

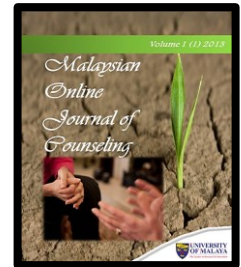
## LONELINESS AND ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES OF ELDERLY WIDOWS AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS IN ONDO STATE: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated loneliness and adjustment strategies as they relate to elderly widows in Ondo State, Nigeria. Four research hypotheses were formulated for the study. A sample of 226 elderly widows was randomly selected from all the local governments in Ondo State. The researchers employed simple random sampling technique to select 226 respondents consisting of 150 Christians, 59 African traditional religionists and 17 Muslims. The 'Loneliness and Adjustment Strategies Questionnaire' (LASQ) was administered to the respondents to collect relevant data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the four null hypotheses generated and where the result of ANOVA showed a significant difference, the Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) statistics was used to determine the group(s) that contributed to the significant difference. The findings showed that there were significant differences in the participants' perception of loneliness and adjustment strategies among elderly widows in Ondo State based on age and religious affiliation. However, significant difference was not found in participants' perception of adjustment strategies employed by elderly widows in Ondo State on the basis of age. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that, where applicable, elderly widows could be considered for political positions, government should encourage the legislature to legislate against torturing and maltreatment of elderly widows; the widows should be facilitated to join support groups and where practicable should be encouraged to re-marry or become more social-media savvy.

*Keywords:* Loneliness, Adjustment Strategies, Elderly Widows, Counselling



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## INTRODUCTION

Loneliness can best be described as unwilling solitude that brings powerful experience of isolation and emptiness. Loneliness is beyond feeling of wanting company or wanting to do something with other people, but a total form of disconnection from meaningful human contact. It could also be an emotional state of emptiness caused by the death of a spouse. Loneliness is a very common experience following break up or loss of long-term relationship or extended absence of a loved one (Loneliness, Effects and Treatment, n.d.).

Nalungwe (2009) reported that loss of spouse is a challenging life changing event and brings negative feelings causing distress to elderly widows. Loneliness in elderly widows is very devastating. It is more than the feeling of wanting company. She further stated that the death of an elderly widow's husband set the stage for being cut off, disconnected and alienated from other people which affect their mental well-being as well. Elderly widows often experience a subjective sense of inner emptiness or hollowness with a feeling of total separation from the world (Alpass & Neville, 2003; Cohen- Mansfield & Parpura-Gill, 2007; Victor, 2000).

Marriages that survive divorce are abruptly dissolved through the death of a spouse. Bereavement results from the loss of a spouse. It is a difficult task to transit to widowhood especially as an elderly widow (<http://what-when-how.com/sociology/widowhood>). There is no doubt that the experience of loneliness among elders widows is so disorganizing that the bridge-collapse caused by the spouses' death is embedded in the following 11 stages of grief that an elderly widow who has reduced quality of life has to undergo: imagination /could- it-be stage, attribution stage, denial stage, reality stage, acceptance of fate stage, bottled-up sorrow stage, decision stage, adjustment stage, retrogression stage, life-goes-on stage, nurturing the scar & sore stage (Akinduyo, 2010; Oniye, 2000).

The aforementioned 11 stages of mourning are the ones the elderly widow would pass through directly and indirectly who has lost a reasonable percentage of her strength to a preferred career, child bearing and child rearing. Bhawana and Kiran (2013) posited that loneliness among elderly widows is an unfortunate and awful experience they may be unable to withstand. Elderly widows experiencing loneliness feel devalued, unloved, rejected, betrayed, chronically exploited, neglected, psychologically abused and abandoned. It was further stated that feeling lonely is not the same as depression but wanting a friend that would be valued and needed for survival.

