes, distribution of family property or land to members of “Ikwu” and conducts family rituals in case of family problem.

(b) **Compound Administration**

This is the next in hierarchy in the political organization of the people. Every “Ezi or compound comprised members of economically independent households, each with a man as a leader. U. Okoro, (personal communication, September 30,2008) asserts that within the compound the patrilineal kindred of “Umu nna ezi” could be found. A strong feeling of solidarity and unity could exist among the “Umunna ezi” irrespective of the great importance attached to matrilineal relationship “Ikwu nne”. The affairs of the compound were in the hands of the council of elders known as “Ndi Iche”. These consist of family heads, each representing his family in the council during compound meetings. The council was presided over by the most senior member of the family called “Eze” (Chief). His authority was thus buttressed by his custodianship of the ancestral shrines and sacred symbols of the founding father. He sacrifices on behalf of the people at the ancestral shrines especially during the New Yam
Festival and as the occasion demands. He also intercedes on behalf of the people before the ancestors.

The Ndi “Iche” (council of elders) performed legislative and judicial functions. They made legislations which regulates the conduct of the people. Decisions were reached democratically and decisions were executed by age grades.

All the members of the compound recognized the authority of the compound head. The council of elders will not make major political decisions without consulting head of the compound. The council of elders also share land among the kindred. In Ihechiowa, land is community owned. No single person or persons no matter the status of the person has the right to use any piece of land unless he obtains permission from the council of elders.

(c) Village Administration:

This is the highest level of political organization. The governance of the village is in the hands of the elderst man from various compound known as “Ndi Eze”. Its leader “Eze Ogo” is not necessarily the most senior chief rather he must proceed from the royal family and compound that has the right of producing the Eze (Chief). The “Eze Ogo” is the custodian of the sacred symbols of the ancestors as well as the communal land. In routine customary matters, the various chiefs rule more or less by edict announced to the community by the town crier. They made legislations and policies guiding the conduct and lives of the citizen, and at the same time fostered peaceful relations
with other villages. As a judicial body, the council of chiefs settled disputes which defied solutions at the lower levels of the political and administrative arrangement.

The instrument for enforcing the decision of the council of chiefs or “Ndi Eze” was the age grade. Based on the degree of the offence, the victim will either be prosecuted, exiled, asked to guarantee his innocence through oath taking.

Occasionally, the “Ndi Eze” may have course to summon a meeting of all free born adult males of the community “Oha ogo” to deliberate on matters of great importance. Although Ihechiowa villages were autonomous, occasion may arose where different village heads met in “Agbor” to deliberate on matters affecting the entire clan. E. Okoro (personal communication, August 30, 2008) asserts that

> Notwithstanding the autonomy which the various villages engaged, there was no forgetfulness that all in the clan were of a common ancestor so when there was any problem confronting any village either internal or external threats of any kind the chief of various villages Would all move to “Agbor”, discussed and resolved the issue.

Such meetings were presided over by the Eze from “Agbor” who acted as host to others, he is referred to as “Ochi-Oha” the head of all or everybody in Ihechiowa. This administrative system is still relevant today except that cases of murder are not tried by the community. Such matters are transferred to the police. In some cases the youths in the community enact legislation forbidden any one to go to police without presenting his/her case to them for trials. Failure to adhere to the police the offender will face the wrath of the youth.
3.5 Religious Life:

Religion is not a separate department of life among the Ihechiowas. It is a very important factor in their life and so interwoven with other aspects of life that to divorce it from them would be “akin to unveiling a tangled skin”. Ihechiowa like other Igbos are nothing but religious and is reflected in all dimensions of their lives. They lived religiously, ate religiously and died religiously. Religion for them was something much more incisive and comprehensive than the common word implies. Its origin would appear to do with uncertainty about the world concerning such matters as agriculture, death, security, and long life.

In agreement Mbiti, (1956) is of the view that:

Many factors must have played a part in the development of religion. These include the geographical environment, the change of the seasons, the powers of nature, calamities, birth and death and major historical events like wars locust, invasion, migration, famine etc. To these must be added man’s reflection on the universe, the question about its origin, the earth and sky, the problem of evil and suffering, the phenomena of nature and many other problems. (p.12)

Before the advent of Christianity, Ihechiowa people worshipped a Supreme Being (God) who is referred to as “Obasidi n’elu” (God who lives in the sky). He is also referred to as “Chukwu Okike” or Chineke – God the creator.


The Ihechiowa people approached the “Obasi di n’elu through the lesser gods, spirits which they referred as intermediary gods. (p.24)
This is because they regarded God as so awesome and powerful that he could not be approached directly. They reached him through “Kamalu”, “Agwunsi” “Nfijoku” etc. The worship of God was projected in seasonal and yearly festivals marking one event or the other in the people’s religion. Such festival was the “New Yam” which attracted many rituals in consonance with their religious beliefs and practices. He further asserts that “The people of Ihechiowa equally believed in the existence of spirits”. These spirits are divided into two – Nature and human spirits.

The nature spirits are referred to as sky and earth spirits and are associated with natural objects and forces. These include the sun, moon, rain, storm, stars, lightening etc. The human spirits are the ghost of dead ancestors. The people have strong attachment to the spirit of their dead ancestors. They believed such spirit lives and exist in the invisible world. They are considered to be part of their families and compound. The spirits show interest in their serving families and visit relatives in the dream to make their wishes known. Misfortunes were attributed to the spirits. In order to avert punishment, sacrifices and rituals are made to appease the ancestor’s spirits.

Another aspect that featured prominently in the religious life of Ihechiowa people is the ancestral worship. The real power of ancestral worship lies in its deep association with the constitution of the family. The cult of ancestors
outlines appropriate rites for contact with the spirit world. This explains why they were regarded as part of the family.

The ancestral worship was extremely projected in “Anyum Afía” (pots ritual). The “Anyum Afía” was kept sacred with the eldest member of the maternal family because of what it represents. It represented the ancestral spirits which sets out the genealogy of the family in a chronological form. Sacrifices were made to them especially during the new “Yam Festival”. The “Anyum Afía” was believed to give protection, safety and good fortunes to each family.

In conclusion, Ihechiowa people were religious before the advent of Christianity even though it was characterized with idol worship. It was a religion which prohibited civilization e.g twins and their mothers were killed and ostracized because of their religious beliefs. Some streams were set apart as object of worship. “Ole river, Iyi edu, Iyi Eziukwu etc were dedicated to gods. These rivers were held sacred and no body goes to catch fish from them or goes to it with foreign items like English pot, or basin. Anything contrary to the aforementioned, the gods of these streams will strike and release calamity on the people. However, this belief is no longer relevant as many Pastors living in the community constantly preach against its relevance. Some of the streams have been defiled, destroyed and people can now go to the streams to fetch water with English pots or basins without any harm or danger inflicted on them.
3.6 **Educational Life:**

Before the advent of Christianity in Ihechiowa, education was informal. Though this lack of formality did not mean there was no education nor did it affect its importance.

According to Garba, (1992)

> If the essence of education is to bring up the young in the ways of traditions and norms of the people, in order to grow with the necessary physical and social skills for usefulness in the society, then education of some kind would have existed in pre-European Nigerian society. (p.20)

There was something to be taught and learnt by the educational system in Ihechiowa in spite of the fact that they were not in written form. The education was simple and relevant, with functional curriculum. Its objectives were simple and clear. It was meant to transmit cultural heritage thereby equipped the child with the ability to survive in the society. It had functionalism as its guiding principles and laid emphasis on social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, moral and spiritual values. The community trained its children for immediate induction into the society, and preparation for adulthood. He takes part in social, political and spiritual activities of his immediate environment.

The process of educating the child is collective responsibility which prepares him for future adult membership of the community where he will be responsible for transferring cultural heritage to the young ones. Learning is mostly through the apprenticeship system, the child learns by imitating adult members of his community. According to Fafunwa (1985) in Ben Yumusa,

Children were involved in practical farming, fishing, weaving, cooking, carving, knitting etc. Recreational subjects included wrestling, dancing, drumming, racing etc., while intellectual training included the study of local history, legends, the environment legends, the environment (Local geography, plants and animals), poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, story telling, story relays etc. (p.30)
What was taught depended on the felt needs of its local industry such as agriculture, trade, fishing, weaving, poetry, and carving. Education was an integral experience for the child and its curriculum was not static or unproductive, it changed to suit the prevailing needs and aspirations of the community. Children learned by living and doing. In the homes and on the farms, they were taught required skills of the community and behaviour expected of its members. They learned the aid of grasses which were suitable for each purpose, the work which had to be done on the crops, or the care which had to be given on the animal by joining with elders in this work. They learned the tribal history and the tribe’s relationship with other tribes, with the spirits, by listening to the stories of elders. Boys were taught hard labours while girls were taught the acts of cooking, plaiting, weeding etc. Through this means and by custom of sharing to which young people were taught to conform, the values of the society were transmitted.
CHAPTER FOUR

AN OVERVIEW OF TRADITIONAL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES

4.1 Widowhood in Igboland:

The continued existence and perpetration of inhuman widowhood rite in our society has become a major source of concern to both local and international organisations dealing on human rights. According to the United Nations Development programme (UNDP), human development report of 1995, “those inhuman widowhood practices manifests in almost every society especially in developing countries.” The inhuman treatment meted out to widows in many societies and nations of the world today represents one of the worst forms of violence against women.

