

Perceived Ideological conflicts between widowhood practices among the Igbo ethnic group and human rights in Nigeria: A challenge to the religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life

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Received 4th June 2024; Accepted 21st July 2024

ABSTRACT: The ideological conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights in Nigeria pose significant challenges to religious understandings of the dignity and sanctity of human life. This study aims to examine the traditional widowhood practices among the Igbo ethnic group, analyse religious interpretations influencing these practices, and evaluate the impact of legal frameworks on the protection of widows' rights. Additionally, the study explores the effects of social stigma and marginalisation on widows' access to resources and recognition within the Igbo community. Utilising a multidisciplinary research methodology, the study integrates theological analysis and sociocultural inquiry. A total of 35 respondents were selected through purposive sampling, including 10 widows, 8 religious leaders, 7 legal experts, and 10 human rights activists, with 18 women and 17 men participating. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Literature review reveals that cultural norms and religious interpretations often clash with human rights principles, perpetuating discrimination and inequality against widows. The study site is Anambra State, Nigeria, known for its rich cultural traditions and diverse religious practices. The findings highlight the complex landscape where communal expectations conflict with individual rights, emphasising the need for collaborative efforts involving religious leaders, policymakers, civil society organisations, and community members. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding the systemic injustices faced by widows and promoting gender equality within the Nigerian context. By addressing these ideological conflicts, the research advocates for a society where widows are accorded respect, protection, and recognition of their inherent dignity and worth, transcending cultural or religious barriers. This study informs policy interventions, advocacy efforts, and community initiatives aimed at fostering a more inclusive understanding of human dignity and sanctity within Nigerian society.

Keywords: Conflicts, dignity, human, ideological, life, practices, rights, perceived, religious, sanctity, understanding, widowhood.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's diverse cultural and religious landscapes influence many traditional practices, including widowhood customs, which vary widely among different ethnic groups. These practices, deeply rooted in cultural beliefs, often include seclusion, property deprivation, and ritual

observances. For instance, Igbo widows may undergo intense mourning rituals to honour their deceased spouses (Akomolafe, 2016). While intended to uphold cultural heritage, these practices frequently clash with contemporary human rights principles that emphasize individual

dignity and autonomy.

Religious interpretations further complicate this issue. Both Christianity and Islam, alongside indigenous beliefs, play significant roles in shaping societal attitudes towards widows. Sometimes, religious doctrines justify discriminatory practices, perpetuating gender inequality and undermining human rights (Adebowale and Oluremi, 2019). The intersection of cultural and religious norms thus presents substantial challenges to achieving a universally accepted standard of human dignity and sanctity.

The ideological conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights in Nigeria challenge the dignity and sanctity of human life. Cultural traditions, religious interpretations, legal frameworks, and social stigma collectively influence widows' experiences and perceptions of their dignity. However, the specific impacts of these factors remain underexplored.

Exploring how cultural and traditional beliefs shape perceptions of dignity and sanctity involves examining the interplay between cultural norms and religious doctrines (Nwagbara, 2017). Additionally, understanding how religious practices uphold or compromise widows' dignity requires analyzing religious teachings and their applications (Fayomi, 2016).

Assessing the impact of legal frameworks and enforcement on widowhood practices involves evaluating the protection of widows' rights and the effectiveness of these provisions (Olasupo, 2018). Furthermore, understanding the effects of social stigma and marginalization on widows' access to rights highlights the multifaceted challenges they face.

Addressing these ideological conflicts requires collaborative efforts from religious leaders, policymakers, civil society organizations, and community members. Promoting dialogue and engagement among these stakeholders can help challenge harmful practices, advance gender equality, and foster a more inclusive understanding of human dignity. The ultimate goal is to ensure that widows receive respect, protection, and recognition of their inherent worth, irrespective of cultural or religious beliefs.

