

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES OF WIDOWS OF FALLEN MILITARY PERSONNEL IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

**BY**

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### **Abstract**

The loss of a spouse in military service can have devastating effects on the mental health and well-being of surviving partners. This study investigated psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey method. A self-designed instrument titled the Social Media and Career Choice Questionnaire (SMCCQ) was used to collect relevant data. A total of 215 respondents were chosen using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. Variables such as age, number of children and husband's rank, were also considered. Mean and rank order analysis were used to answer the research question, while three hypotheses were tested using a t-test statistics at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel are feeling lonely on spouse's passing, superficial social relationship and unhappy being alone which are all loneliness and feeling isolation. The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference in psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on age and husband's rank and there is a significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on number of children. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that it is essential to establish support groups specifically designed for them in the barracks. These groups can provide a safe space for sharing experiences and connecting with others who understand their challenges, helping to alleviate loneliness and feelings of isolation.

**Keywords:** fallen military personnel, loneliness, psychological challenges, widows

### **Introduction**

Widowhood pertains to the status of being a widow or widower, denoting the surviving spouse after the passing of their partner. This transition in social standing is frequently accompanied by notable adjustments in duties, obligations, and interpersonal dynamics. The emotional manifestation of widowhood is profound, marked by sorrow, deprivation, distress, and mourning (Worden, 2009). Culturally and religiously, widowhood carries profound implications, encompassing diverse observances, traditions, and prospects concerning mourning, inheritance, and subsequent marriage. Economically, widowhood typically entails substantial modifications, including the forfeiture of financial resources, benefits, and monetary stability. The bereavement of a partner can also precipitate alterations in self-perception, identity, and sense of direction as the individual adapts to their revised role and circumstances (Carr, 2004). The passing of a loved one during military service can have a profound impact on the surviving family members, particularly the spouse. Military engagements and activities result in fatalities, leaving behind a significant number of widows who must grapple with the traumatic loss of their partners. Since 2001, the US Department of Defense reports that over 6,000 military personnel have perished in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, leaving behind a substantial population of widows. Additionally, other nations engaged in military activities also have a considerable number of military widows. The prevalence of military widows presents a pressing concern, emphasizing the necessity for further research and support.

Nigeria has encountered various security challenges, including insurgencies by Boko Haram, militancy, and military operations, leading to the loss of military personnel (Nigeria Security Tracker, 2022). The widows of these fallen

military personnel encounter numerous psychological challenges that can impact their mental well-being (World Health Organization, 2019). Lagos State, as the most populous state in Nigeria, constitutes a critical location for this study due to its substantial population of military personnel and their families. Widows of deceased military personnel encounter distinct psychological obstacles. Their experiences of grief and mourning are enduring and profound, encompassing feelings of sorrow, longing, and emotional anguish that persist over extended periods. The abrupt and often violent circumstances of military fatalities can give rise to symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviors. These challenges are further compounded by social isolation, as widows may feel disconnected from their social support networks, leading to feelings of loneliness and detachment. Furthermore, the loss of a spouse can engender a sense of displaced identity, particularly if the widow's role was closely intertwined with their spouse's military service. In the context of Lagos State, Nigeria, cultural and socio-economic factors exacerbate the psychological burdens faced by military widows (Oyeboode, 2005). The patriarchal nature of Nigerian society can precipitate feelings of helplessness and dependency among widows (Uchendu, 2007). Moreover, the financial responsibilities of childcare and household management can intensify their emotional distress (Adebayo & Fakeye, 2015).