Adjustment strategies neutralize the venomous effects of loneliness on elderly widows. Development of adjustment strategies depends on the age, religion, cultural background and years of bereavement of the widow (Oniye, 2000). Bandana and Shalini (2015) stated that elderly widows adopt several positive coping mechanisms that are not harmful for them. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, not much has been done on loneliness and adjustment strategies among elderly widows in Ondo State or even in Nigeria. The researchers felt that a vacuum had been left unfilled, therefore prompting them to investigate loneliness and adjustment strategies among elderly widows in Ondo State, Nigeria.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Marriages that do not end in divorce eventually dissolve through the death of a spouse. The stress of bereavement derives largely from the disorganization caused by the loss of the deceased from the social support system of the survivor. The death of a marital partner requires developing

alternative patterns of behavior so that the survivor can maintain satisfactory relations with the family, the kin group, and the community and sustain his or her personal equilibrium. Families exhibit considerable diversity in their attempts to accomplish these transitions. Spousal loss is a challenging and life changing event; it is even worse in elderly people, whether the spouse dies expectedly or unexpectedly. Loneliness among the elderly widows whose social network has already been reduced will affect the elderly widows' quality of life making them more vulnerable to loneliness. Although social support buffers the effects of loneliness such as mental problems, depression, insomnia and hallucinations of the dead, widows have lower levels of social support than married individuals.

Our traditional socialization which emphasized dependence and passivity hinder the elderly widow's attempts to adjust to widowhood and create new life for themselves (Gbenda, 1997). However, as good as this submission is, it should be stated from the onset that the state of widows in this culture is moderately stressful. Previous researchers such as Osarenren (1998) studied the status of widows among the Igbos of Eastern Nigeria. Olusakin (1998) worked on gender inequality and the stress level, support systems and adjustment strategies among widows in Nigeria. Oniye (2000) studied adjustment strategies of Nigerian widows undergoing widowhood stress. These earlier researches focused on different variables, respondents and locale. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has focused on loneliness and adjustment strategies of elderly widows as perceived by participants in Ondo State, Nigeria; thereby leaving a research gap to be filled.

## **RESEARCH HYPOTHESES**

This research was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of age.
2. There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of age.
3. There is no significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation.
4. There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey method. According to Akindutire (2009), descriptive survey method involves collecting data in order to test hypotheses or to answer research questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study.

### ***Sampling Procedures***

Participants were randomly selected from the target population. Some 226 elderly widows were randomly selected in Ondo State.

## *Measures (Instruments)*

A researchers-structured questionnaire meant to elicit information on loneliness and adjustment strategies among elderly widows was used to collect participant data. The instrument has three sections: A, B and C. Section A elicits personal details of the respondents, section B consist of 20 items on perception of participants about loneliness while section C focused on adjustment strategies employed by elderly widows in Ondo State. The 4 point Likert-type response format was adopted for use in sections B and C.

In order to ascertain the validity of the instrument, the draft of the questionnaire was given to five lecturers in the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin for vetting and advice. Necessary amendments were made following their suggestions.

The instrument reliability was ascertained by using the test re-test reliability method. The instrument was administered to a group of twenty (20) elderly widows in Ondo, who were not part of the actual study and after an interval of four weeks the same instrument was re-administered to the same group. The two sets of scores were correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient formula. The correlation co-efficient obtained was .74 at .05 alpha level of significance. Based on this, the instrument was adjudged reliable for the study.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to analyze the demographic data of the participants. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tool was used to test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance. Table 1 shows the number of participants in accordance with the variables.

**Table 1:** Frequency Counts and Percentages Distribution of Respondents

<b>Item grouping</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>AGE:</b>		
60-64 years	58	25.7
65-69 years	152	67.3
70 years and above	16	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>RELIGION:</b>		
African traditional Religion	59	26.1
Christianity	150	66.4
Islam	17	7.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## **HYPOTHESES TESTING**

**Hypothesis One:** *There is no significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of age.*

**Table 2:** Result of Analysis Of Variance (ANOVA) Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing Perceived Loneliness Among Elderly Widows on the Basis of Age

Sources	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	Cal <i>F</i> - value	Critical <i>F</i> -value
Between groups	2	725.200	362.600		
Within groups	223	17545.915	78.681	4.608*	3.00
Total	225	18271.115			

Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 2 shows the result obtained from analysis of the data which indicates that the calculated *F*-ratio of 4.608 was greater than the critical *F*-ratio of 3.00. Thus on the basis of this result, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows as perceived by participants on the basis of age was rejected. Duncan Multiple Range Test was used to detect the magnitude and direction of the difference.