By investigating these issues, this study aims to inform policy interventions, advocacy efforts, and community initiatives to promote gender equality and human rights in Nigeria. Through empirical analysis and critical inquiry, the research seeks to illuminate the complex dynamics between widowhood practices, human rights, and societal understandings, thereby contributing to efforts to address systemic injustices and promote dignity and equality for widows.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ideological conflicts

The concept of ideological conflicts has been a focal point

in various fields of study, including political science, sociology, psychology, and cultural studies. Ideological conflicts arise from differences in beliefs, values, and worldviews among individuals or groups within a society. According to Kriesberg (2014), ideological conflicts often emerge due to contrasting ideologies, political systems, or religious beliefs, leading to tension, discord, and sometimes violence. These conflicts can manifest on various scales, from interpersonal disputes to large-scale social movements and even international conflicts. They are driven by the desire to preserve or promote certain ideologies while challenging or opposing others.

One of the key features of ideological conflicts is the clash of competing narratives and worldviews. As stated by Jost *et al.* (2003), individuals and groups often engage in ideological conflicts to defend their beliefs and identities, viewing alternative perspectives as threats to their own. This defensive posture can intensify ideological divisions and perpetuate conflict dynamics, making resolution challenging. Moreover, ideological conflicts are often characterised by deep-rooted historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors that contribute to their complexity and longevity.

The dynamics of ideological conflicts are further complicated by the role of power dynamics and social structures. According to Deutsch (2006), ideological conflicts are not merely about differences in opinions but are deeply intertwined with issues of power, privilege, and inequality. Dominant groups may seek to maintain their ideological hegemony, while marginalised groups strive to challenge and redefine existing ideological paradigms. This power struggle can fuel tensions and exacerbate divisions within societies, making ideological conflicts resistant to easy resolution.

In conclusion, understanding the concept of ideological conflicts requires an examination of the multifaceted nature of belief systems, power dynamics, and social structures that shape human interactions and societal relations. Navigating these complex dynamics is crucial for fostering mutual understanding, promoting social cohesion, and resolving conflicts constructively.

Widowhood practices

Widowhood practices are customs, rituals, and social norms that govern the treatment of women upon the death of their husbands. These practices vary widely across cultures and societies, but in Nigeria, they often involve strict mourning rituals and behavioural norms that widows are expected to adhere to, such as wearing black clothing, abstaining from certain social activities, and shaving their hair (Nwoye, 2011).

These practices can have severe health and social implications for widows, including depression, anxiety, and economic deprivation (Umeh *et al.*, 2021). The persistence of harmful widowhood practices can be attributed to a

complex interplay of sociocultural, economic, and political factors, including patriarchal norms and gender inequalities, religious and cultural interpretations, economic vulnerability, and weak legal frameworks and enforcement (Akomolafe, 2016; Adebowale and Oluremi, 2019).

In recent decades, there have been growing global efforts to address harmful widowhood practices and promote the rights and dignity of widows. These efforts have involved legislative reforms, advocacy and awareness-raising, empowerment and economic support, and interfaith and community dialogues (Nwagbara, 2017). Widowhood practices among the Igbo people often involve strict mourning rituals and behavioural norms that widows are expected to adhere to, such as wearing black clothing, abstaining from certain social activities, and shaving their hair (Nwoye, 2011). These practices can last for extended periods, sometimes up to a year, during which widows face significant social and economic restrictions (Nwoye, 2011).

However, these widowhood practices frequently clash with human rights principles that emphasise the inherent dignity and autonomy of the individual (Okafor, 2019). For example, the expectation that Igbo widows must participate in rituals that involve physical harm, such as the shaving of hair, can be seen as a violation of their bodily integrity and right to self-determination (Okafor, 2019).

The tension between Igbo cultural norms and human rights principles is further exacerbated by the role of religious interpretations and institutions. Some religious leaders and communities in Nigeria have been known to justify or even actively participate in the enforcement of discriminatory widowhood practices, citing religious doctrines or traditions (Kumuyi, 2016).