Military widows may also confront trauma and stigma, intensifying their emotional anguish. The traumatic nature of military deaths may evoke feelings of guilt, shame, and self-reproach. External stigma and censure can exacerbate these emotions, leading to social withdrawal and isolation. Additionally, military widows may experience survivor's guilt, harboring beliefs that they should have been the one to perish instead of their spouse. It is challenging for widows to seek assistance and support due to the complexities of these emotions. They grapple with intense emotional pain, sadness, and longing for their deceased spouses (Worden, 2009). While grief is a natural response to loss, it can be overwhelming and incapacitating. Widows often navigate through feelings of shock, denial, anger, guilt, and sadness as they traverse the grieving process (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Widows are also at risk of developing depression, which can manifest as persistent sadness, loss of interest in activities, and changes in appetite or sleep (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Depression can be a major challenge for widows, making it difficult for them to manage daily tasks, maintain relationships, and find joy in life (Carr, 2004). The loss of a partner can lead to feelings of emptiness, hopelessness, and helplessness, which can be characteristic of depression (Bonanno, 2004). Widows may also feel disconnected from their social support networks, leading to loneliness and social isolation. The loss of a partner can create a sense of disconnection from others, making it difficult for widows to maintain relationships and find social support (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). Many military widows assume new roles as sole caregivers for their children, adding to their emotional burden. Caring for children who have also experienced trauma can be particularly challenging, requiring emotional support and guidance. Widows must navigate their own grief while supporting their children's emotional needs, creating a complex and emotionally draining situation (Obi, 2018).

Military widows in Lagos State often lack access to effective support systems, including counselling services, peer support groups, and financial assistance. The Nigerian military has limited resources to provide comprehensive support to widows, leaving them to navigate their grief and trauma alone (Obi, 2018). Triggers like anniversaries, memorials, and media coverage can evoke painful memories and emotions, making it difficult for widows to move forward. These reminders can bring back intense feelings of grief and trauma, requiring widows to relive the pain of their loss repeatedly. The constant reminders of their loss can make it challenging for widows to find closure and move forward.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State, Nigeria encounter an array of emotional and mental health challenges including grief, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loneliness, and social isolation. These difficulties considerably impact their overall well-being and quality of life. The enduring psychological effects of these challenges impede the widows' ability to manage daily life, foster relationships, and

find meaning and purpose. Moreover, societal and cultural norms in Nigeria tend to stigmatize widowhood, compounding the psychological burden and constraining access to essential support and resources. Consequently, these widows may face impediments in performing daily tasks, maintaining relationships, and seeking gainful employment. The dearth of available support and resources further exacerbates their psychological distress, resulting in feelings of despondency and hopelessness. Furthermore, the societal stigma attached to widowhood results in marginalization, social isolation, and exclusion from familial and community support systems, rendering it arduous for the widows to reconstruct their lives and find purpose and significance.

The widows, despite the sacrifices of their late spouses, often face challenges in accessing sufficient support and resources, leading to heightened psychological distress. Moreover, cultural and societal norms in Nigeria can contribute to the stigmatization of widowhood, further compounding the psychological burden. This study aims to examine the psychological difficulties experienced by widows, identify the factors exacerbating their distress, and explore potential interventions to promote their mental health and overall well-being.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The research sought to explore the psychological difficulties experienced by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State. Additionally, it aimed to assess whether factors such as age, number of children, and the rank of the deceased husband could impact the widows' reported psychological challenges in Lagos State, Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the psychological challenges encountered by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State?"

### **Research Hypothesis**

In pursuit of addressing the indicated research inquiries, the subsequent hypotheses were posited:

1. There exists no statistically significant disparity in the psychological challenges experienced by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State based on age.
2. There exists no statistically significant disparity in the psychological challenges experienced by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State based on the rank of the deceased husband.
3. There exists no statistically significant disparity in the psychological challenges experienced by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State based on the number of children.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive research in which the goal is to describe people, their thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It is directed towards determining the nature of situation as it exist at the time of the study. The population of this study comprised all widows of fallen military officers; who lost their husbands within the last three (3) years in two military Barracks in Lagos. The widows within this bracket were chosen because most of them still reside around the barracks while they wait for their entitlements and many of them are still actively grieving. A representative sample size of 215 was drawn from the population of this study to give the true and fair views of the entire population of the study. The sample of study was selected from Ojo cantonment and 243 Recce Battalion Badagry using purposive sampling technique. This sampling technique was used to choose specific participants who have lost their husbands within three (3) years from the population to meet the specific goal of the study.

The instrument for this study was a Questionnaire tagged "Psychological Challenges of Widows Questionnaire (PCWQ). Therefore, the questionnaire was divided into two main sections. Section A meant to collect personal

information of the respondents such as age, number of children and husband’s rank while section B contained items on psychological challenges of widows. The items were patterned after four (4) points Likert-type rating scale format. The instrument was given to three experts in educational foundations department, University of Lagos. The suggestions and corrections were effected in the final draft of the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a test re-test procedure was employed. At the end of the two administrations; a co-efficient of 0.82 was obtained. Descriptive statistics of percentage was used to analyse the personal data of the respondents while inferential statistics of t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the postulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

**Results**

**Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

This section presents demographic characteristics of the respondents using frequency and percentages.

