

*Full Length Research Paper*

## **Violence against women in Igboland, South-east, Nigeria: A critical quest for change**

**CHUKWU, Christian Chima<sup>1\*</sup>, SCENT, Grace A.T<sup>2</sup>, EMEKA, Josephat Owan<sup>3</sup>, OBI, Christopher Ugochukwu<sup>1</sup> and KALU, Emelike Okorie<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Intelligence and Security Studies/Sociology, Novena University, Ogume, Kwale, Delta State, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Niger Delta University, Nigeria.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Sociology, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

<sup>4</sup>Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

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**This paper examines some violent cultural practices such as widowhood discrimination, female genital mutilation, wife battery, and early girl child marriage perpetrated against Igbo women in the three senatorial districts of Ebonyi State, South-east Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The questionnaire was one of the instruments used for data collection. The second instrument: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also employed to compliment the questionnaire method. The multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select samples in stages in the three senatorial districts of the state. One hundred respondents were selected as sample from each district, and in all, three hundred (300) respondents were selected as sample for the study. Chi square ( $X^2$ ) was adopted to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The results rejected the null hypotheses, and accepted the alternate hypotheses. The rejection revealed that these cultural practices were inimical to the development of women. Sequel to this, the paper suggests that the Ebonyi State House of Assembly should make laws to protect women from these violent and obnoxious cultural practices. Government at all levels, particularly in Ebonyi State should empower women through education (free tuition) and also through free micro-credit facilities to enable them embark on small-scale businesses to improve their poor economic status, and also their persons without any inhibitions from cultural practices.**

**Key words:** Widowhood discrimination, female genital cutting, wife battery, early child marriage, patriarchy.

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the remarkable features of the present day traditional setting in Igboland, particularly in Ebonyi State, South-East Nigeria, has been the growing interest in perpetuating violent cultural practices against women, and also excluding them from the socio-economic development of their immediate milieu. Although this exclusion is currently strong and widely upheld, there has been a relative silence on how to liberate women from the firm hold of these cultural practices.

The Igbos are culturally endowed, and a good grasp of their cultural anthropology and cosmology show the pride with which they uphold their distinctive way of life. However, some of these cultural practices have been observed, according to Chukwu (2006), to be very archaic, dangerous, and damaging to the psyche of women. Corroborating this trend earlier, Ebirim (2005) argued that the situation was even worse for women who had low literacy level. In a similar strand Ritzer (1996) averred

\*Corresponding author. E-mail: [c\\_xtianchuks@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:c_xtianchuks@yahoo.co.uk).

that women's situation was centrally that of being used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men. Elucidating further, Ritzer (1996) concluded that women's oppression was basically by a system of patriarchy cultivated for the deliberate purpose of commandeering women to achieve the intents of the so-called power structure. In a related development, the erstwhile chairperson of Women Commission in Nigeria, Awe (1993) remarked: 'You know this is a patriarchal society in which men take the first place . . .', but later argued that they would, however, resist being forced into embracing obnoxious cultural practices. Awe's opening lines aptly summarized what Gerda (1986) had previously upheld in her study that women were socialised, indoctrinated and coerced into co-operating with the patriarchal system.

Contributing also to the plight of women as a result of patriarchy, Iwe (1985) observed that the perpetrators of these violent cultural practices against women were yet to acknowledge that the dignity of women was equal to that of men. He stated that the splendour of womanhood, which is based on human personality, the prerogative and quality of every human being, man or woman, is fundamentally, essentially and unquestionably equal to the dignity of man. Furthermore, he affirmed that, the truth of this statement is unassailable in spite of sex differences, for human dignity rests not on sex but on personality; and personality as such has no sex. Accepting this position therefore, there is an urgent need to change these violent cultural practices against women. This is a change Udoh (1996) asserts that cannot be achieved through muscle struggle, but simply by effective persuasion because cultural practices passed down from generation to generation are not easily discarded, but held sacrosanct. Thus, the general objective of this paper is to free Igbo women of Ebonyi State from being victims of these violent cultural encumbrances and also, to situate them amongst their kind globally.

Having averred the objectives of this work, it is obvious to note that every aspect of culture, whether material or non-material, is a product of man's endeavour. This explains why man occupies an enviable position as culture creating and culture using animal, and goes further to manipulate the natural endowments to his advantage. Charles (2010) argued that man is socialised by learning and imbibing sufficiently the appropriate ingredients of a given culture to become a cultural being. In other words, being a cultural being in any group demands the assimilation of the ways of life of the group to be seen and accepted as responsible member of the group.