Human rights in Nigeria

Human rights in Nigeria represent a complex landscape shaped by historical, political, and socio-cultural factors. Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, grapples with the challenge of upholding human rights standards amidst diverse social contexts and governance structures (Okonkwo, 2018). The concept of human rights in Nigeria is deeply rooted in international treaties and conventions, particularly the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) as promulgated in 1948 by the United Nations, as well as domestic legal frameworks such as the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Chapter 4), which guarantees fundamental rights and freedoms to all citizens. However, the practical realization of these rights faces significant challenges due to systemic issues such as corruption, weak rule of law, and political instability (Okafor, 2019).

Despite constitutional guarantees and international obligations, Nigeria has faced persistent human rights violations across various domains. Issues such as extrajudicial killings, police brutality, arbitrary detention, and restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly

remain prevalent (Adedokun, 2020). The government's response to dissent and activism has often been characterized by repression and crackdowns, leading to a chilling effect on civil society and the media. The End SARS 2020 is a good case in point (the crackdown at Lekki Toll Gate speaks volumes). Furthermore, marginalized groups such as women, children, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ individuals continue to face discrimination and exclusion, highlighting the gap between legal provisions and lived realities (Okeke, 2021).

Efforts to promote and protect human rights in Nigeria have been met with both progress and setbacks. Civil society organizations, human rights activists, and legal advocates play a crucial role in holding the government accountable and advocating for reforms (Adebile, 2017). International scrutiny and pressure from human rights bodies and organizations also serve as important mechanisms for addressing human rights violations in Nigeria. However, entrenched political interests, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic disparities pose formidable obstacles to achieving meaningful human rights advancement (Olawale, 2020). The concept of human rights in Nigeria thus remains a dynamic and contested terrain, requiring sustained engagement and concerted action from both domestic and international stakeholders to realize the full promise of human dignity and equality for all citizens.

The intersection of ideological conflicts, widowhood practices, and human rights in Nigeria

Ideological conflicts in Nigeria have often intersected with traditional practices, particularly regarding widowhood, posing significant challenges to human rights in the country. Nigeria's diverse population comprising various ethnic and religious groups, has contributed to a complex socio-cultural landscape where ideological differences often lead to tensions and conflicts (Ojo, 2018). These conflicts, rooted in historical, religious, and political contexts, often exacerbate challenges faced by vulnerable groups, including widows. The clashes between different ideological factions perpetuate harmful traditional widowhood practices, undermining the human rights of widows and impeding efforts toward gender equality and social justice (Adewuyi and Olasupo, 2020).

Widowhood practices in Nigeria are deeply entrenched in cultural norms and beliefs, which vary significantly across ethnic groups and regions. Despite efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights, many widows still face discrimination, social stigma, and economic marginalization following the death of their spouses (Oyekanmi & Babatunde, 2019). Traditional customs often dictate restrictive mourning periods, property inheritance laws, and rituals that perpetuate the vulnerability of widows and limit their autonomy. The clash between these entrenched practices and evolving human

rights norms underscore the complex nature of ideological conflicts in Nigeria's socio-cultural landscape (Adewuyi & Olasupo, 2020).

Addressing the intersection of ideological conflicts, widowhood practices, and human rights in Nigeria requires multifaceted approaches that engage local communities, religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations. Efforts to promote human rights and gender equality must be contextualized within Nigeria's diverse cultural and religious contexts to effectively challenge harmful practices and promote social justice (Ojo, 2018). Policy interventions, legal reforms, and educational campaigns aimed at challenging discriminatory beliefs and practices are essential to advancing the rights and dignity of widows in Nigeria. Moreover, fostering interfaith dialogue and promoting tolerance can help mitigate ideological tensions that often exacerbate human rights violations in the country (Oyekanmi & Babatunde, 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a multidisciplinary research methodology integrating theological analysis and sociocultural inquiry to examine the perceived ideological conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights among the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria, and their challenge to the dignity and sanctity of human life.

The study uses a survey research design, utilizing 5-point Likert scales for questionnaire analysis. The specific population for this study consists of widows, religious leaders, legal experts, and human rights activists within the Igbo community. The study site is Anambra State, a region within Nigeria known for its rich cultural traditions and diverse religious practices.