**Table 3:** Duncan Multiple Range Test Showing Differences in Perceived Loneliness Among Elderly Widows Based on Age

Duncan's grouping	Mean	No.	Group	Age group
A	52.1875	16	3	70 years and above
B	45.3882	152	2	65-69 years
C	44.8966	58	1	60-64 years

In Table 3, the Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) results showed that Group 3 with a mean score of 52.1875 differed significantly from groups 2 and 1 with mean scores of 45.3882 and 44.8966 respectively. Group 1 with a mean score of 44.897 differed significantly from group 3 with a mean score of 52.188 thus it can be deduced that the significant difference noted in the ANOVA result in table 3 was a result of the fact that group 3 (70 years and above) and 1 (60-64 years) differed significantly from each other. This hypothesis was rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:** *There is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows as perceived by Participants on the basis of age*

**Table 4:** Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing participants' perception on Adjustment Strategies of Elderly Widows on the Basis of Age

Sources	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	Cal <i>F</i> - value	Critical <i>F</i> -value
Between groups	2	268.205	134.103		
Within groups	223	19274.078	86.431	1.552	3.00
Total	225	19542.283			

Table 4 shows that the calculated  $F$ -ratio of 1.552 was less than the critical  $F$ -ratio of 3.00 at the .05 level of significance. Therefore, the difference was not significant. This indicates that the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of the elderly widows to loneliness as perceived by participants on the basis of age was not rejected.

**Hypothesis Three:** *There is no significant difference in elderly widows' loneliness in Ondo state as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation.*

**Table 5:** Analysis of Variance Showing Perceived Loneliness Among Elderly Widows Based on Religious Affiliation

Sources	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	Cal $F$ - value	Critical $F$ -value
Between groups	2	1095.900	547.950	7.114*	3.00
Within groups	223	17175.215	77.019		
Total	225	18271.115			

\*Significant at .05 alpha level

Table 5 shows that there is significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation ( $F_{2, 223}=7.114, p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, hypothesis 3 was rejected. Since there is a significant difference in the result using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) the researchers proceed to the usage of Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) as a post-hoc test to determine the religious group(s) that was responsible for the significant difference noted in ANOVA result in Table 5.

**Table 6:** Duncan Multiple Range Test Showing Difference in Perceived Loneliness Among Elderly Widows Based on Religious Affiliation

Duncan's grouping	Mean	No	Group	Religion Affiliation
A	53.2353	17	3	Islam
B	46.0169	59	1	African traditional Religion
C	44.0169	150	2	Christianity

Table 6 indicate that groups 3 and 2 differed significantly from each other. It can be deduced that the significant difference noted in the ANOVA result in Table 5 was because groups 3 and 2 differed from each other significantly. It is worth noting to say elderly widows from Islamic religious affiliation are less lonely compared to widows from other religious affiliation.

**Hypothesis Four:** *There is no significant difference in the elderly widows' adjustment strategies as perceived by participants on the Basis of Religious Affiliation*

**Table7:** Analysis of Variance showing participants perception on Adjustment Strategies of Elderly Widows on the Basis of Religious Affiliation

Sources	DF	Sum of squares	Mean square	Cal F- value	Critical F-value
Between groups	2	843.414	421.707		
Within groups	223	18698.870	83.851	5.029*	3.00
Total	225	19542.283			

\*Significant at .05 alpha level

From Table 7, it is clear that there is significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation ( $F_{2, 223} = 5.029$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the elderly widows' adjustment strategies as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation was rejected. Duncan Multiple Range Test was used to detect the direction of the differences as presented below.

**Table 8:** Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) Showing Differences in the Perceived Adjustment Strategies of Elderly Widows in Ondo State on the Basis of Religious Affiliation.

Duncan's grouping	Mean	No.	Group	Religion Affiliation
A	49.0000	17	3	Islam
B	47.9153	59	1	African traditional Religion
C	44.1067	150	2	Christianity

Table 8 showed that groups 3 and 2 differed significantly from one another causing hypothesis 4 to be rejected. This implies that elderly widows from Islamic religious affiliation have the highest level of adjustment strategies compared to widows from Christianity and African Tradition Religion affiliations.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of demographic data of elderly widows (participants) in Ondo State based on age and religious affiliation. The first null hypothesis indicated that there is significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows as perceived by participants on the basis of age. The result of this finding may be as a result of different age group of participants, so elderly widows' perception of loneliness might be different too. This corroborates the finding of Nalungwe (2009) that loneliness is more common among elderly with long history and depth of relationship before the husband's death thereby affecting the widow's psychological age and emotion need.