Culture, taken in its ethnographic sense, is defined by Tylor (1871) as that, "complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". It was a simple, but inclusive definition which stated or implied focused on attributes that people acquired by growing up in a particular society, where they were exposed to a specific cultural tradition. In

furtherance to the explication of culture, Charles (2010) submitted that it consisted of observable things and events in the external world. Earlier, Herskovitz (1955) had defined culture as man's creation. Agreeing with Herskovitz (1955), Charles (2010) also explained that culture was indeed man's creation, and that man could manipulate his creation using his ingenuity to make it either useful or not to the society as he interacted with the natural environment. For example, leaves or bark of trees are natural endowments, and man can use these leaves or barks for the treatment of all kinds of ailments thus converting them to items of culture of usefulness. In other words, culture could be transformed into an item of good or bad depending on the circumstance.

Widowhood discrimination (WD), Female genital mutilation (FGM), Wife battery and Early child marriage (ECM) are some of the violent cultural practices which have become items of bad culture, not necessarily because they have degraded women, but because they undermine a people's progress both socially and economically, thereby making them the laughing stock of their neighbours and the civilised world. Centrally, no human society likes to be branded unprogressive, uncivilised, uncouth or lacking modern trends in human relations.

## CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

### Widowhood discrimination (WD)

A woman becomes a widow (*isi mkpe*) when her husband dies. As a result, she is addressed as *Nwanyi isi mkpe* (a woman without a head; the deceased husband being the head), and this labelling justifies her widowhood status. At her husband's death, the rites of passage associated with widowhood practices begins. For example, the ritual practices accorded the dead varies according on the status of the male deceased, but culture demands, irrespective of the status of the deceased, that the wife goes into traumatic wailing immediately, beating her chest, flinging around her arms and falling down, and only to get up to repeat the cycle again and again until other women surround her immediately and restrain her and force her to sit down on the ground where they sit around her to commiserate with her. Among the Igbo, this kind of bitter wailing is expected to go on until the deceased is buried. Substantiating this observation, Basden (1966) held that, the wife is expected to enact a wail or two every morning between the hours of 5.00 am and 6.00 am for upwards of four days or more. In addition, Basden (1966) averred that she was also compulsorily expected to wail every morning of a feast day and recount to the hearing of her neighbours what her husband usually did for her on an occasion such as this. The veracity of her claims, according to the discussants in the Focus Group, was never questioned even

when it was obvious that all claims were false.

Writing also on the plight of widows, Obioma (2011) observed the pathetic state of Mrs. Gertrude Melo, a widow. According to Obioma (2011), Melo was discriminated against, and subjugated to all kinds of ill treatments even by her deceased husband's siblings. Prior to the burial of the deceased, the siblings sold everything they had in Lagos thereby rendering Melo with her two sons homeless. At the end of her husband's funeral, Obioma (2011) stated that, Melo was handed a mattress, a cabinet bed and a paltry sum of twenty thousand naira (approximately \$150) for their wellbeing. Corroborating, Charles Ogueri, a pastor with the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) at a suburb in Lagos, also contended in Obioma (2011) that:

*It is crazy out there in the Igboland because the kinsmen of the deceased jumped at these widows and take everything that belongs to them and their children without a second thought on how they will cope. Today, landlords are trying to sleep with some of these widows in exchange for rent. Recently, I overheard a widow saying her landlord wanted to sleep with her in exchange for her rent, but who knows if she has not succumbed!*

In a related development, Pastor Ogueri argued that widows were forced to marry their husbands' brothers (widow inheritance) and also compelled to sit by the ash and dine with broken plates and cups throughout the period of mourning which however, as earlier stated, varied according to the status of the deceased. In a similar strand, participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) noted that, when a mourning process consumes a widow this much, episodes of depression, despairs, and regressive setbacks bound to envelope her. The Focus Group also observed that the perpetrators of the practices were not concerned even if widows died, and if they did, it was good riddance to bad rubbish because their death was a confirmation of their guilt. In other words, widows were not regarded as prime suspects in the demise of their spouses, but guilty. In another instance, Charles (2010) asserted that, widows were labelled husband killers, husband snatchers, adulteress, problematic, destitute and women with ill-luck. Continuing, Charles (2010) observed that, their innocence as husband killers was only established when they underwent the diabolical ritual cleansing by drinking the filthy water used in bathing the corpses of their deceased husbands.