The sampling method employed was purposive sampling. This method was chosen to select participants who possess in-depth knowledge, experiences, or perspectives pertinent to the conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights. A total of 35 respondents were selected, comprising:

- 10 widows (6 women, 4 men who have insight into widowhood practices)
- 8 religious leaders (4 women, 4 men)
- 7 legal experts (3 women, 4 men)
- 10 human rights activists (5 women, 5 men)

Data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires were distributed to all 35 respondents, designed to capture quantitative data on their perspectives regarding widowhood practices and human rights. Interviews were conducted with a subset of respondents from each category to gather qualitative insights and a deeper understanding of their views.

Data analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using mean scores and standard deviations to establish the perspectives of the respondents based on the variables in the specific objectives. For the qualitative data, thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes and patterns in the responses from the interviews. This mixed-methods approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the ideological conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights, providing a nuanced view of the challenges to the dignity and sanctity of human life within the Igbo community.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings presented in Table 1 shed light on the complex ideological conflicts between cultural and traditional beliefs and religious understandings of the dignity and sanctity of human life, particularly as they relate to widowhood practices in Nigeria. The high levels of agreement among the participants on the various survey items underscore the pervasive nature of these conflicts and the need for a comprehensive approach to address them.

Firstly, the strong consensus (mean: 4.77) that beliefs prioritising communal well-being over individual rights may clash with religious views emphasising the inherent sanctity of each human life highlights the tension between collectivist cultural norms and the principles of individual autonomy and human rights. This aligns with the concerns raised by (Robinson and White, 2021) regarding the dilemma of balancing communal expectations and individual freedoms, which is particularly pronounced in the context of widowhood practices where the rights and dignity of widows are often subordinated to communal interests.

Secondly, the participants' high level of agreement (mean: 4.8) that practices such as honour killings or ritual mutilations challenge religious understandings of dignity and respect for life corroborates the findings of (Akhtar, 2019), who has emphasised how such practices directly contradict both human rights principles and the core teachings of major religions. This underscores the need for religious leaders and communities to critically examine and condemn any cultural or traditional practices that undermine the inherent worth and sanctity of human life.

Furthermore, the concerns expressed by the participants regarding traditional beliefs that assign different values to individuals based on their gender, social status, or caste system resonate with the research by (Oyebode *et al.*, 2018) on the widespread discrimination and marginalisation faced by widows in Nigeria. This highlights the imperative to address the systemic inequalities and biases

Table 1. Mean summary of rated responses on the effect of cultural and traditional beliefs on religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life.

SN	Items	SA(5)	A(4)	D(3)	SD(2)	U(1)	Total	Mean
1	Beliefs that prioritize communal well-being over individual rights may clash with religious views that emphasise the inherent sanctity of each human life.	27 (135)	8 (32)	-	-	-	35 (167)	4.77
2	Practices like honor killings or ritual mutilations challenge religious understandings of dignity and respect for life.	28 (140)	7 (28)	-	-	-	35 (168)	4.8
3	Traditional beliefs that assign different values to individuals based on their gender, social status, or caste system can undermine the principle of equality and the inherent dignity of every person, which is often emphasised in religious teachings.	17 (85)	10 (40)	4 (12)	4 (8)	-	35 (145)	4.14

Source: Authors computation.

Table 2. Mean summary of rated responses on the effect of religious interpretations and practices on religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life.

SN	Items	SA (5)	A (4)	D (3)	SD (2)	U (1)	Total	Mean
1	Literal interpretations of religious texts may lead to practices or beliefs that seem to devalue certain individuals or groups based on factors such as gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation	25 (125)	9 (36)	-	1 (2)	-	35 (163)	4.66
2	Religious institutions have sometimes been involved in practices that contradict principles of human dignity and sanctity, such as religiously discrimination or persecution.	20 (100)	12 (48)	2 (6)	-	1 (1)	35 (155)	4.43
3	Some religious communities may prioritise personal salvation or spiritual pursuits at the expense of social responsibility and engagement with issues affecting human dignity and sanctity	18 (90)	13 (52)	1 (3)	3 (3)	-	35 (148)	4.23

Source: Authors computation.

embedded within cultural and social structures and to promote the principle of equality and the inherent dignity of every person, as emphasised in many religious teachings.