The provision of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Section 33(1) is relevant to the issue at stake. This section clearly states that every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person and accordingly (a) No person shall be subjected to any forms of torture or to inhuman degrading treatment. Therefore, the onus of eliminating, adjusting or modernizing some of the cultural practices that oppress women in Igboland falls on every member of the tribe.

However, this work is not aimed at harboring disrespect for the rich cultural values of our people nor is it aimed at discarding those tracts by which the Igbos are identified. The researcher’s stance in this work is to showcase those
malignant details of our burial rites and widowhood practices which dehumanize and brutalize the widows in Igboland and at the same time advocate for a total discontinuity of these acts.

**Zone one: shelving of Hair.**

In Umuahia zone, especially in Ihechiowa sub zone, the very day a woman’s husband dies, the widow in required to undress and shelve her hairs, sit on a mat and surrounded by other widows. This however, was before the coming of Christianity in 1911. This act was done to assure the dead man’s relations that she is deeply aggrieved by the loss and that she has no hand in the death of her husband.

Aja, (2007) asserts that Africans value human life so much that they do not accept its termination or total extinction. Continuing he said

> Africans don’t even accept that physical life can be terminated in any case except by special reason or by some arrangement from the spirit world. Physical death of the people in this world was not the original plan of the creator God. (p.208)

Sequel to the above and consequent upon the fact that the woman must demonstrate her love for the dead husband, she has to officially dress in black cloth. At the end of this period, there is a ceremony performed and she can now re-marry if she wants or remained unmarried for life. This act was done before but today it has been modified by allowing individuals to choose to practice it or not.
In Zone two which includes Onitsha, Obosi etc shelving of hair, restriction to the house, not allowed to talk and mourning for about three years was observed. These years of mourning are sub divided into various stages. During the first month, the widow is restricted to the house, she is made to sit on the floor.

Zone Three: In Nkanu and Nalagu respectively, widows were subjected to shelving of their hairs after the demise of their husbands. Damap (2007) expressed her feeling thus: she is not allowed to talk, shake hands with people and not allowed to eat the food prepared for the husband funeral.

**Denial of Property:** In zones one, two and three, the treatments for widows were the same when it comes to right to property. Widows where not allowed to own their late husband’s property. The only hope of having a little access to their property was only at the instance of the widow having a male child for the late husband. The practice however is loosing grip nowadays because Christianity and civilization are seriously hitting these practices. Many widows are enlightened and could pursue their rights. Okoye (1995) said that:

> Each male relatives, sends round his chewing stick … with his name to the woman of his choice, they are expected to reject the proposal twice as if they were resolved to remain widows all their lives but at the last proposal, with tears in their eyes, they make their choice and are taken over (p.70).

**Wearing of Black Cloth:** The Wearing of black cloth for the dead was common in Onitsha, Nkanu and Umuahia zones of IgboLand. However, in Umuahia town precisely perhaps because of their early contact with aliens on
account of being a major railway station the treatment of widow were humane. The daughters of the lineage are not notorious for maltreating of their widows.

**Refusal to Shake Hand:** In zones one, two and three i.e Umuahia, Onitsha and Nkanu, widows were not allowed to shake hands with people. The widows were seen as unclean and should not transfer their uncleanliness, to the society. They were to undergo thorough scrubbing for about 28 days as in Nkanu zone. However, most of these practices were obvious only before the coming of Christianity, modernism and civilization.

**Widows as Property:** Widows are seen as property and could be shared amongst the relations of their late husband in areas like Idemili sub zone of Igboland. The right of possession of the widow could be determined by ballot

In order to possess the deceased property including the wife of his brother his elder brother will observe one native week of absolute confinement in honour of his dead brother. Now after the widow must have undergone the tribulations of seven native weeks, she will now advance to the next stage of the mourning period. She must first of all go for cleansing. She has a thorough scrubbing after twenty-eight days of having no contact with water in the way of absolution. Nwoga, (1989) elucidating on the concept of widowhood unfolds that

Before the widow is taken to the stream for this ceremonial or ritual bath, her hair must be shaved clean. The barber, according to the custom, must be another widow. The widow whose hair is being scraped off must remain motionless. She sits as still as a statue until the process of barbering comes to an end. (p.300)
At the end of mourning period, the widow is permitted to remarry, and integrate fully in the society. For the widow is regarded as existing between life and death. She is always battling to hold her own in the no man’s land between the living and the dead.

Finally, in Orlu and Ikwo sub zones respectively, widowhood practices as described in other parts of Igbo land are prevalent. Polygamy is a common feature in the families as it is in other parts of the country. The wives of the dead man receive the same treatment or are bound by the same cultural practices at the commencement of widowhood period. It is only through a minute detail that one could say, how exactly the Umuada are in their demands to the wife of the deceased that differentiate them from others.

4.2 Widowhood in Ihechiowa Before the Advent of Christianity:
Widowhood practices in Ihechiowa community is heart breaking and tantamount to denial of human rights and freedom of man. These practices ranges from dehumanization, dejection and rejection, shame etc. O.N. Akpan (personal communication, September 21, 2008) asserts

Widowhood is another traditional burden that may not go away soon. Many widowers take delight in seeing the widows suffer these inhuman practices and taboos which are oppressive and dehumanizing.

Traditional widowhood is a period in Ihechiowa where widows are subjected to hardship, subjugation, deprivation and humiliation. This involves various
degrees of physical seclusion i.e. a state of ritual contamination and impurity.

A.O. Nduka, (personal communication 21 September, 2008) echoed

Widowhood is a traumatic experience that no woman would pray to go through. Their problems begin immediately their husbands are certified dead. These sufferings are organized in stages.

**STAGE ONE: At the Point of Death:**

Immediately a husband is certified dead in Ihechiowa, the wife is automatically suspected or accused of being responsible for the death of her husband. This mischief is assumed to have been executed through inadequate feeding of the man by the wife or by poor health care given to him by the wife while on sick bed. This act is executed in cases of death by the husband relations. In order to prove her innocence, the woman is compelled to take a public oath. This act is not in all cases. However, refusal to comply with this mandate is tantamount to ousting her from the husband house and her children will automatically loose the right to their father’s property.

At this point in time, the widow is expected to shave her hairs if they were plaited or leaves them uncombed. She is made to guard the corpse of her husband. This type of guard depends on the position of the deceased i.e. whether he was a title holder or not, an aged man or an ordinary citizen of the land. Under such development, the widow is compelled to wear rags, eat and drink with local calabash. She is placed under strong restriction of not bathing until the funeral is over. She has to turn her drinking pot upside down and is not permitted to cook but could eat food brought to her by friends and relations All
these are aimed at honouring the dead. Responding to the above purpose about widowhood practice Dadzie, (2001) asserts

There are other ways of conducting our lives in a way that honour the dead. These things include; living an honest and righteous life; being mindful of the good principles upheld by the deceased spouse; preserving the memory of the dead by purchasing a piece of furniture, or equipment for the church, or setting up a mission fund or any other appropriate project, such as a library, building or school in the name of the deceased (p.4).

To justify and show love and respect for the deceased husband the widow does not go to toilet the same time with other women rather she is expected to wail every morning between the hours of 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. as the custom demands. However, modernism and Christianity have affected a great change that today widows no longer wail for a long period. Today, most Christians have refused to obey the above tradition. Aforji (personal communication, 1st October, 2008) sharing her view on widowhood practice asserted that

Immediately and after the burial of my husband, I was asked to cry and call the name of my husband the way I used to call him when he was alive.

However, her husband’s property were confiscated and locked up in a room until the purification period was over. This tradition has no regard for social status i.e. no matter a woman’s social status, she must undergo these customary practices or face the punishment associated with it.

**STAGE TWO: Seclusion from Funeral Ceremony:**

At this stage, the widow is confined in the home between four to eight days depending on the social status of the deceased. Within this period the widow is not allowed to associate nor interact with other people except fellow
widows. She is regarded as impure and profane. The essence of her interaction with fellow widows is to enable her acquire the knowledge and rudiment of widowhood observances and rites. During this period she is not expected to travel or engage in any kind of business, rather she is expected to provide a goat and fowl before burial day. O. V. Ekechi, (personal communication, 5th October 2008) asserts that

> When the husband is finally buried, the widow is required to bring “akwa isi mkpo” to be placed on the grave of the deceased husband. This indicates that the relationship between the woman and the man has been broken.

If the above is not done, it is believed that the deceased husband will constantly disturb and torture the widow. However, on ceiling the grave, the widow is expected to go to the stream with a hoe and other instruments used in the digging of the husband grave to wash. She is to hold an “abosi” leaf which she will use to spread round her body four times saying “In my next world I won’t marry a man that will die before me rather I will marry a man who will live with me to bring or train my children.

Contributing to this view O. O. Onu, (personal communication 18th October 2008) holds that at the end of the funeral, the widow is escorted to the stream by an older widow in the morning to shower. The essence of this exercise is to avoid being seen or greeted by anybody. This is called “Ifupu miri” (washing off), she is to shower at the down part of the stream with cocoanut shell called “okpukpo aki bekee” and with local soap “ncha ogbe”. At the end of her bath, she is rubbed with palm oil. On returning, she fetches water with the local
calabash called “nkuku” which will be poured in the drinking pot already turned down.