Prior to the funeral purification, the researchers observed that, widows were secluded and locked up in a small dark room in order to compel them to confess their role(s) in their husbands' death. Also, during this period, especially in the morning, widows avoided the elders, the custodians of the cultural practices because they regarded them as unclean and unfit to mingle with decent minded people. In the same vein, Charles (2010) averred

that the widows were not allowed to take their baths, changed their clothes, brushed their teeth, washed their hands, clothes, or even washed the plates used in serving them food. It was also observed that, widows were sent out to the stream at midnight to have their baths for funeral purification. Aside these, washing and bathing during this period called for punishment of the widows because they were assumed to be beautifying themselves (*icho mma*); they were expected to have only one set of black mourning dress (*akwa mpke*), which they must wear whenever they were in public. In another strand, Chukwu (2006) averred that the most humiliating of all the violent cultural practices meted out to widows was the scraping of their hair with broken bottles by *Umuada* (first born daughters within the extended family system), which usually left them with injuries on their skulls. Summarising the plight of widows, the Focus Group Discussants (FGD) agreed that the widows were left unkempt, dirty, unattractive and haggard.

Apart from these humiliations, the Focus Group Discussants (FGD) averred that the human greed inherent in man was responsible for all the religious rituals, the cleansing rituals, the superstitious sanctions, and other practices meted out to widows. According to the group, this was to make them more amenable to keeping silent over all other forms of oppression, and subjugation including being coerced to marry any of the willing siblings of their deceased husbands (widow inheritance) against their wish. The participants also observed that the human greed which manifested at the demise of a male member of the family offered the siblings the opportunity to confiscate the deceased assets without considering whether the deceased had wives and children when alive.

Corroborating the de-humanisation meted out to widows, in an interview [(Tell, October 10, 2005) Bismar Adah], a widow of late Major Adah of the ill-fated C-10 Jet that crashed at Ejigbo (Lagos, Nigeria) in 1993 remarked thus:

Widowhood is not something any woman would pray for. It is a terrible thing; it is a terrible stigma. The first shocker of my life after my husband's death was from my in-laws. When it happened, people were going to look for their relations, their children's children in the barracks. But my own in-laws went to Lagos to look for property to inherit. It was shocking to me. Thereafter, many things happened. I was taken to the highest authority in my place where I was told that women are not supposed to inherit property. Widowhood is like leprosy, I tell you. Even wives of your husband's friends will begin to suspect you. I do not know that as a widow, one has automatically become a prostitute that people would begin to suspect.

In an earlier report, *Ezekwesili* (1996) observed that widows were harshly treated and unfairly labelled. According to *Ezekwesili* (1996), widows were generally seen as a shackle of the devil and as result, they hid

away most of the time in order not to attract any ugly comment from passersby. In other words, the society interpreted every action of widows and reacted inappropriately to the extent that people pointed at them making unhealthy comments.

### Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female genital mutilation (FGM) has been variously defined. According to Chukwu (2006), it is “an unnecessary gruesome and crude surgery that involves partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to female genitalia organs of women as a prerequisite to earn respect, and recognition in Igboland”. Chukwu (2006) further stated that, during the makeshift surgical procedure, or the ritualistic sexual mutilation, sharp objects such as razors and knives, which are most often than not sterilised, are used by non-medical practitioners in the home or other non-clinical setting to cut young women (removing the sensitive little soft knob at the front of the vaginal) in the name of initiating them into womanhood. However, on the relevance of the surgery, the Focus Group Discussants (FGD) noted that, the reasons traditionally advanced for the ritualistic sexual mutilation are, namely, that the exercise desensitises the clitoris by reducing libido and curbing sexual promiscuity; it ensures cleanliness, prevents immorality, keeps babies alive during birth, and also prevents an overgrowth of the clitoris.

Onuzulike (2006) has classified female genital cutting into four different types, namely, type I, type II, type III and type IV in line with the extent of the surgery. According to Onuzulike (2006), the most common is the type 1. Onuzulike (2006) further gave a detailed analysis of the four types as follows:

Type I: In this type, the prepuce is cut off with or without the excision of the part of or the entire clitoris.