The findings presented in this study underscore the urgent need for collaborative efforts involving religious leaders, policymakers, civil society organisations, and community members to navigate the complexities of cultural traditions and religious teachings regarding the dignity and sanctity of human life. By fostering open dialogues, raising awareness, and advocating for the protection of human rights, particularly for marginalised groups like widows, these stakeholders can work towards reconciling the ideological conflicts and promoting a more inclusive and equitable understanding of human dignity within Nigerian society.

The findings presented in Table 2 provide a nuanced examination of how religious interpretations and practices shape perceptions of human dignity and sanctity, highlighting the ideological clashes inherent in widowhood practices and human rights discourse in Nigeria.

Participants express significant concern (mean 4.66) regarding the adverse effects of literal interpretations of religious texts, echoing findings by Akintola and Ogunlade (2017) who emphasise how rigid adherence to such interpretations perpetuates discriminatory practices against marginalised groups like widows, based on gender, ethnicity, or religious affiliation. This consensus underscores the pervasive impact of religious interpretations on societal attitudes towards marginalised widows.

Furthermore, participants acknowledge (mean 4.43) instances where religious institutions themselves perpetuate discrimination or persecution, reinforcing calls for critical examination of institutional actions affecting widow rights, as suggested by existing literature (Kumuyi, 2016). Moreover, the recognition (mean 4.23) of a tendency within religious communities to prioritise personal salvation over societal responsibilities resonates with broader discussions on the challenges faced by rights advocacy groups in religious contexts (Johnson, 2018). These findings highlight the intricate dynamics between

Table 3. Mean summary of rated responses on the effect of legal framework and enforcement on religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life.

SN	Items	SA(5)	A(4)	D(3)	SD(2)	U(1)	Total	Mean
1	Religious individuals or institutions may find themselves in a position where they are legally obligated to participate in or facilitate activities that they believe violate their religious principles.	16 (80)	9 (36)	5 (15)	4 (8)	1 (1)	35 (140)	4.0
2	Legal protections for civil rights and religious freedom sometimes clash when religious beliefs or practices come into conflict with laws intended to prevent discrimination or promote equality	17 (85)	16 (64)	1 (3)	1 (2)	-	35 (154)	4.4
3	Legal systems that permit capital punishment may be viewed as conflicting with religious teachings that emphasise the value of every human life	11 (55)	17 (68)	2 (6)	4 (8)	1 (1)	35 (138)	3.94

Source: Authors Computation.

religious beliefs, institutional practices, and societal attitudes towards human dignity and rights, urging a re-evaluation of religious teachings and institutional policies to foster greater equality and justice for widows in Nigeria, aligning with broader principles of human rights advocacy and social justice.

The findings presented in Table 3 underscore the profound dilemmas faced by religious individuals and institutions when legal obligations clash with religious beliefs, particularly evident in the context of widowhood practices and human rights in Nigeria. As researchers, we find this tension deeply concerning, as it highlights the complex challenges that arise when traditional cultural and religious norms collide with modern legal frameworks intended to protect individual rights and promote equality.

Our analysis of the data reveals a high mean score of 4.4 regarding the clash between legal protections for civil rights and religious freedom. This finding echoes existing literature that we have extensively reviewed, emphasizing the inherent tension between upholding individual liberties and respecting religious autonomy within legal systems (Jacobsen & Bergeijk, 2016; Greenawalt, 2018). We argue that navigating this delicate balance is crucial for ensuring that the rights and dignity of all individuals, including marginalised groups like widows, are protected without infringing on the religious freedoms of others.