Nevertheless, it is worthy of note that before the widow drinks from the pot she has to present a hen called “okuku isi mkpo” for some sacrifices on her behalf. This sacrifice is usually done in the night in the absent of widow. The sacrificed hen must be eaten only by a widower who has not remarried. It is only after this exercise that they can drink from her pot. This concludes the second stage of the traditional widowhood practice in Ihechiowa.

THIRD STAGE: Actual Mourning

This spreads between one to three years depending on the benevolence and magniminity of the deceased husband’s relations and the widow’s cordiality with the husband’s relations. Having satisfied all the requirements mentioned above, she is now free to go about her normal duties. At this juncture, she puts on black cloths wherever she goes. She must not plait her hairs. Within this period, the widow enjoys the benefit of not participating in any village or communal work or financial contribution to any village project. She is not bound by any communal law except that she cannot have sex with any man until the mourning period is over.

STAGE FOUR: Purification:

Before this final stage, the widow is still regarded as unclean. She has to undergo this stage of cleansing. If the husband’s family is satisfied with mourning activities of their brother’s wife, she will now be required to perform
the last traditional rites. N. Obasi, (personal communication, 21st October, 2008) asserts

The widow is expected to cook for the kindred. If she refuses to cook no portion of land will be given to her during the land allocation for farming. She will also be denied the right to her husband’s property.

If the widow is able to meet the above requirements, the hairs will be shaved and the black cloths removed. This exercise guarantees her acceptability to community and family alike. It also grant her access to her late husband’s property. However, if the widow had no male child, she will be denied ownership of her late husband property since girls were not included as heirs or inheritance of the father’s property.

Justification of Widowhood Practices in Ihechiowa:

A critical analysis of the traditional widowhood practices in Ihechiowa shows that the motive of the above actions were not really bad but the practice and the application by the people makes it to be humiliating and degrading. K. Nwankwo (personal communication, 25th July, 2008) asserts that widowhood practices in Ihechiowa are both symbolic and an act of demonstration of a woman’s love and respect for her late husband.

For all Africans, death is never natural to both the old and young. Nothing goes for nothing. Explanation are always sought for through the juju priest or native doctors or diviners. At the death of a husband, the wife is the chief suspect. She is suspected of killing her husband either by inadequate care while he was sick or by starvation. With this view in mind, both knives, arrow and all
kinds of weapons are deposited in the grave to enable the deceased revenge over the suspect or killers.

Nevertheless, the poor condition or nature of the widow is not meant to hurt her but to make her unattractive to the deceased husband and be free social harassment from the dead husband. Moreso, it was also meant to guarantee the dead easy admission into the spirit world of the ancestors in order to have good repose with them. It is believed that if the widow fails to observe the above rites, the dead husband’s spirit will be hovering in the spirit world.

This, by implication means, that the practice must be thoroughly done in order to get a good welcome in the ancestral world. According to Ogonneya

A month after my husband’s burial a woman dreamt of him lamenting and complaining of not having peace with the ancestors. His kindred went and enquired and was told they are to perform some rituals which were omitted.

Moreso, the sacrifices were made to enable the dead to have a settled place or position in the new world. If any of these rites are omitted, the spirit of the dead will not allow the living to have peace.

4.3 Factors Influencing Traditional Widowhood Practices in Ihechiowa

An adage which says that there is no smoke without fire is confirmed when the factors influencing widowhood practices in Ihechiowa are considered. The following are considered as factors responsible for the traditional widowhood practices in Ihechiowa.

(A) Religion: Religion is one of the major factors responsible for the shaping and organization of human culture. It is seen as a social organizing instrument
used for the regulation of human behaviour. Human beings attached great importance to their religion; hence, man is governed by his or her belief.

Chuta, (1992) maintains that in Africa, the principles, prescriptions and sanctions that control and regulate human conduct are derived from religion.

In view of the above submission, it is hoped that the religion of a people exerts great deal of influence in the way they behave, their thinking, action and worship. The past, present, and the future are all in the hands of the Supreme Being who fashions their social system thereby making them to act according to the intent of these beings. The Africans as well as the Ihechiowa people believe in God and communal existence. The individual guilt is capable of breeding communal contamination; hence, eyes are on the widows to observe all the traditional rites and ritual in order to avoid communal disaster. Okoye (1995) citing Henderson’s Widowhood: Natural or cultural states that

If a widow fails to go through the prescribed period and motions of mourning, it is possible for her to convey ritual contamination to her children and such ritual impurity would lead to the children forfeiting their inheritance rights to their dead fathers property.

The fears of being a victim of the gods’ makes adherent to religion observe the rules religiously without altering anything from the prescribed rules or laws. Ilogu, (1994:20) echoed thus:

I have not come across any death that Igbos accepts as a natural and biological end. By and large, traditional communities tend to probe each death with causes. No death is accepted on the surface value, so to speak, as being a natural phenomenon. (p.20)
In view of the above assertion, widows are seen as the first suspect as soon as their husband dies. In order to exonerate themselves from the accusation, they subject them to tortures and religious rites stipulated by the tradition of the people.

**Illiteracy**: There is a common saying that “Ignorance is a disease”. This assertion breeds superstition, lack of self-confidence, fear of tomorrow and change and incompetence in handling one’s problems. Okoye, (1995) observed that “an illiterate man is invariably a poor consumer of goods, pawn in the hands of the unscrupulous politicians, and a victim of superstition and magic”. Women were not given the opportunity to go to school hence, they formed the majority of illiterates in Ihechiowa. This was at the instance of the assertion that investing in women education is a waste of resources. Women were seen as second class citizens relegated to the background. Their role was limited to the production of children and assistance in farm work or domestic work. They were not to participate in family meetings nor were they allocated their husband or father’s property during distribution.

Today, following the advent of Christianity and modernism, many women are literate and could fight for their rights. Hence the ill treatment deposited on women and widows are gradually rolling away for modernism and Christianity.

**Poverty**: Relations use the burial rites as a means of enriching themselves especially the poor amongst them. Although poverty is not the main source of this dehumanization practice, it is hoped that if majority of the practitioners of
these practices were rich, the forceful implementation of this practice would have minimized. The rate of poverty of our people suggests why heavy cooking is done during burial ceremony. The hungry ones see it as an opportunity to feed themselves at the expense of the widow. Arhin, (1994:3) painted a picture of poverty in any given society. According to him:

The scale of the funeral is determined by the resources of the bereaved kindred, children, patrkin or matrikin. Everybody wants to be like the Jonases. It is obvious that many widows families have suffered financial bankruptcy at the end of the burial rites of their father or relation especially as the husband family may want the widow and children to empty their deceased brother’s account in order to accord him a befitting burial rite with the aim of protecting the reputation of the family. This suggests that they have little or nothing to assist their late brother’s family. Against this background, it is pertinent to observe that poverty has a big role to play in the inhuman attitudes meted on the widows in Ihechiowa.

**Covetousness:** In his contribution on covetousness, Iwe (2003) holds the view that covetousness is the anxiety to have more than one is entitled to have. The selfish man usually desires unlawfully and culpably what is not his own. Many people are not satisfied with what they have especially in this age where the “get rich” quick syndrome has become the order of the day. People look forward and desire to dispossess other people of their possessions. The Bible says in (1 Tim.6:6) that godliness and contentment is great gain. No wonder the greedy relation always look forward for the death of their wealthy brother or
relation in order to dispossess their wives the property of their late relations. (Luke 12:15) reminds us that one’s life is made up of the abundance possession he or she has.

**Low Concept of Widowhood**: The notion that women were meant to be seen and not to be heard account for the inhuman practice of the society. Women were only recognized for procreation, cooking, domestic responsibilities and above all were acquired as property by the husband.

Women were also seen as weaker, inferior and subordinate sex with no right or authority to challenge the policies of the husband. In the Greco-Roman world especially among the Israelites, women were held in a very low esteem. Men disposed the women in their prayer. For instance, early in the morning, an orthodox Jew prays at the synagogue saying “thank you Yahweh for not making me a woman”.

This automatically may have been responsible for their not been counted during census. In African Tradition Religion (ATR) women were not given opportunity to become priests but could serve in the priest palace. Some Christian churches like Anglican, Roman Catholic etc don’t allow their women the ordination rites as priests. Although they confess that Jesus Christ did not choose women as apostles, however, in the kingdom of God, there is neither Jew, nor Gentile, male or female, slave or free. In the kingdom of God we are all one.
Before the coming of Christianity, women were relegated to the background. For instance, it takes two people to commit adultery yet the woman is disgraced and paraded before the crowd with the aim of stoning her to death. Moreso, the society feels that training of a girl child academically is a waste of resources. Those who managed to defile this tradition of sending the female children to school are ridiculed by the society.

**Female Passivity:** This serves as a powerful weapon designed against widows. “Defeat they say is very dangerous” Passivism entails women’s submissiveness to the oppressive, social, cultural and traditional practices. Passivism debars women from lifting up their fingers to challenge those obnoxious practices. It is often said “heaven helps those who help themselves”. If one does not say I am, nobody will say you are. Women passivism negates any positive action. Women have adopted the posture of surrendering with disgraceful abandonment by the society’s low concept of women.

They have kept mute for a long time watching their fellow women subjected to irrational tortures by various cultural practices. However, it is unfortunate that most of these inhuman practice meted on widows are executed by elderly women in the community in conjunction with dead husband’s family. Female passivity is the most dangerous obstacle to successful cultural change Okoye, (1995) highlights:

For change to take place in the status of women, they must at first instance shake off the social constraint which has conditioned them to believe that humility, submissiveness, passivity etc. are the true mark of feminity. (p.20)
The concept of female passivism as prescribed by Okoye is not from the notion of women as second class citizen.