Type II: The hooded clitoris together with a part of or all of the *labia minora* (inner lip of the vulva) is cut-off.

Type III: Part of or all of the external genitalia are cut-off. Then the raw edge of the remaining part may or may not be sewn up together. In this process, the vaginal opening may be narrowed. This is described as infibulations.

Type IV: This is unclassified, but includes pricking, piercing or incising the clitoris and surrounding tissues, scraping of tissue surrounding the vaginal orifice (known as *angurya* or *yankee* cuts in Hausa). In this type, the incision opens the vaginal either anteriorly or posteriorly into the surrounding tissues, resulting in the damage of the urinary bladder/ urethral opening or rectum and anus which causes vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). Onuzulike (2006) further explained that the excision/cutting of a part or whole of the external genitalia included the clitoris and hood, *labia minora* (inner lip), *labia majora* (outer lip), vaginal and urethral openings. The incision also includes

the cutting of the vagina (*gishiri* cuts), another source for vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). According to Ngouakam et al. (2008) and Onuzulike (2006), vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF) is attributed to the different kinds of incisions because there is no standardization in the methods employed as the circumciser's hand dictated the end result of the surgery. Corroborating, Darrah and Froude (1975) averred that 40% of the patients attending Zaria hospital (Nigeria) with VVF were victims of *gishiri* cuts. Similarly, Tahzib (1983) substantiated this study by asserting that 1443 VVF patients at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Zaria, between January 1969 and December 1980 had also received *gishiri* cuts. Furthermore, Human Rights Organizations such as World Health Organization, United Nations International Children Education Fund, and UNFPA have considered the fatal consequences of female genital mutilation (FGM), and thus submitted a joint statement supporting the fight against FGM (Ngouakam et al., 2008). According to Ngouakam et al. (2008) and Onuzulike (2006), female genital mutilation fringes on the physical and psycho-sexual integrity of women and girls, a form of violence against them. In addition, the Inter-Africa Committee (IAC), voluntary organization founded in 1984 has also been concerned with the promotion of grassroots programmes to eradicate FGM and other harmful traditional practices against women because of the attendant health consequences inherent in the exercise. Six years after its formation, the Inter-African committee (IAC) in 1990 at a meeting held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, adopted the terminology female genital mutilation (FGM) rather than its earlier terminology: Women Circumcision. However, most recently, the terminology, female genital mutilation has changed to female genital cutting (FGC). This embellishment does not remove the fact that, the damages inherent in the practice are enormous and irreparable, if not fatal.

In his assessment, Ahmed (1996) asserted that, more than eighty million women in Africa and around the world had undergone the practice, and many more are expected to do same to be accorded respect in their respective rural communities. But following the harrowing experiences of the unhealthy exercise, women of Ebonyi State extraction in Diaspora have rejected overtures to return home to contribute substantially in the development of their rural communities because of the fear of being ridiculed.

### Wife battery

Wife battery is anti-human rights. Therefore, wife battery contradicts Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which runs thus: *All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.* Battery,

according to the Advanced Dictionary (1988), is a term in law which involves the unlawful beating of another person or any threatening touch to another person's clothes or body. The definition connotes great force or intensity; the use of excessive physical force that ultimately results to injury to that (person or animal) which the great force is being applied upon. Battery against women constitutes an oddity because women are the direct targets, even though the entire society indirectly shares in its effects in the long run. Burns et al. (1997) submitted that every day, women are slapped, kicked, beaten, humiliated, threatened, sexually abused and even murdered by their partners. Accepting the foregoing, Brown et al. (1997) argued that women were the sole victims of battery by stating the following to buttress their position:

1. Women are not battering their husbands in epidemic proportions.
2. Women are not regularly beating up their men and leaving them -crouched, huddled, sobbing and injured (or worse) on the kitchen floor.
3. Men are not fleeing their homes.
4. Men are not the spouses who live in terror.

The conclusion from Brown et al. (1997) was self explicit: women obviously the main victims of battery. In the same vein, Nosike (1996) observed that subjecting a wife to battery in order to earn the approval of male relations as an effective disciplinarian and head of the house is sickening.