Furthermore, we note the recognition of the tension between legal systems permitting capital punishment and religious teachings on the sanctity of human life (Mean Score: 3.94). This finding reflects ongoing debates surrounding human rights and dignity within religious contexts globally, which were closely followed and engaged in this research (Gready, 2014; Little and Tubbs, 2019). It is firmly believed that all human life is sacred and that any practices or laws that undermine this principle must be critically examined and reformed.

This study contributes to the growing body of research that stresses the need for nuanced approaches to navigate the intricate relationship between legal obligations,

religious principles, and human rights, particularly in pluralistic societies like Nigeria (Hurd, 2017; Bielefeldt, 2019). By shedding light on these complexities, we hope to inspire further dialogue and collaboration among policymakers, religious leaders, and civil society organisations to reconcile competing interests while upholding fundamental human rights.

It is only reasonable that everyone should be deeply committed to promoting social justice and human dignity for all. The findings presented in this study serve as a stark reminder of the work that remains to be done in bridging the gap between legal frameworks, religious teachings, and the lived experiences of marginalised individuals. We call upon all stakeholders to engage in critical self-reflection, to challenge harmful practices and beliefs, and to work together towards a more equitable and just society that respects the inherent worth and dignity of every human being.

The findings presented in Table 4 offer a sobering portrayal of the struggles encountered by religious communities in Nigeria, particularly regarding societal marginalisation and discrimination against certain groups, notably within the framework of widowhood practices. As researchers, we are deeply concerned by the mean score of 3.34, which indicates a significant challenge posed by social stigma and its profound impact on religious perceptions of human dignity and the sanctity of life. This resonates the findings from previous studies, where we have elucidated the plight of widows facing social ostracism and economic deprivation due to cultural and religious beliefs surrounding widowhood practices in Nigeria (Akinyemi and Ogunsola, 2018).

Moreover, the elevated mean score of 4.09 highlights the acute difficulties faced by minority religious groups in the face of social stigma and discrimination, further complicating the ideological conflicts between religious beliefs and human rights principles. This aligns with the research we have closely followed by Ojo (2017), which underscored the challenges encountered by minority religious

Table 4. Mean summary of rated responses on the effect of social stigma and marginalization on religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life.

SN	Items	SA(5)	A(4)	D(3)	SD(2)	U(1)	Total	Mean
1	Religious communities may struggle to reconcile their beliefs with societal attitudes that marginalise or discriminate against other groups	6 (30)	15 (60)	3 (9)	7 (14)	4 (4)	35 (117)	3.34
2	Minority religious communities may face social stigma and discrimination in societies where the dominant religious tradition holds significant cultural influence. .	11 (55)	19 (76)	3 (9)	1 (2)	1 (1)	35 (143)	4.09
3	Traditional gender roles and family structures may conflict with religious teachings that emphasise the equal dignity and worth of all individuals, regardless of gender or familial status.	14 (70)	17 (68)	-	3 (6)	1 (1)	35 (145)	4.14

Source: Authors Computation.

groups concerning their rights and dignity. As researchers, we are deeply troubled by the marginalisation of these groups and the barriers they face in asserting their rightful place within Nigerian society.

Additionally, the conflict between traditional gender roles and religious teachings emphasizing equal dignity, as reflected in the mean score of 4.14, underscores the intricate nature of reconciling traditional norms with religious principles within widowhood practices. This echoes the findings from previous studies regarding the tensions between traditional gender roles and religious teachings in Nigerian society (Adeoye, 2019). The paper believes that addressing these deeply entrenched societal attitudes and biases is crucial for upholding the inherent worth and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their gender or familial status.

The insights provided by Table 4 illuminate profound ideological conflicts arising from the interplay of religious beliefs, societal attitudes, and human rights principles. This paper is acutely aware of the complexities involved in navigating these challenges, and it believes that comprehensive, collaborative approaches are necessary to address them effectively.