Buruette and Hoshni (1993) affirm this fact when they muted that:

Unless women take up their fate in their own hands all attempts will ultimately be controlled by political powers which already use both culture and religion as a weapon. (p.30)

**Extended Family System:** The practice of extended family system helped to compound the widow’s ordeal. This system calls for fraternity and unity among the extended family. This system canvases for communal assistance to all the members of the family i.e. “Ikwu”. In this system whatever affects one automatically affects the entire “Ikwu” i.e. the matrilineal family. This accounts for the scrambling of a deceased property at death. The extended family system makes widowhood practice a public concern. This is at the instance of the suffering associated with this act.

**Gender Discrimination:** Gender blindness or discrimination is the inability of the human society to appreciate the fact that men and women have some natural differences which do not have any biological disadvantage and so do not confer any biological superiority to any of the sexes.

It is observed that equality does not exist between male and female because women are marginalized. People especially the illiterates have conditioned their minds to accepting and believing that male children are superior to the female
counterparts and so certain roles are reserved for them in the family to play or perform. Mackenzie (1993:41) attested that:

"Gender is a set of qualities and behaviour expected from a female or male by their society. A person’s gender behaviour is affected by social or cultural expectations. Those expectations come from the idea that certain qualities and roles are natural for men while other qualities and rules are natural for women. (p.41)"

The world is male dominated and ruled by their degrees.. Thank God for the Belgin conference that gave birth to women liberation. Before now the widows were associated with profanity and impurity and are placed under series of cleansing and purification ritual and rites. The male claimed to be superior to the females who are forced to undergo some ordeals during death of their husbands.

4.4 Widowhood in the 21st Century in Ihechiowa:

Presently in Ihechiowa, widowhood practices have taken a new dimension. This is consequent upon the arrival of Christianity and modernism. Eighty five percent of the widowhood practices which were inhuman and dehumanizing have been greeted with new wears and fashion. O. E Chimdi (personal communication, 21st October,2008) asserts that

"Christianity had done a lot in the refining and reforming of the barbaric cultures of our people aimed at bringing womanhood to nothing"

A critical survey and comparative analysis of the past and present widowhood practices will postulate that there have been a lot of variations and changes that existed between the former and the present. For instance, the period of
mourning and grief which were based or centered on display of love by the widow to the husband has been reduced. The widow and her late husband’s relations now decide on the number of months to mourn the late husband.

Sequel to the churches policies on burial rites, widows nowadays in Ihechiowa have converted to mourning their late husband in conformity with the churches stipulation of widowhood rites. It is noteworthy to observe that in Ihechiowa today the issue of wearing rags, sitting on bare floor, early morning cry, eating from local calabash and unnecessary accusations and suspicion, and turning of water pot at a specific period have all been reversed to meet the modern day trend of things.

O’Donovan, (1992) echoed that a major problem in the period before 1960 was that very few efforts were made to relate Christian theology to the African context. Many Africans found that the persecution of western issues in theology did not answer their innermost question, or solve some of the spiritual problems related to African culture. Western method of thinking and learning were often unsuited to African ways.

However, following the introduction of modern embalmment and mortuary system the old way of doing things have given way for modernism. People nowadays keep their dead ones two or three weeks, while the wealthy ones keep theirs for about seven to one year in the mortuary to enable them prepare very well. The tradition of putting on black clothes have been replaced with white or any other colour by the widows especially the born again Christians. Some
widows immediately after the burial of their husband proceed to plaiting of their hairs, showing and dressing decently. The practice of confinement and restriction has been modified especially with the advent of modernism and Christianity. Widows have the freedom to interact with other people in the society, assist in the arrangement of the burial of their late husbands and decide the length of time to mourn the husband. A young widow decried:

Must I undergo all the cultural practices before people will know that I love my husband. I call these pretence and marginalization of womanhood by our people. I know the impact the demise of my husband has caused me. For the man that wears the shoes knows where it pinches. (p.65)

Sequel to the aforementioned, some churches in Ihechiowa like Deeper life Bible Church, Assemblies of God Church, Jehovah’s Witnesses etc have made some decrees that governed the widowhood practices for their church membership. They insisted that their members will not undergo the ancient ordeal and inhuman treatment meted on widows in Ihechiowa, rather, immediately after the man’s death, the widow is free to go about her normal duties.

In a similar development, some main stream churches like the Presbyterian, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches subscribe for a total reformation and modification of widowhood practices in the entire community. Following their advocacy, it is now a canon that any widow who feels she has mourned satisfyingly her late husband is free to go to the church for thanksgiving and
prayers. The widow informs her pastor who plans for a day to shave her hairs after which normal activities resumes.

The custom of locking up of the late man’s house or room and sharing of his property by his relations are now fading away. Reacting on the difficult times experienced by the widows in the traditional Ihechiowa society Schuller (1983) opined that

Tough people who survive the tough times do so because they have chosen to react positively to their predicament. This is not always as easy as it said. (p. 69)

However, it is good to choose the reaction that will ultimately make you proud of yourself as a person. A positive reaction would be the reaction that holds the greatest possibility of making a constructive contribution to the society.

Contributing on modern widowhood practices in Ihechiowa.

O.B. Chinemere, (personal communication, 28 November, 2008) affirmed that:

I was not locked or confined in a place when my husband died. His property was not taken from me. I participated in the burial arrangement of my late husband. My husband’s relations promised to assist me and my children in their educational career.

This change of attitude towards widowhood may have been at the instance of Christianity, modernism and modern philosophy.

Achunike, (2004) remarked:

The age of reason is about the worship of reason inaugurated by philosophers who believed that man was endowed with reason which gave him leverage over other creatures (p.25).
Reason was given credit to philosophers for all the achievements recorded in science and philosophy. So for widows whose husbands are core traditionalist or title holders, their wives could undergo some of the practices with the intention of fulfilling all righteousness.

4.5 Factors Influencing Widowhood Practices in the 21st Century in Ihechiowa

It is said that “there is no smoke without fire” The present development, modification and changes to widowhood practices in Ihechiowa is triggered by many factors which includes:

Education: Ignorance they say is a disease. Education broadens one’s horizon. It is a liberating force which triggers progress. It is a process which is aimed at developing the whole man in order to have dominion over his environment. Tradition had no space for women education. It was regarded as unwise to educate the female child, hence, their world-view was seriously affected.

Thanks to the advent of western education which came to cleanse and change the world view of women and instill confidence in them by exposing them to the realities of life. The acquisition of western education by women nowadays exposed them to their rights which today they are fighting without fear or favour. Today we have women lawyers whose aim is to fight, defend and speak for widows who are marginalized.

Women today compete favourably with their male counterparts of all works of life. For instance, we have women lawyers, doctors, engineers, pilots etc. Following the acquisition of western education, women now know that gender
equality, violence against women etc. are becoming an issue of discussion in every women gathering. Iwe, (1979) echoed that:

Women are no longer sub citizens to be seen and not heard, to be given away in marriage and deployed in spite of their will or choice, and be relegated to the background and stably harnessed to the burdens of domestic cares and routines.(p.23)

Christianity: Ayandele echoed that

To all mission the main objective of education was religious instructions especially of the young children who could easily be converted from the pagan ideas and prejudices of their unyielding parents. (p23)

The missionaries came with the gospel, to Africa with the aim of making Christ known in every nation. They needed to reform, civilize and transform the African culture and replaced it with Christianity and education. Religion itself is a dominant force to transform the whole man, intellect, will, emotion and imaginations. Adopting every strategy within their reach, the early missionaries were able to win converts who abandoned their traditional religion to the new faith.

Christianity is monotheistic. It has a written tradition and the historical order according to scripture and culture. The death of the physical body is not the end of the human being, the soul lives on either in hell or heaven. Christians therefore are encouraged by scripture not to weep in the event of death like people without hope. Christianity teaches her adherents to look forward to dead as a means that ushers them into the New Jerusalem.

In traditional religion women have longer time to mourn their husband. Their life style must agree with their mourning activities whereas, some Christian groups like the Presbyterians allows their members to mourn the dead for about
six to twelve months before coming for memorial and thanksgiving services. The church enjoins people to avoid maltreatment of widows for they are human beings created in the image of God.

Reacting on the influence of Christianity in modern widowhood practices Okoye, (1995) submits that:

Christianity as a religion poses the strongest force to herald potential cultural changes in widowhood practices by condemning most of the traditional widowhood practices; this is making a steady progress in initiating attitudinal change in the society. (p.20)

**Urbanization:** This involves the migration of people from rural to urban cities. The influence of urbanization, modernization, Christianization of the youths and urbanized adults cannot be overemphasized. Women who are oppressed run to the church for security, while the women who could not go to the church runs to the cities for safety and avoidance of these widowhood practices. Moreso, women who were already living in the cities with their late husbands finds it difficult to come down to the village to reside after the demise of their husbands. The exposure they gathered in the cities could not allow them to come home to reside. They consider village life burdensome, hopeless, lonely and helpless without the necessary facilities.

**Vocation or Job Opportunity:** This involves one’s career or profession. The type of job one engages himself or herself before may not allow him or her observes all the widowhood practices as enshrined in the tradition and culture of the community. Some widows are career civil servants or professionals who may not sacrifice their job for culture. With their level of education and
exposure they can question the tradition that works against them. They could take professional and personal decisions. They could be self reliant to cater for their welfare.