In the history of humanity, Owan and Anizu (2002) averred that, man had been known to Lord it over the woman with power and authority as he used tradition as the camouflage to help perpetuate his misdeeds even in the faces of national and international initiatives on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. In addition, Bradley (1994) also submitted that the practice of wife beating is not just hidden and invisible, but hard to tackle because many traditional and transitional cultures have a blind-spot about it. Dwyer et al. (1996) viewed the invisibility of marital violence, especially as it affected women as stemming not necessarily from the fact that victims covered up the problem, but from the fact that society regarded the problem as normal and therefore not a problem.

Research on battery (Dwyer et al., 1996; Okolo, 2004) revealed that due to the private and hidden nature of the problem, it was somewhat difficult for the law enforcement agencies and similar bodies to have reliable documented and quantifiable information on it. This, in turn, made it difficult for the intensity of the problem to be known in order to ascertain how much effort to put towards addressing the problem. Amongst the Igbo, battery against women is not seen as 'a problem' but a 'normal' social occurrence. Okolo (2004) further observed many women who faced battery were reluctant to let even the closest person know, and even when their experiences were those of severe pains, they would

simply wear guise that all was well, all for the purpose of concealing their bitter and heart-rending experiences. The concealment of their bitter and heart-rending experiences, according to the discussants in the focus group were due to: (a) Women's fear that society would blame them for such happenings (b) Homes where battery is frequent are often stigmatized as unsuccessful homes, and because no woman would want her marriage to be stigmatized, in the event of battery, most women would rather keep the matter concealed than disclosed it. (c) Women would never want the public to know that their husbands have abusive tendencies because it is 'criminal' for them to disclose to an 'outsider' that their spouses were women barterers, and any attempt to go against this would mean more battery. Burns et al. (1997) also observed that most women stayed on in battered homes because they had no other place to go to. Furthermore, Bannett et al. (1993) observed that a number of women saw their marital homes as the only home they had and, did not know where else to go to if they left them. As such, to avoid the difficulty of having no home of their own or for fear of becoming homeless, most women simply accepted the only option open was to stay, the level of battery, notwithstanding.

The discussants in the Focus Group (FGD) submitted that in the traditional Igbo society, women were blamed and also condemned for all the wrongs that went on in their families. The discussants also averred that, women's inability to remain and manage their homes were always 'the talking talk' in different drinking spots, and the fear of becoming 'the talking talk' often made women remain with their partners in spite of the battery. In addition, the discussants also argued that the issue of social conditioning inculcated into women from childhood that, irrespective of their other interests, they would never be fulfilled unless they were married and had children. According to Brown et al. (1997), when women accepted this social conditioning, leaving an abusive husband meant failing not only as a mother or wife, but as a woman and also as a human being. This, from all sound arguments, rested on a disastrously premise that kept women in battered homes. From this, we could state that women stayed in abusive homes in order not to be branded as 'failures', stigmatized and shamed as unsuccessful wives. Furthermore, Brown et al. (1997) observed that women were told that love conquered all and as such, in the event of being battered, they were urged to remain in the hope that the men would change positively in no distant time for the wonderful times they once had during courtships to occur again.

### **Early girl child marriage**

Marriage is the beginning of a legitimate family. In essence, marriage is a universal institution that contributes considerably to holding of the Igbo society together and providing continuity and stability to it. Coleman

(1988) defined marriage as “a socially approved sexual and economic relationship between two or more persons that are assumed to be permanent and includes mutual rights and obligations”. This definition highlights amongst others, one fundamental aspect; it provides the regulation of sex and childbearing. From this perspective, marriage is the vehicle through which legitimate reproduction is sanctioned. Marriage is, thus, for reproduction, and childbearing is seen as an indicator of the attainment of "married woman" status. Nwosu (2008) averred that, for reproduction to occur, the girl child was given out at a very young age; she was not allowed to mature fully to understand her desires and goals in life before being forced into marriage. In addition, the discussants in the Focus Group (FGD) submitted that in the Igbo traditional societies that when young girls were given out in marriage at very young ages, often before or during the process of puberty, they were delivered of healthy children. But Chukwu (2006) observed that the consequences of early child marriage were tragic because most of them felt frustrated and worthless after being diagnosed with vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). From this perspective, it is obvious that early child marriage is fundamentally an assault on women.

Vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF) is a direct pathological communication between the urinary bladder and the vagina resulting in the uncontrolled leakage of urine into the vagina from the bladder (Murphy, 1981). In a study by Tahzib (1983), the study showed that 5.5% (80) of VVF sufferers were less than 13 years of age. In other words, children beget children. The high rate of vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF) amongst these girls during childbirth was attributed to their young ages (Murphy, 1981; Mustafa and Rushwan, 1971; Harrison, 1985). Furthermore, Murphy (1981) observed that VVF caused many serious problems, especially with respect to inability to bear any more children despite the young ages of these girls. Murphy (1981) further averred that, the tear from the contractions of the pelvic muscles resulted in a leakage between the legs, which invariably emitted a terrible odour causing bad odour in gathering. Finally, Murphy (1981) concluded that the plight of these unfortunate victims could be so devastating and dehumanizing that even when cured after surgery some of them never regained their self-esteem and as such shunned social life.

## METHODS

This work adopted the ex-post facto research design (after-the-fact). Ex-post facto research design is 'a systematic and empirical inquiry in which the scientist does not have any control of independent variables because the manifestations have already occurred and therefore cannot be manipulated (Kerlinger, 1986). To achieve the purpose of this study, four hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and the population area was given equal and independent opportunity to be selected in the study. The questionnaire, one of the major instruments used for data collection was

subjected to face and content validity by experts in the field and other related fields including NGOs. The second instrument: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also employed to compliment the questionnaire method. Focus group discussion is primarily a qualitative method of administering open-ended questions in non-directive interviewing manner. One of the greatest advantages of the FDG is that the group situation generates information which can easily be overlooked in the questionnaire method. The discussants were between 8 and 12. The discussion was not be dominated by the researchers and so there was no 'high table effect'. That is, the researchers conducted the sessions in a way as not to appear knowledgeable than the discussants that they wanted to derive information from; there was no gap between the researchers and the researched. The population of the area of study was too large to accommodate any other sampling method other than the multi-stage sampling technique. Thus, the multi-stage sampling technique which involved to a large extent a combination of two or more sampling methods was employed to select the sample from the three senatorial districts, being the study area and one hundred respondents were selected as sample from each of the local government areas. In a nutshell, three hundred (300) respondents were selected as sample for the study. Chi square ( $X^2$ ) was adopted to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

The formula for chi-square ( $X^2$ ) is computed using the formula,

$$x^2 = \frac{(Fo - FE)^2}{FE}$$

Df = (R - 1) (C - 1)

Fo = observed frequencies

FE = Expected Frequencies

DF = Degree of Freedom

R = Row

C = Column

## Test of hypothesis

### Hypothesis one

**H<sub>0</sub>** There is no significant relationship between widowhood discrimination and cultural practices.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: There is a significant relationship between widowhood discrimination and cultural practices.

## RESULTS

The result in the data analysis as presented Table 1 showed that at 0.05 significant level with 6 degrees of freedom, the calculated value of 35.55, and is greater than the table value of 12.592. In effect, there is a significant relationship between widowhood discrimination and cultural practices. Therefore, we accept the alternate hypothesis.

### Hypothesis two

**H<sub>0</sub>**: There is no significant relationship between female genital mutilation and cultural practices.

**H<sub>1</sub>**: There is a significant relationship between female genital mutilation and cultural practices.

The result in Table 2 showed that at 0.05 significant levels with 6 degree of freedom, the calculated chi-

**Table 1.** The Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical analysis for hypothesis 1 is computed showing the relationship between widowhood discrimination and cultural practices.

O	E	O - E	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>
20	73.33	-53.33	2844.09
80	26.67	-53.33	2844.09
0	0	0	0
	0	0	0
100	73.33	-53.33	2844.09
0	26.67	26.67	711.29
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
100	73.33	26.67	711.29
0	26.67	-26.67	711.29
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
	300		10666.14

Degree of freedom, 6; significant level, 0.05; table value, 12.592; calculated  $\chi^2$ , 35.55.

**Table 2.** The Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical analysis for hypothesis 2 is computed showing the relationship between female genital mutilation and cultural practices.

O	E	O - E	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>
25	61	-36	1296
75	39	36	1296
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
68	61	7	49
32	39	-7	49
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
90	61	29	841
10	39	-29	841
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
	300		4372

Degree of freedom, 6; significant level, 0.05; table value, 12.592; calculated  $\chi^2$ , 14.57.

square value of 14.57 is greater than the table value of 12.592. In effect, there is a significant relationship between female genital mutilation and cultural practices. Therefore, we accept the alternate hypothesis.