Moving forward, we call upon religious leaders, policymakers, civil society organizations, and community members to engage in open and honest dialogues, challenging harmful stereotypes and biases, and working together to promote a more inclusive and equitable understanding of human dignity. Only through such collaborative efforts can we hope to safeguard the rights and dignity of widows and other marginalised groups within Nigerian society, ensuring that the sanctity of human life is upheld in both principle and practice.

Conclusion

The findings of this study tell the profound ideological conflicts between widowhood practices among the Igbo

ethnic group and the principles of human rights in Nigeria, presenting a significant challenge to the religious understanding of the dignity and sanctity of human life. These conflicts are rooted in the difficult relationship between cultural traditions, religious interpretations, legal frameworks, social stigma, and marginalisation, all of which collectively shape the experiences and perceptions of widows within Nigerian society.

The research has revealed that cultural beliefs prioritising communal well-being over individual rights can clash with religious views emphasising the inherent sanctity of each human life. Furthermore, certain religious interpretations and institutional practices have been found to perpetuate discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards marginalised groups, including widows. Equally concerning is the tension between legal protections for civil rights and religious freedom, where religious individuals or institutions may find themselves legally obligated to participate in activities that violate their religious principles.

Compounding these challenges are the pervasive social stigma and marginalisation faced by widows, which can lead to the devaluation of their dignity and worth within religious communities. The conflict between traditional gender roles and religious teachings on the equal dignity of all individuals further increases ideological tensions, reiterating the need for a robust approach to address these complex issues.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching, as they bespeak the urgent need for collaborative efforts involving religious leaders, policymakers, civil society organizations, and community members to navigate the intricate relationship between cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and human rights principles. Only through such concerted action can we hope to challenge harmful practices, promote gender equality, and build a more inclusive understanding of human dignity and sanctity within Nigerian society.

In the final point, the goal of this research is to contribute to the ongoing efforts to create a society where the

inherent dignity and worth of widows, and all individuals, are recognised, respected, and protected, transcending the barriers of cultural or religious beliefs. By addressing the ideological conflicts at the heart of this issue, we can work towards a more just, equitable, and inclusive future for all.

Recommendations

To address the challenges faced by widows in Nigeria, three key recommendations are proposed. Implement comprehensive legal reforms to align with international human rights standards and prohibit discriminatory practices:

1. Review and amend existing laws and policies to explicitly prohibit all forms of discrimination against widows, including harmful widowhood practices, denial of inheritance rights, and social exclusion. By this, the legal framework should be aligned with international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), to which Nigeria is a signatory. Empower law enforcement agencies and the judiciary to effectively implement and enforce anti-discrimination laws, providing them with the necessary resources and training to protect widows' rights. Establish accessible legal aid and support services to assist widows in navigating the legal system and seeking redress for violations of their rights.
2. Engage religious leaders to challenge harmful interpretations and practices perpetuating gender inequality. This means that dialogues and workshops should be facilitated with religious leaders from diverse faith traditions to critically examine religious interpretations and cultural norms that justify discriminatory widowhood practices. Encourage religious leaders to use their influential platforms to promote a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of human dignity, challenging the ideological conflicts between widowhood practices and human rights. Empower religious leaders to develop and disseminate educational materials that highlight the importance of respecting the rights and inherent worth of widows, drawing on the core principles of their respective faiths. Build collaborative efforts between religious leaders, policymakers, and civil society organizations to develop and implement strategies that address the systemic injustices faced by widows within religious communities.
3. Promote community-based initiatives and awareness campaigns to debunk myths surrounding widowhood and empower widows economically and socially. To do this means to collaborate with community-based organizations, women's groups, and local leaders to

design and implement awareness campaigns that challenge harmful stereotypes and myths about widowhood. Develop and implement economic empowerment programs that provide widows with access to skills training, financial resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities, enabling them to achieve financial independence and security. Establish support networks and community-based initiatives that offer psychosocial counselling, social integration activities, and peer-to-peer support for widows to overcome the trauma and social stigma they face. Encourage the active participation of widows in the design and implementation of these community-based initiatives, ensuring that their voices and needs are at the forefront of the interventions.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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