**Table 1:** Distribution of respondents’ demographic characteristics

SN	Variables		Frequency	Percentage %
1	Age	25-40 years	124	57.7
		41 years above	91	42.3
		<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100.0</b>
2	Number of Children	1-5	113	52.6
		6 and above	102	47.4
		<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100.0</b>
3	Husband’s Rank	Other Ranks	80	37.2
		Officer	135	62.8
		<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that out of the 215 widows who participated in the study, 124 (57.7%) were 25-40 years of age, while 91 (42.3%) were 41 years and above. Based on number of children, 113 (52.6%) of the respondents have number children between 1-5, while 102 (47.4%) were with 6 children and above. With respect to husband rank, 80 (37.2%) were other ranks in Nigeria Army, while 135 (62.8%) were Officers.

Research Question: What are the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State?

**Table 2:** Mean and rank order of psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel

N	As far as am concern, the following are psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel	Mean	Rank
6	feel lonely my spouse's passing	3.09	1 <sup>st</sup>
3	My social relationship are superficial	3.07	2 <sup>nd</sup>
12	unhappy being alone	3.06	3 <sup>rd</sup>
7	Nobody really understand how feel	3.02	4 <sup>th</sup>
10	Unable to relax	2.60	17 <sup>th</sup>
15	Fear of worst happening	2.59	18 <sup>th</sup>
16	Dizzy or lightheaded	2.41	19 <sup>th</sup>
11	Wobbliness in legs	2.15	20 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 shows that 18 out of the 20 items were agreed upon by the respondents as psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel. This is so because the 18 items have mean scores that are greater than the average (benchmark) mean value of 2.50 for determining those challenges. However, items 6 (with mean value of 3.09), 3 (with mean value of 3.07) and 12 (with mean value of 3.06) took precedence over others and were ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. Based on this, the widows of fallen military personnel believed that the significant

psychological challenges of widows are feeling lonely on spouse's passing, superficial social relationship and unhappy being alone which are all loneliness.

### Hypotheses Testing

Three null hypotheses were formulated for this study. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance, using t-test statistics. This section thus presented the results of the hypotheses tested.

**Hypothesis One:** *There is no significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on age.*

**Table 3:** Mean, SD and t-test showing difference in respondents' views of psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on age

Age	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value
25-40 years	124	56.88	12.76	213	0.64	1.96	0.52
41 years above	91	55.67	14.84				

Table 3 shows that, for a degree of freedom (df) of 213, the calculated t-value of 0.64 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of 0.52 which is greater than the significant value of 0.05. This indicates that no significant difference exists in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on age; hence, the hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on age.

**Hypothesis Two:** *There is no significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on husband's rank*

**Table 4:** Mean, SD and t-test showing difference in respondents' views on psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on husband's rank

Husband's Rank	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value
Other Ranks	113	54.76	16.19	213	1.82	1.96	0.07
Officers	102	58.15	9.93				

Table 4 shows that, for a degree of freedom (df) of 213, the calculated t-value of 1.82 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of 0.07 which is greater than the significant value of 0.05. This indicates that no significant difference exists in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on husband's rank; hence, the hypothesis is retained. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos state based on husband's rank.

**Hypothesis Three:** *There is no significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on number of children.*

**Table 5:** Mean, SD and t-test showing difference in respondents' views on psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on number of children

Number of Children	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value
1 - 5	80	50.96	15.48	213	4.67*	1.96	0.00
6 and above	135	59.57	11.35				

\* Sig. at  $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows that, for a degree of freedom (df) of 213, the calculated t-value of 4.67 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.96, with a corresponding p-value of 0.00 which is less than the significant value of 0.05. This indicates that a significant difference exists in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel based on number of children; hence, the hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on number of children.