**Modernization and Civilization:** Civilization is a state of human social development especially the one with high level of cultural and technological development. It is a way of bringing one out of his primitive or uneducated state while modernism focuses on adapting to modern ideas and practices. Christianity came with civilization to modernize those widowhood practices which are barbaric, adulterous and obsolete.

Iwe, (2002) echoed

> The western world is in possession of a civilization absolutely secular on the surface but deeply spiritual and Christian in its foundations and spirit. Here is a civilization characterized by intellectual maturity, advance science and technology greater appreciation of human dignity, values and fundamental freedoms and progressive socio-economic equilibrium and advancement (p.15).

The advent of Christianity that ushered in civilization with technological and human development is now battling with our culture. People of this generation especially the widows are on the fast lane imbibing and adapting those modern ideas which ignore our rich cultural heritage and values. These have served as motivating factors which propel the present day Christians in Ihechiowa to resist the barbaric treatment meted on widows.

No woman would want to parade herself haggardly in the community or street simply because she lost her husband. No matter how critical the situation might be, she will try to be moderate in her appearances.
Reflecting on the factors that influenced modern widowhood practices, Alberg (1998) holds the view that: Even if we assume that the internal contradiction and process of change do not exist, the Christianization process of Africa fundamentally transform local customs in the ways that delinked their role in regulating behaviour including widowhood practices (p.20).

4.6 Causes of Widowhood:

Widowhood does not occur in a vacuum. Following the various obituary announcements published in the dailies and consequent upon the numerous announcements made or aired in the radio and television. It is deduced that more men die than women, hence the under listed factors could be responsible for widowhood.

**War:** In the traditional times, war was exclusively for men. It was only at rare cases that women partake in warfare. In some cases women were to supply food and water taken during warfare. Damap (2007) attested that

Modern warfare however, does not exclude women as many women fighters planes are visible in the arm forces even though their ratio of participation in war does not equal that of men. (p.14)

In such war times many men normally lose their lives thereby making their wives widows automatically. For instance, the constant communal clashes between villages have claimed many lives. For instance during the communal crisis between Okpo and Ukwa people many men lost their lives thereby flooding the village with widows.
**Life Responsibilities:** From time immemorial, men have been the key players in the sustainability of the family. Men according to most custom and tradition carry the responsibility of providing for the family. In order to make these demands from the nuclear and extended family, the man is faced with a lot of burden which in most cases results to much stress and pressure, depression, heart attack, high blood pressure which may end up in death.

The same is true of a man whose drive for increase, comfortability and pleasures of life has exposed himself to fatal risk. The advent of science and technology and quest for monumental satisfaction has also landed a lot of men to untimely death.

**Accident:** Many people lost their lives in automobile accident especially since the introduction of “Okada” as a means of transport in Nigeria. Most of the taxi drivers are men, most “Okada” riders are men and in most of these accidents recorded, men records the most affected. Most drivers, pilots, captains of ship are men who constitute the larger portion of the passengers in the journey. Adeyemi (2000) observed:

> No fewer than nine thousand persons die yearly in road accident in Nigeria. Men as the bread winner are mostly exposed to the danger of road accident, factory accident, air crashes, fire accident, armed banditry and the like. (p.15)

**Disease and Sickness:** It is assumed that most men die as a result of venerable disease contacted by them. This is because the problem of marital infidelity is higher among men than women. For instance, some traditions debar women from indulging in extra marital affairs. Involvement in such acts is seen as
abomination and may attract a lot of rituals to appease the gods in order to avert the wrath of the ancestors to the family or kindred.

Men have no such restrictions; they are free to move with any woman of their choice. In trying to entangle themselves in such kind of pleasure might attract such diseases like STI, Gonorrhea, Syphilis. Recently HIV/AIDS are easily transmitted to men because of their infidelity and so creates a lot of hazard to their wives. Most at time many men do not survive these disease and sicknesses thereby making their wives widows and victims of such sickness.

Ignorance and Pride: In the traditional Ihechiowa set up, most men were hunters, palm wine tapers and palm tree harvesters etc. Hence, the probability of death through one fatal fall or injury was not contestable.

The victims of this die out of pride and share ignorance. They hardly submit themselves for treatment or medication. For men who always complain one ailment or the other are often considered as weak people.

It is also observed that many men would only visit the hospital when their sickness have reached advanced stage and may not be easy to overcome. This act in most cases are at the instance of pride, show of strength and protection of family dignity. No family would want to be classified as a family with or that sickness or for the man to be tagged a weakling. The pride of trying to be brave finally lands the man to death.

Nature: There is a common notion that women are weaker vessels. This assertion may not be wholly true because medical experts have postulated that women have the tendency to resist hardship or sickness than men. For instance,
more baby boys die at infancy than baby girls. Baby girls tend to have more natural immunity than baby boys. Life expectancy for men on the average is higher than that of women in Africa. The above expectation accounts for the high rate of widows in Ihechiowa than widowers.

**TABLE ONE: The Demographic account of widowhood in Ihechiowa**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>SINGLE</th>
<th>MARRIED</th>
<th>WIDowers</th>
<th>WIDOWS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 – 30</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 45</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46 – 60</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60 AND ABOVE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% PERCENTAGE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Demographic Account of Widowhood**

The total number of people whose age ranges from 16years-60years and above in Ihechiowa is approximately 1200. These includes different categories of people ranging from single, married, widowers, and widows.

1. The total number of people who fall in the age bracket of 16-30years ranges from single to widows, is 520 with an average percentage of:

\[
\frac{520 \times 100}{1200} = 43\% \text{ approximately}
\]

2. The total number of those that fall in the age bracket of 31-45years is 338, therefore the percentage is thus:

\[
\frac{338 \times 100}{1200} = 28\% \text{ approximately}
\]

3. The total number of those that fall in the age bracket of 46-60 is 186, therefore the percentage is thus:

\[
\frac{186 \times 100}{1200} = 16\% \text{ approximately}
\]

4. The total number of those that fall in the age bracket of 60years and above is 156, there fore the percentage is thus:

\[
\frac{156 \times 100}{1200} = 13\% \text{ approximately}
\]

To find the percentage of each group ranging form single to widows.

1. Total number of single from the age 16-60years and above is 312, therefore it percentage is thus:

\[
\frac{312 \times 100}{1200} = 26\% \text{ approximately}
\]
2. Total number of Married from the age of 16-60 years and above is 549, therefore its percentage will be: \( \frac{549 \times 100}{1200} \approx 45\% \) approximately

3. Total number of Widowers from the age of 16-60 years and above is 102, therefore its percentage will be: \( \frac{102 \times 100}{1200} \approx 9\% \) approximately

4. Total number of Widows from the age of 16-60 years and above is 237, therefore its percentage will be: \( \frac{237 \times 100}{1200} \approx 20\% \) approximately

Then the percentage now become 26+45+9+20=100% which is the same as the total percentage. Following the demographic account of widowhood in Ihechiows, it is evident the age bracket that is the number of married women are more while the least number of people are the widowers which suggest that in terms of widowhood occurrences, the married carried the day.

The above statistic is deduced from a personal communication and my personal knowledge of the village Okpo Ihechiowa.

**TABLE TWO: CAUSES OF WIDOWHOOD:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>Accident</th>
<th>PER. %</th>
<th>War</th>
<th>PER. %</th>
<th>Nature</th>
<th>PER. %</th>
<th>Disease (STI,HIV,AID)</th>
<th>PER. %</th>
<th>Social Responsibility</th>
<th>PER. %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>16-30</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>31-45</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>46-60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>60 &amp; Above</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>240</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Causes of Widowhood**

Those that falls between the age of 16-30 years:

a. Accident = \( \frac{100 \times 100}{1200} \) = 8.3%

b. War = \( \frac{80 \times 100}{1200} \) = 6.6%
c. Nature = \( \frac{10 \times 100}{1200} \) = 0.8%

d. Diseases = \( \frac{120 \times 100}{1200} \) = 10%

e. Social Responsibility = \( \frac{55 \times 100}{1200} \) = 4.5%

2. Those that falls between the age of 31-45 years

a. Accident = \( \frac{60 \times 100}{1200} \) = 5%

b. War = \( \frac{60 \times 100}{1200} \) = 9.5%

c. Nature = \( \frac{43 \times 100}{1200} \) = 9.5%

d. Diseases = \( \frac{100 \times 100}{1200} \) = 8.3%

e. Social Responsibility = \( \frac{60 \times 100}{1200} \) = 5%

3. Those that falls between the age of 46-60 years

a. Accident = \( \frac{30 \times 100}{1200} \) = 2.5%

b. War = \( \frac{40 \times 100}{1200} \) = 3.3%

c. Nature = \( \frac{70 \times 100}{1200} \) = 5.8%

d. Diseases = \( \frac{20 \times 100}{1200} \) = 1.6%

e. Social Responsibility = \( \frac{95 \times 100}{1200} \) = 7.9%
4. Those that fall’s between the age of 60 years and above

a. Accident = \( \frac{10 \times 100}{1200} = 0.8\% \)

b. War = \( \frac{5 \times 100}{1200} = 0.4\% \)

c. Nature = \( \frac{118 \times 100}{1200} = 9.8\% \)

d. Disease = \( \frac{0 \times 100}{1200} = 0\% \)

e. Social Responsibility = \( \frac{30 \times 100}{1200} = 2.5\% \)

The above charts represent the seventeen villages in Ihechiowa. From the above tables, it is evident that the age group that is seriously hit by widowhood injury is the age group of 46-60 while the age of 60 and above follows. This analysis is taken from a research conducted in Okpo community, the largest village in Ihechiowa. The source of the above chart is consequent upon personal communication with people interviewed and my personal knowledge of my village Ihechiowa.