**Hypothesis three**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between wife

**Table 3.** The Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical analysis for hypothesis 3 is computed showing the relationship between wife battery and cultural practices.

O	E	O - E	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>
24	64.67	-40.67	1654.05
76	35.33	40.67	1654.05
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
72	64.67	7.33	53.73
28	35.33	-7.33	53.73
0	13.33	-13.33	177.69
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
98	64.67	33.33	1110.89
2	35.33	-33.33	1110.89
0	0	0	0
	300		5637.34

Degree of freedom, 6; significance level, 0.05; table value =12.592; calculated  $\chi^2$ , 18.79.

battery and cultural practices.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between wife battery and cultural practices.

The result in Table 3 showed that at 0.05 significant level with 6 degrees of freedom, the calculated chi-square value of 18.79 is greater than the table value at 12.592. Therefore, we invalidate the null hypothesis and validate the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between wife battery and cultural practices.

**Hypothesis four**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between early child marriage and cultural practices.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is significant relationship between early child marriage and cultural practices.

The result in Table 4 showed that at 0.05 significant level with 6 degrees of freedom, the calculated chi-square value of 20.64, and is greater than the table value of 12.592. Therefore, we invalidate the null hypothesis and validate the alternate hypothesis which states that there is a significant relationship between early child marriage and cultural practices.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The findings on widowhood discrimination are supported by the studies of Ezekwesili (1996) and Charles (2010).

**Table 4.** The Chi square ( $\chi^2$ ) statistical analysis for hypothesis 4 is computed showing the relationship between wife battery and cultural practices.

O	E	O - E	(O - E) <sup>2</sup>
22	64	-42	1764
78	36	42	1764
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
70	64	6	36
30	36	-6	36
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
100	64	36	1296
0	36	-36	1296
0	0	0	0
0	0	0	0
<b>300</b>			<b>6192</b>

Degree of freedom, 6; significant level, 0.05; table value, 12.592; calculated  $\chi^2$ , 20.64.

Specifically, Ezekwesili (1996) stated that widows were harshly treated and unfairly labelled. Furthermore, she observed that the society interpreted every action of widows and reacted inappropriately to the extent that people pointed and made unhealthy comments about them. Ezekwesili (1996) concluded that they were generally seen as a shackle of the devil and hideaway most of the time in order not to attract any ugly comments. In the same vein, Charles (2010) observed that, widows were labelled husband killers, husband snatchers, and women with ill-luck, adulteress, problematic and destitute. According to Charles (2010), their innocence as husband killers was only established when they underwent diabolical ritual cleansing by drinking the filthy water used in bathing the corpses of their deceased husbands. Aside this, Charles (2010) averred that widows were not allowed to take their baths, changed their clothes, brushed their teeth, washed their hands, clothes, or even washed the plates used in serving them food. Summarizing the plight of widows, the participants in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) agreed that the widows were left unkempt, dirty, and unattractive and haggard.

On female genital cutting (FGC), Chukwu (2006) argued that the subjugation of women had introduced inadvertently female genital cutting, a gruesome and crude surgery as a prerequisite to be accorded respect, and recognition among the Igbo. According to Onuzulike (2006), the most common is the type 1. In this type, the incision opens the vaginal either anteriorly or posteriorly into the surrounding tissues, resulting in the damage of the urinary bladder/ urethral opening or rectum and anus thereby causing vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). The incision

also includes the cutting of the vagina (*gishiri* cuts), another source for vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). According to Nguouakam et al. (2008) and Onuzulike (2006), vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF) is attributed to the different kinds of incisions because there is no standardization in the methods employed as the circumciser's hand dictated the end result of the surgery. Corroborating, Darrah and Froude (1975) averred that 40% of the patients attending Zaria hospital (Nigeria) with VVF were victims of *gishiri* cuts. Similarly, Tahzib (1983) substantiated this study by asserting that 1443 VVF patients at the Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital, Zaria, between January 1969 and December 1980 had also received *gishiri* cuts. Earlier, Murphy (1981) concluded that the plight of these unfortunate victims could be so devastating and dehumanizing that even when cured after surgery some of them never regained their self-esteem.