## **Discussion**

The study's findings revealed that widows of fallen military personnel encounter significant psychological challenges following the passing of their spouses. These challenges include feelings of loneliness, the presence of superficial social relationships, and dissatisfaction with being alone, all contributing to experiences of loneliness and isolation. This is consistent with a study conducted by Fried, Bockting, Arjadi, Borsboom, Amshoff, Cramer, & Stroebe (2015), which highlighted loneliness and isolation as the most prominent psychosocial challenges for widows. Additionally, a study by Muhammed and Idowu (2020) focused on loneliness as part of the grief reaction and identified significant differences in the grief reactions of bereaved spouses based on factors such as age at bereavement, nature of death, and length of years of loss.

Hypothesis one posited that there is no significant difference in the psychological challenges faced by widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on age, suggesting that the age of widows of fallen personnel does not exert influence on their experiences of psychological challenges. This finding aligns with the conclusions of a study by Carr (2004), which similarly found no significant differences in the psychosocial challenges encountered by widows based on the age of the respondents.

The second hypothesis posits that there exists no significant variance in the psychological challenges encountered by widows of deceased military personnel in Lagos State based on the rank of their late husbands. This suggests that the psychological challenges faced by the widows are not influenced by the rank of their deceased husbands. This finding is consistent with a study by Ding, Gale, Bauman, Phongsavan, and Nguyen (2021), which indicates that the loss of a spouse can have profound emotional, psychological, and social ramifications for individuals, regardless of their economic standing.

Hypothesis three demonstrates a notable disparity in the psychological challenges experienced by widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on the rank of the deceased husbands. This implies that the number of children and the size of the family significantly impact the widows' psychological challenges. This finding corresponds with Ogunrotifa's (2013) research, which revealed that the number of children a widow must care for in the absence of her husband heavily impacts the psychological well-being of both the mother and the children. The challenges faced by a widow in terms of identity and belonging continue to be closely associated with her initial marriage to her deceased husband for the children and herself. Subsequent to the husband's death, who served as the linchpin and provider for the family, the widow may be compelled to allow some of the children to reside with other relatives or guardians due to limited resources, or she may face overwhelming challenges without any support from her late husband's family.

## **Summary of the findings**

1. The findings revealed that the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel are feeling lonely on spouse's passing, superficial social relationship and unhappy being alone which are all loneliness and feeling isolation
2. There is no significant difference on the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on age.

3. There is no significant difference on the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on husband's rank
4. There is significant difference on the psychological challenges of widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State based on number of children

The examination of the psychological obstacles encountered by widows of deceased military members bears significant relevance for applied methodologies, policies, and provisions. The discoveries can guide the formulation of tailored support services, therapeutic interventions, and communal support assemblages for military widows. Moreover, research can contribute to the enhancement of policies and entitlements for military widows, attending to their financial, healthcare, and social support requisites. Ultimately, the research endeavors to ameliorate the well-being and resilience of military widows, equipping them to navigate their bereavement and reconstruct their lives.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study underscore the profound psychological toll experienced by widows of fallen military personnel in Lagos State, Nigeria. The overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation that pervades their lives is a stark reminder of the devastating consequences of military service on families. The fact that age and husband's rank did not significantly impact these challenges suggests that the psychological struggles are ubiquitous and transcend demographic boundaries. However, the significant difference in psychological challenges based on the number of children highlights the added layer of complexity and responsibility that comes with raising a family alone.

### **Recommendations**

In addressing the psychological hurdles encountered by widows of deceased military personnel, it is imperative to institute tailored support groups within the barracks to provide a secure platform for sharing experiences and connecting with individuals who comprehend their adversities. Such groups offer a means to mitigate feelings of solitude and seclusion. Moreover, the provision of counselling services, particularly with a focus on widows with dependent children, is essential. Additionally, hosting community events and activities can promote social engagement and facilitate the establishment of meaningful relationships, transcending superficial bonds.

Programs and services ought to be developed to accommodate widows of diverse age groups, as research indicates the absence of notable variations in psychological challenges based on age. Similarly, support initiatives should be indifferent to the military rank of the deceased spouse, centring on the collective experiences and tribulations of all widows, irrespective of their late husband's military status. Assistance with childcare and access to resources can aid widows facing distinctive psychological challenges due to their parental responsibilities. Conducting outreach programs to raise awareness about the psychological ordeals confronting widows of fallen military personnel and the support services available is also advisable.

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