The second null hypothesis test shows there was no significant difference among elderly widows in their adjustment strategies to loneliness in Ondo state Nigeria on the basis of age. This contradicts the finding of Oniye (2000) who emphasized that the development of useful adjustment strategies is dependent on religious background, duration of widowhood, age and so forth. It is worth saying here that elderly widows of different age groups may be compelled by the universality of grieving nature of bereavement to use the same adjustment strategies to overcome the biting effects of loneliness.



The third null hypothesis test result indicated a significant difference in the elderly widows' loneliness in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation. The major reason for this might be traced to differences in religious beliefs, doctrines, ideology and general perception of life. This corroborates the findings of Akinduyo (2010) that Christian widows belief system was that they were never alone during widowhood period because of the promise of God to send another Helper and Holy Spirit to be with them till eternity.

Similarly, the fourth null hypothesis shows that there was a significant difference in the elderly widows' adjustment strategies in Ondo state as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation. The plausible reason for this is that each religion has divine activities laid down to keep elderly widows sheltered from loneliness. Though this is so much dependent on how greatly elderly widows are inclined to their religion. Some of these activities include offering of sacrifice to the departed soul, getting involved in 'remarriage,' praise and worship, joining various religious groups, praying fervently, teaching children, founding Non-Governmental Group for widows, alms giving just to mention but a few to keep loneliness at a bay from graduating to depression which can adversely affect the longevity and mental well-being of an elderly widow.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings of the study and the discussion, the following conclusions were drawn: Elderly widows are left alone after few days of bereavement to move on with life alone. Most of the elderly widows are socially cut off from society and culturally devalued. One can equally say that elderly widows are not left with any alternative than to look for adjustment strategies such as becoming more religious inclined, rearing animals, petty trading, alms begging, offering sacrifice to the soul of the dead husband, participating in support groups, playing politics, and so forth, to cope with bereavement.

The findings also show that there was a significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of age. There was no significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows in Ondo- State as perceived by participants on the basis of age. There was a significant difference in the loneliness of elderly widows in Ondo state as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation. There was a significant difference in the adjustment strategies of elderly widows Ondo State as perceived by participants on the basis of religious affiliation.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING**

From the findings, elderly widows experience loneliness irrespective of age and religious affiliation. Professional counsellors should assist these "forgotten ones" to alleviate all form of loneliness that could graduate to depression causing adverse effects on their mental health and the overall well-being of the society of which they are a significant stakeholder.

Secondly, the development of adjustment strategies by elderly widows is a function of their age group and religious affiliation. The implication is that professional counsellors need to pay attention to the relative role of these variables in the overall life experience of elderly widows. This is imperative if the counsellors are to efficiently rise to the need of their elderly clients. This is underscored by the realization that no one ever prepares or desires to be a widow at any point in time notwithstanding the age or religious affiliation. Counsellors thus have a duty to sensitize other stakeholders, religious leaders and other opinion leaders on the role of these variables on the



loneliness and adjustment strategies of elderly widows so that these variables receive due cognizance when assistance is given to elderly widows for adjusting to loneliness and coping with bereavement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is hereby recommended that couples be encouraged to join and play an active part in the activities of their age-groups as early as possible in their marriage (long before the death of their partner) for them to benefit from the activities during widowhood and its attendant loneliness. It is recommended also that couples be encouraged to play an active part in the activities of their religious-groups as early as possible in their marriage for them to benefit from its activities during widowhood and its attendant loneliness.

Elderly widows are full of experience. They should be given opportunities to hold political positions as much as their qualification and experience would allow. Elderly widows should be encouraged to participate actively in the community activities as this will keep them busy and enable them to quickly adjust to any circumstance they are facing.

In this era of internet and technology, elderly widows should be encouraged to become more social-media inclined to enable them to communicate more easily with their immediate and distant family separated from them by daily struggle for survival. Each elderly widow should join at least one widow support group for assistance.

Government at all tiers should legislate against neglect and torturing of elderly widows in Nigeria. Professional counsellors should be empowered to provide post-bereavement training and rehabilitation counselling to all widows and especially elderly widows as a way of facilitating their optimal adjustment to daily living after bereavement.

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