On wife battery, Ugwu (2003) contended that, the patriarchal culture as practised empowered men against women. We could situate this de-empowerment of women in the words of the erstwhile chairperson of Women Commission, Bolanle Awe (1996) thus: "you know this is a patriarchal society in which men take the first place". Awe's position aptly summarised what the feminist historian, Gerda (1986) had earlier upheld in her study that women were socialized, indoctrinated and coerced into co-operating with the patriarchal system. The discussants in the Focus Group (FGD) also observed that women were blamed and also condemned for all the wrongs that went on in their families. The discussants also averred that, women's inability to remain and manage their homes were always 'the talking talk' in different drinking spots, and the fear of becoming 'the talking talk' often made women remain with their partners in spite of the battery. In addition, the discussants also argued that the issue of social conditioning inculcated into women from childhood that, irrespective of their other interests, they would never be fulfilled unless they were married and had children. According to Brown et al. (1997), when women accepted this social conditioning, leaving an abusive husband meant failing not only as a mother or wife, but as a woman and also as a human being. This, from all sound arguments, rested on a disastrously premise that kept women in battered homes. Furthermore, Brown et al. (1997) observed that women were told that love conquered all and as such, in the event of being battered, they were urged to remain in the hope that the men would change positively in no distant time for the wonderful times they once had during courtships to occur again.

On Early Child Marriage, Nwosu (2008) averred that, for reproduction to occur, the girl child was given out at a very young age; she was not allowed to mature fully to understand her desires and goals in life before being forced into marriage. In addition, the discussants in the Focus Group (FGD) submitted that in the Igbo traditional societies that when they were given out in marriage at



very young ages, often before or during the process of puberty, they were delivered of healthy children. But Chukwu (2006) observed that the consequences of early child marriage included amongst others, vesico-vaginal fistula (VVF). From this perspective, it is obvious that early child marriage is fundamentally an assault on women. In a study by Tahzib (1983), the study showed that 5.5% (80) of VVF sufferers were less than 13 years of age. Murphy (1981) further averred that, the tear from the contractions of the pelvic muscles due to the inadequacy of the pelvic muscles of these teenage mothers leads to prolonged obstructed labour and trauma during delivery. Chukwu (2006) concluded that the problem of early child marriage was indeed a frightening reality.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Suggestions considered appropriate to dismantle these afore-discussed practices are hereby advanced for creating a conducive and enabling environment for Igbo women of Ebonyi State extraction to strive for excellence.

1. Emphasis should be placed on enlightenment programmes to make women realize that they are fundamentally equal in personality and dignity with men. Women should see themselves as equal in human dignity with their men folk and as a result, must have free hand to plan their lives without any disabling or de-personalizing cultural practices or prejudice or taboo. Igbo women, like their men, should be free to live their lives without any cultural obstacles.
2. Education plays a vital role in the favourable attitude of the sexes towards each other. There is need for the government and religious leaders not only to inspire individuals to a higher educational qualification, but also to make conditions conducive for women to be educated if possible, at no cost.
3. Women are naturally endowed with unique qualities which when properly developed can aid them broaden their horizons for the better, irrespective of the cultural inhibitions they face. In other words, developing the capabilities of women is an important investment not only because their population accounts for more than half of the world, but because they have a major responsibility toward nurturing the young. Therefore, government at all levels; particularly in Ebonyi State should empower women through free micro-credit facilities in order to enable women embark on small-scale businesses and improve their poor economic status, and also improve their persons.
4. Finally, the paper concurs with the efforts of the Ebonyi State House of Assembly to make laws to protect women from these violent and obnoxious cultural practices.

### Conclusion

Many dynamic changes have ushered in improvements in the conditions of women worldwide, especially in the sub-African region. But the Igbo ethnic group of south-east Nigeria is not yet sufficiently aware of the extent to which her cultural practices have displaced, dislodged, and marginalized women. Consequent upon this, the surest way out of these cultural practices, this paper concludes, is empowerment through critical education, access to credit facilities and enlightenment in order for Igbo women to acquire intellectual mind power to free themselves from these shackles of old times. The paper also concludes that man-women relationship in Igbo society should be characterized by the fundamental appreciation of each other's obligations and opportunities and, should therefore not be allowed to lead to any form of enslavement. In essence, women should take positive steps toward improving and transforming their minds, the most fundamental and vital aspect of social engineering and the husbanding of human resources.

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