In view of the above chart, one may adduce that many families have been affected by this widowhood pandemic due to various kinds of infections especially diseases and war. The coming of HIV/AIDS has also caused a lot of injuries in many homes leaving them powerless because of the demise of the head of the home. This research therefore is aimed at showcasing the causes of widowhood injuries in the society with the aim of provoking the readers of this work to look for ways of overcoming this menace and decrease widowhood in the society.
5.1 The Advent of Presbyterian Church in Ihechiowa

When a place experience development, it has an all round effect on the socio-economic, political and religious lives of the people. Like the process of growth in organism, all societies undergo changes. These changes could lead to development which may either be positive or negative.

The coming of Presbyterian Church in Ihechiowa was greeted with mixed feelings. According to Agu (1998) change is a normal occurrence in a society, for the inner dynamics and inherent tensions of interaction put the society potentially in flux. Change is a process phenomenon that can be evolutionary in which the basic structures are maintained while they allow new and better system to emerge. We live in a time of rapid change and processes where the past is very important in planning for the future, for he who controls the past controls the future. Achunike (1990) observed that “To lack the sense of history is to be even ignorant of one’s purpose of existence and the entire meaning of life. Therefore, the presence of Presbyterian Church in Ihechiowa for the past 85 years cannot be swept under the carpet.

Christianity is one of the major religions in Nigeria. Before the advent of Christianity, Ihechiowa people had the knowledge of God. They had strong belief in God “Obasi di n’elu” and so approached him through ancestral
worship, divinities and spirits etc. Many factors were responsible for their religious development. These include the geographical environment, mountains, rivers, deserts and forests, the change of seasons, the powers of nature like earthquake, thunderstorm, calamites, epidemics, diseases, birth and deaths etc.

In the process of searching for answers to these questions and as well as making life more favourable and safer for habitation, religious ideas arose and took shape. Through the media mentioned above, they related with God by religious objects, and sacred places for worship. They reached him through sacrifices at different occasions. Ihechiowa people also indulged in some obnoxious practices that endangered the human welfare like human sacrifice and burying of people alive.

Daudu et al (2000) asserted that “the social condition and practices like human sacrifices, infertility, widowhood, slave trade, trial by ordeal prevailed in African community”. It was these groups of people that saw the advent of the Missionaries in their midst in the 19th century.

The first missionaries to arrive Ihechiowa were the Church of Scotland Mission, followed by the Roman Catholic Missionaries. When the Mission became obvious and attractive the Pentecostal Churches started coming into the land. Hence, Christianity played and still plays a very important role in the transforming of the people’s lives and environment.
Owing to the successful launching of the Calabar Mission by the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland in 1846 and the favourable reception in Calabar, the first Christian Church was thus established in Calabar. According to Kalu (1996), this initial success paved way for the Missionaries to penetrate the hinterlands of Calabar following the old trade routes. The team that came for the mission consisted of Reverend Hope Masterton Waddell (leader) James Edgerly (Printer and Catechist). Andrew Christom (Carpenter). Edward Miller (Negro teacher and an ex-slave boy) and George (servant).

Kalu (1996) asserts that the team made an abortive attempt to reach Arochukwu with stiff opposition by the Aros who clung tenaciously to the worship of “Ibinaukpabi” (the long Juju), which served as their main source of wealth and fame at that time. The long Juju was a stream surrounded by thick forest. It was worshipped and honoured by the Aros. The Juju was believed to have the capacity of attending and supplying people’s needs and solving their problems. These problems could be that of barrenness, security and protection from enemies and enrichment. Hence, people traveled from far and near from all the parts in Igboland in order to get solutions to their problems.

According to U. Uduma, (personal communication, 8th October, 2008), the juju priest used and applied devices known to the customers. The priests demanded that the persons in question should bring a human being for the sacrificial acts in order to get the needs solved. The customer was stationed in a place to watch on the sacrificial ground. Consequently, if the customer sees the
red blood running down the stream, he or she would have the assurance that his needs have been met or solved. Unfortunately the whole exercise or activities were all deceits.

Kalu (1996) echoed thus:

A new economic order emerged substituting legitimate trade to slave trade and, they are forcing the slaving oligarchy to make severe adjustments. We have noted that some of the Aro endeavoured to continue the old system under invented subterfuges are cloak. For many years they were able to manipulate the North-Eastern Igbo with “oracle”. (p.54)

The oracle took its name from the term used for God, chukwu, by the Ogoja and Ejagham people of the upper Cross River “Ibin Ukpabi”. Those villagers who operated in the upper Cross River area borrowed it, mystified and manipulated the concept on the Ezza and Ikwo primarily and gradually the influence spread.

Consequently, to penetrate Arochukwu means to destroy the long Juju (Ibinaukpabi). With this aim in view the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland persuaded the British Government to bring Arochukwu under its control by invading and destroying the “Long Juju” completely.

Ayandele (1966) opined that in 1901-1902 the decision arrived at by both Sir Ralph Moor, and the Presbyterian Missionaries in 1898 to plant Christianity in Arochukwu was executed.

In the operation of destroying the long Juju, the Presbyterian Mission took an active part, while Dr. Rattray, one of its medical missionaries was chaplain and medical officer to the troops. After the expedition, Dr. T.B. Adams, an official
attached to the army began to preach. He was accompanied by James Johnson and Mary Slessor respectively.

In 1911, Mazi Nwafor Ogwuma from Arochukwu took the Church to Uburu Ihechiowa to his friend Mazi Samuel Okwara. The initial converts were few including Mazi Okwara who later became an Ordained Elder of United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPCS). The few converts attended Church services at Obinkita traveling through fearsome track road from Uburu Ihechiowa to Amuvi. Some of the converts were Johnson Amaeke, Ejei Okereke, Onyemauwa Okoro, Okoro Mgbeke and Samuel Okwara etc.

A local Church building was erected in 1913, a church teacher and an Evangelist Nwankwo and Kalu were stationed in Uburu to teach the new converts. In 1918, the gospel was passed from Uburu to Ndi Okpo Ihechiowa through a relationship between Samuel Okwara and Kalu Bassey of Ndi Okpo. In the same year a church building was erected and more converts were won through the effort of Kalu Bassey who later became an Elder.

In 1919, a stranger by name Omenka Nwankwere introduced the gospel to Achara Ihechiowa and made converts like Kalu Okpurukpu, Ubi Ogbonnaya and Owa Obasi. Elder Nwa Onye from Arochukwu evangelized the neighbouring village of Okpo and Nkporo the same year. Converts from Okpo, Nkporo took the gospel to other parts of Ihechiowa. A school was established in Obinto and other villages in Ihechiowa.
These schools attracted a lot of individuals who were compelled to join the church. It took about seventeen years for the Presbyterian church to make Christ known in Ihechiowa. According to K. A. Origba (personal communication, 5\textsuperscript{th} September, 2008) the whole district was still cloed with impenetrable virgin forest with paths irregularly connecting the clans. This made traveling difficult and risky. However, the presence of the church made life a little easier for the people especially the widows who were seriously maltreated by the natives of the land. The church vehemently condemned the ill-treatments meted on the widows of the community.

5.2 The Reaction of the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria Towards the Plight of Widows in Ihechiowa.

The advent of Presbyterianism in Ihechiowa ushered in civilization and modernization. This had in no small way helped in the development of the cultural and technological knowledge of the people. In the words of Iwe (1987):

The Western world is in possession of a civilization absolutely secular on the surface but deeply spiritual and Christian in its foundations and spirit. Here is a civilization characterized by intellectual maturity, advance science and technology, greater appreciation of human dignity, values and fundamental freedoms and progressive socio-economic equilibrium and advancement. (.p6)

In view of the above understanding, the Presbyterian Church came with her might to fight and salvage the widows who were passing through all kinds of inhuman practices by the Ihechiowa people. These strategies were effected through the following means.
Empowerment:

“No meaningful development in a country can take place without women empowerment.”

Commenting on the above quotation Agha (2000) defines empowerment as the process by which people take control of an action so as to overcome their difficulties and barriers standing on their ways to positive progress.

In trying to empower the widows, the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria took the initiative of empowering the widows economically, socially, politically and otherwise. Parcels of land were bought for the widow to cultivate and plant their crops especially those who were denied the right of farm land. The church also organizes what she calls “charity” or love box. Monies are deposited every Sunday in boxes with the aim of sharing amongst the widows and the physically challenged people in the church.

The proceed from this love box has empowered some widows to commence a small trade to better their living. N. Grace (personal communication, 20th April, 2008) asserts:

We contributed to assist the widows in order to fulfill God’s mandate to us by helping the poor, the widows, and the less privileged amongst us.

Political empowerment: The Church empowers the widows by encouraging them to join politics. In the Church widows who are qualify are given certain position of leadership e.g. Elder or Priest. Women are also encouraged to join social groups in the community. Some of them are holding position of honour in the age grade or social clubs. Agha (2000) asserts:
The capacity of women to participate fully in political programmes should be increased to help them influence the direction of the society and to wipe away the unnecessary obstacle that stand in the way of women’s access to power (p.17).

During the just concluded all Presbyterian Women Conference in Abakaliki on 5\textsuperscript{th}-13\textsuperscript{th} September, 2008, women were sensitized to get more involved in politics. Today in Ihechiowa, most of the enlightened widows have joined one political group or the other. Today Ihechiowa is happy to have produced a strong woman politician in the person of Hon. Mary Ottah.

**Teaching and Seminars:** This is a spiritual dimension of empowerment. Teaching activities like Bible study and seminars are organized for widows to encourage, strengthen and raise their hope that God has not finish with them. There is still hope for the living. Tomorrow is always better than today. U.A. Mgbafor (personal communication, 8\textsuperscript{th} August,2008) asserts:

> We organize these programmes to help us avail widows the opportunity to freely discuss their problems and share feelings. Solution to problems may emerge as we share and discuss our problems.

During these programme older widows share their experiences and counsel the young ones. Widow to widow counseling in some cases are very effective because experiences are always considered, hence, the role of the church over the plight of widowhood in Ihechiowa.

**Education:** In the traditional society, women were not given the required attention to formal education. Education brought by the Presbyterian Church afforded the women especially the widows the opportunity to be educated. Gone are the days when women education were considered unimportant. Education
enhances one with the opportunity to acquire leadership quality, participation, management capabilities skills etc. It is believed that education is a vehicle for developing ones potentials in order to participate effectively in national development. The Church in some cases where a widow cannot train a brilliant child, takes up the responsibility of training such child by granting him/her scholarship. K.N. Mgbokwo (personal communication, 20th May, 2008) asserts:

My two children were trained by the Church and today they vowed to remain Presbyterian and to help orphans in the academic pursuit.

The Presbyterian Church has trained many Evangelists, Missionaries, Prophetesses, Deaconess and Ministers of the gospel of which the researcher is one of them.

**Provision of Job Opportunities:** The Presbyterian Church in responding to the plight of widowhood in Ihechiowa, provided job opportunities for the widows and their children. The Presbyterian Church has employed some widows as sexton and cleaners in the Church. Some widows are employed as Pastors or Evangelist, teachers in the Church’s Nursery and Primary schools. Church members in position of authority are encouraged to assist the widows in gaining employment for them.

**Visitation and Welfare Packages:** Damap (2002) postulates:

Loneliness is one of the greatest weapons used by Satan to attack widows. Whenever one looses a loving husband who had been a real partner and a provider, you feel as if you are decapitated like a body without head. (p.14)

The Presbyterian Church in her effort to alleviate the plight of the widows in Ihechiowa directs her members to visit the widows before and after the burial of
their husbands. This visit is normally greeted with a warm appreciation by the widow. It creates a sense of belonging to them. It makes them feel encouraged, unforgotten, uplifted and encouraged in their Christian race. This visit in most cases have been embellished with gifts in kind or cash. Contributing on the above K.N. Aforji (personal communication, 20th December, 2008) echoed:

We Presbyterians have widow’s service once a year and whatever is realized is shared among the widows of the church. She further stressed that our brethren outside the village once in a while supply us with gifts for distribution to the widows of our church.

Adding her voice P. K. Ada (personal communication, 20th December, 2008) asserts that:

Apart from special services organize for widows, during harvest thanksgiving services, Fathers and Mothering services a percentage of the items brought is shared amongst the widows of the church.

The church does not stop at the aforementioned. She goes ahead in providing food items, cloths, and firewood, fetch water for the old widows, build houses for the very poor widows and provide scholarship to their children. O. E. Orieji (personal communication, 20th December, 2008) highlighted

When I had my twin babies after the death of my husband. The Presbyterian Church visited and encouraged me with plenty of food items and a cash donation to help me survive the plight.

**Defense:**

The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria does not hesitate in defending the widows in Ihechiowa. They vehemently make an open declaration on policies that glorifies God. The church in her wisdom ensures that widows and their children are not disinherited of their property, hence, the church becomes the voice of the widow. In other to avoid much expenses and demand from the
widows for the burial rite, the church decided to enact a burial law that no corpse should last for more than two week in the mortuary. There is also a policy that no Christian should succumb to any ungodly practice designed to humiliate the widow. Should such happens, the widow should inform the Pastor for necessary actions.

On her own, the church encouraged the (NGO) None Governmental Organization to arise and defend the widows. The Presbyterian in her teaching, preaching, and seminars encourages her male members to develop the habit of writing a will before their demise. The young widows are also advised by the church to get married to avoid shame or disgrace.

**Medical Assistance and Care:** The Presbyterian Church of Nigeria do offer medical care or assistance to the widow in Ihechiowa. Medical bills of some widows who are insolvent are normally offset by the church. In some cases the widows are referred to church hospital and are treated free of charge. The Presbyterian has Medical week organized once a year throughout the country. Medical professionals of Presbyterian faith are used to offer free treatment to the communities especially the widows, less privilege, and orphans.
Widows lined up for food and medical attention in the Presbyterian Church of Nigeria Ikwun Parish Ihechiowa.
5.3 Widowhood in the Old Testament

One of the assignments given to the people of God is to care for the widows and the orphans amongst them. Widows in the Old Testament were harshly treated and God was not happy with the treatment allotted to them. People were therefore commanded to take care of the widows. For God loves and sustains the fatherless and the widows. This explain why the church today should take up the responsibility of teaching and correcting the hash traditional practices men placed on widows, hence, Deuteronomy 14:29 teaches that part of the tithe brought into the temple should be given to the widows. Elisha helped a poor widow when she was in danger of selling her two sons as slaves to pay her creditors. The widow of Zarephath was another woman showcased in the Old Testament whom Elijah saved by multiplying her resources.

In the Old Testament, widows were part of God’s family. They found joy in fellowshipping with other people of God. They were part of the worship that went on in the tabernacle and at feast times. The widows were grouped alongside with the Levites who had no inheritance, fatherless, servants and strangers. Neither grain nor grapes were to be completely harvested by the owners of the farm. Some were to be left for the poor and widows. God gave them care and justice.

Hall and Dudley (1983) noted:

For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of Lords, a great God, mighty and terrible. He doth execute judgment for the widows, fatherless and love strangers. (p.33)
Moreso, God defends the widow, cherish and sustain the poor. He punishes those who opposes or oppress them and passes imminent judgment on those who oppress them. The role of Boaz over Ruth demonstrates the place of widows in the mind of a typical Jew. Caring for widows bring one closer to God hence the place of widows in the Old Testament people cannot be over emphasized.

5.4 Widowhood in the New Testament:

The Christian Church inherited from Judaism this special treatment for widows. James (1:27) says “a pure and lasting religion in the sight of God means that we must care for orphans and widows and should refuse the world to corrupt us”. Here the writer of James is telling us unequivocally that to give assistance to the widows and the destitute is a mark of the kind of religion which God is well pleased with. Widows were more recognized in the Christian Church than in the Judaism. In the Christians Church a group of officers were appointed to care for the interest of the widow.

In Mark (12:40), the Bible says “But they shamelessly cheat widows out of these properties and then, to cover up the kind of people they really are, they make long prayers in public. Because of this their punishment will be greater. Jesus condemned and rebuked the Pharisees for oppressing the widows and went on to say that they will be punished for that acts. This is reflected in Luke chapter 18:1-5 in the story of the persistent widow who demanded for Justice from the wicked Judge. One of the earlier goods done by the church of
Jerusalem was the organization of daily distribution of food to the widows in need.

To this effect seven respected men who were filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom were selected to take charge of the business. This was also to avoid discrimination between the Greek speaking widows and that of the Aramaic (Acts 6:1-4). Another mark of kind gesturing shown by one Dorcas is seen in (Acts Chapter 9:39). So, St Peter return with them, and as soon as he arrived, they took him to the upstairs room. They were weeping and showing him the coats and other garments Dorcas had made for them. The instruction Paul gave in the New Testament are good evidence in the Bible. To Timothy, he gave special instruction in regard to the care for widows in Timothy 5:3. The church should care for any widow who has no one else to care for her.

In 1 Timothy 5:14 Paul advised younger widows to marry again, and have children to take care of them in their own homes. This advise and encouragement is evidence in the New Testament teaching of caring for the Spiritual well being of widows.

A critical analysis of Paul teaching on widowhood indicates that he wants widows of sixty and above to be enrolled on regular recipients of the church’s bounty, while the younger widows, though they should not be overlooked, yet they should rather as a rule be expected to look out for some provision on their own in the sense or remarrying in regard to that widows that feel they cannot
marry, can stand firm in the Lord and stay with their children, not to be going about with men for these displease the Lord.

Having gone through the New Testament thought and teaching about widowhood, it has been discovered that the New Testament has special care and concern for the widows over their physical and spiritual needs. So the Jews regard about the widows in the Old Testament are applied in the New Testament.
CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

6.1 Principal Findings: Ihechiowa like any other community migrated from somewhere i.e (Ibeku in Umuahia of Abia State) to her present location. They had a well-established and enriched political, religious, economic, social and educational institution before the advent of Christianity (Presbyterian Church).

From oral interviews and literatures considered, it was discovered that widowhood practices emanated from history, tradition, religion, values, and ideologies which are based on a male dominated world. The society’s perception of women had given rise to a lot of discriminatory laws and crimes against women and therefore are relegated to the background. It was also discovered that widowhood practices do not occur in a vacuum. Many factors were responsible which includes accident, war, life responsibilities, sickness and diseases etc. The ministry of caring for widows had been in existence from time immemorial.

According to my findings it is obvious that at the death of a husband, a widow is subjected to the demands of culture. Their rights are never accorded them instead they are subjected to hardship and unnecessary suffering motivated by factors such as greed, poverty, ignorance, extended family system, religion and gender discrimination etc.
Nevertheless, these subjections and deprivations were not viewed as punishment but as a means of demonstrating the widows innocence, respect, love for the husband and also a means of protecting her children, kindred and the entire community. It was also as a means of granting the deceased a perfect repose in the spirit world.

The advent of the Presbyterian Church in Ihechiowa contributed in no small measure in the changing of the plight of widows in Ihechiowa. This success was at the instance of western education, civilization and modernization which she introduced in other to broaden the people’s world view and importance of human freedom, rights and liberty. In the process of this research, it was observed that most literate Ihechiowa people passed through the Presbyterian school and today occupies prominent position in the society.

However, despite the efforts made by the church, it is observed that a lot is yet to be done by the church and the government in order to fully eradicate the inhuman practices in the society especially in Ihechiowa..

6.2 Contribution of the Work to Knowledge:

Since death is inevitable and a price every human being must pay, it is therefore at this juncture necessary to postulate the following views in other to fight, educate, eradicate and restore hope, focus direction and encouragement to the widows. To bring these views to a reality, this research or dissertation will attempt to showcase or contribute the following to knowledge and posterity.
The society should understand the need or importance of assisting the widows and their children especially when they are faced with the diverse challenges like sexual urge, provision for the children and securing of accommodation especially when their late husband died with a house.

This work will help to create awareness in the society to desist from maltreating the widows since they belong to the low social class of the society.

The widows need to brace up the situation and see it as one of those life experiences and inevitable of life trusting that God will not forsake them.

This work will help to create awareness to both the traditional and spiritual leaders to promulgate laws that could secure and safeguard the widows.

The knowledge of this work will help to sensitize, encourage or motivate men to put their houses in order by writing their wills using their wives or children as next of kin.

One of the contributions of this work is to encourage every woman to have something doing while in her husband’s home since death is inevitable. This will make them cope with the widowhood experiences during the death of their husbands.

This work will motivate and persuade the church to rise and provide or build vocational centers where these widows and their children could acquire some skills to better their living.
God blessed Abraham for him to be a blessing to others. In view of the above, women layers should form (N.G.O) None Governmental Organization to fight and defend the widows especially those who are maltreated. For the Presbyterian Church, this work is aimed at persuading her to borrow a leaf from other denomination like the Roman Catholic Church, Anglican Communion, and Methodist Church etc who have in no small way created or established a lot of programmes aimed at reducing the sufferings of the widows in the society. The Church should be the mouth piece of the society and the hope of the hopeless.

If the above submissions and contributions are considered, the society will be a better place where peace and tranquility will prevail and respect for human right will be seriously honoured.

6.3 Recommendations:

Death is inevitable. Widows will continue to exist within humanity. Death can come anytime it likes. It can come in the house, school, place of work or on the road. The Old and New Testaments Bible emphasized on how we should care for widows. A woman who lost her husband is prone to temptation. She needs some care and protection from the church and society.

Whenever death strikes, women are usually at the receiving end thereby bringing a change of status to them. Tradition and culture reduces the woman to the lowest level by exposing her to all kinds of hazards.
Apart from defending the course of the widows, the church should also demonstrated her concern for widows by empowering them economically, spiritually, politically, socially and religiously to meet their social needs. These gestures could go along way in putting smiles on the faces of widows each time they remember there are people who care for them.

In the light of this study, the researcher has been able to come up with the following recommendations which are based on interview and research findings.

**Advocacy:** Every hand must be on deck to assist the prevention and elimination of violence against the widows. The church, government, community, individuals and local organizations should all arise and be involved in fighting the plight of widowhood. Widows should be taught to exercise their human right which will enable her to participate in the social political and economic life of the community she finds herself.

**Counseling Centre:** The church should organize a counseling and prayer center for widows. Every widow needs a counselor who will counsel and pray for her always. This continuous exercise will help arrest their fears, anxiety and worries of life.

**Intensive Visitation:** It is observed that visitation to widows are occasionally. The church should increase her visitation zeal over the widow. The church should form a hospitality or care team that will visit the widows regularly. This
will in no small measure help to revive the widows from the pains they are going through.

**Introduction of Literacy Class:** Majority of widows in Ihechiowa are illiterate hence, they easily succumbed to any kind of ill-treatment whenever they are being intimidated or victimized. Introduction of literacy class will enable them improve upon their ignorance and be able to know and fight for their rights.

**Advance Preparation:** Every woman is a potential widow since death is inevitable. The woman should therefore advise her husband to write a will or share his property while he is still alive in order to accommodate his family that is still alive after his demise. The widow should learn to engage herself in doing something for a living. This will enable her not to be frustrated at the demise of the husband.

**Written Policy:** The church should liaise with the government and traditional institution to write policies that are aimed at protecting women in general. For instance, emphasis should be placed on girl-child education and women empowerment. This will help the women help themselves at the demise of their husband. A written policy could be made that forbids relations from tampering the properties of their deceased brother. But incase the widow wants to remarry; the properties should be given to the decease children.

**Education and Information:** It is said that education is power. For most of the widowhood practices are centered on ignorance on both the community and the widow herself. If the widows are properly educated and financially empowered,
she will be able to fight for her right and some of these inhuman practices will be a thing of the past.

**Establishment of a Vocation Centre:** The saying “Give someone a fish he will be hungry again, but teach him how to fish, he will fish all his life and feed himself” is true in this area of life. Instead of providing widows with meager amount each time they are in need will not solve their problems. A vocation center could be established in other to train women, children and widows on different trade or vocation of their choices.

Micro-credit loan scheme could be given to them to commence a small business.

There should be concerted efforts led by the pastoral agent to ensure that certain oppressive practices are abolished in the area where he works. This will reduce the suffering of widows and draw them closer to Christ represented by the pastoral agent. The Roman Catholic church has done much by establishing the justice of Development and Peace Commission in all the dioceses of Nigeria. This commission should be used in its full force to ensure the emancipation of widows from the many socio-economic shackles that bind them.

**6.4 Suggestion for Further Research:**

The researcher did not exhaust everything about widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa. Anyone therefore, who wishes to venture or embark on further research on widowhood phenomenon in Ihechiowa could develop, expound or build upon what the researcher had already alone.

The work may be approached or attempted in a way that may seem convenient to the researcher in other to postulate further information for the consumption of the society.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


_______ (2002). What is church history? An African perspective; Nimo: Rex Charles and Patrick


Adeniya, M. E; “Obnoxious laws and practices against widows. Obstacles to its elimination and action for the future”, A paper presented at the Workshop on formulation and management of widows welfare programmes at Local Government Level.


Arochukwu Divisional file: No. AW/PA/65/Volume 1/19


Daves, M. (1962) *Young readers dictionary of the Bible*. New York:


# PERSONAL COMMUNICATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>STATUS</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>PLACE</th>
<th>INTERVIEW</th>
<th>DATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Abari Ota</td>
<td>Title Chief</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Atan</td>
<td>Rev.S.E.Ole</td>
<td>4/4/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Mba Kalu</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Okpo</td>
<td>Rev.S.E.Ole</td>
<td>10/6/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Clement Njoku</td>
<td>Eze</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Ndi Okpo</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/6/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Okoro Njoku</td>
<td>Church Elder</td>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>Obichia</td>
<td></td>
<td>15/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Kalu Ndu</td>
<td>Title Chief</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>Umuchi</td>
<td></td>
<td>20/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Nwankwo Kalu</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Clergy</td>
<td>Achara</td>
<td></td>
<td>25/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Okoro Uche</td>
<td>Pastor</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>Okpo</td>
<td></td>
<td>30/7/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Okoro Elechi</td>
<td>Eze</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>Okpo</td>
<td></td>
<td>30/8/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Okwu Ogboanu</td>
<td>Church Elder</td>
<td>Civil Servant</td>
<td>Okpo</td>
<td></td>
<td>2/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ndu Okwun</td>
<td>Church Elder</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Obinto</td>
<td></td>
<td>5/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Origba Njoku</td>
<td>Title Chief</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Umuzomgbo</td>
<td></td>
<td>5/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Njoku Ogbo</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Retired H/M</td>
<td>Umuye</td>
<td></td>
<td>30/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Akpan Nwachukwu</td>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Uburu</td>
<td></td>
<td>21/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>Nduka Anya</td>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Obichie</td>
<td></td>
<td>30/9/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Aforji Ndu</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Trader</td>
<td>Amamiri</td>
<td></td>
<td>1/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Ekechi Ofondu</td>
<td>Widower</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Obinto</td>
<td></td>
<td>5/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Onu Ogbo</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Achara</td>
<td></td>
<td>18/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>Obasi Nzere</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Amafia</td>
<td></td>
<td>21/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Chimdi Okwun</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Amafia</td>
<td></td>
<td>21/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>Nwadiya Ndu</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Umuchiakuma</td>
<td></td>
<td>30/10/08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Uduma Chinedu</td>
<td>Church Elder</td>
<td>Farmer</td>
<td>Nkporo</td>
<td></td>
<td>8/10/08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>