

Cultural Practices as a Means of Maintaining Traditional Beliefs in Sierra Leone

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Abstract:

The focus of the study was to look into the act of widow cleansing in the Sierra Leonean context. The study has its aim as looking why the act is performed, the processes that are involved and the effect it has on the victim and society as a whole. The participants were drawn from the various region of the country totaling 100 and from five (5) tribes. Concepts and opinions of previous writers were used as literature review and questionnaires were also distributed to the respondent for their opinion on the research issue. The method of analysis of finding was used using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS). The results show that different tribe has their specific focus on why they perform widow cleansing though their general view was for purification and the accepted method is a peace offering.

Keywords: tradition, cleansing, emersion, cultural, religious, Beliefs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

When taking of culture, one should realize that it is a pattern of responses discovered, developed, or invented during the group's history of handling problems which arise from interactions among its members, and between them and their environment. These responses are considered the correct way to perceive, feel, think, and act, and are passed on to the new members through immersion and teaching. Culture determines what is acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, workable or unworkable. It encompasses all learned and shared, explicit or tacit, assumptions, beliefs, knowledge, norms, and values, as well as attitudes, behavior, dress, and language

A widow is simply a woman who has lost her husband through death. Being a widow is a very pathetic situation as one will from hence have to define a new path to complete one's lifespan on earth? In addition, one has to contend with the socio-economic realities of life without one's partner who has been a companion in life, a supporter and a comforter. A widow goes through a lot of psycho-social and traumatic difficulties.

In lieu of the above, there are usually a number of programmers, packages and practices used to help widows to console them on the one hand and or the other, enhance the recovery. This is where Widow Cleansing comes into play. Widow Cleansing has become an integral part of the process of healing widow's psycho-social and traumatic problems.

According to the Oxford English reference dictionary, cleansing is derived from the verb 'cleanses' which means to make clean!! Or in the context of Widow Cleansing denotes purification of a woman. It is a process of cleaning or purifying the widow so that she is clear of any form of guilt or sin to her deceased husband. This is done against the backdrop that, the marriage now requires a man or woman to be faithful, patient and obedient to the other whom he or she has chosen to partner with.

Widow Cleansing tests the resilience of the widow, her faithfulness, and reliability. It ensures that the deceased husband is duly honored before a new husband is accepted. It ensures that there is no complacency with regards claiming any property that might have been left behind by the husband. For instance, a pregnancy that was too young to detect at the time of death. Sometimes it could be money or physical property acquired before the death of the husband. For this reason, cleansing requires that a widow remains in seclusion and in abstinence from sex and many other activities while the designated dress is worn throughout the period as a mark of the identification. The motive of the Widow Cleansing process is purification from sin and vindication from crime as well as preparation reintegration into normal life.

The practice of Widow Cleansing has a long history which could be traced from the Arab conquest and occupation of North Africa between 639 and 708 AD. The Arab conquerors ushered in the practice of Widow Cleansing as part of their post-funeral ceremonial practices. However, this ceremony came to be observed in a different way according to the cultures of the indigenous inhabitants of the host countries.

Today, Widow Cleansing has become a major culture practice and is observed by the major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone viz: Limba, Themne, Mende and Loko and Fulla. The bereaved family normally makes provision for the observance of the ceremony setting the duration the widow or widows of a deceased should go into seclusion. During the period the widow is expected to remain clean and

holy. If after the duration of the ceremony no signs of pregnancy are manifested, it is accepted that the husband had died to live the wife's womb whole. It is also believed that the bond created by years of living together is gradually broken with thoughts of the dead occurring less frequently during the period of isolation or seclusion.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Widow Cleansing has become an acceptable and common practice among indigenous tribes in Sierra Leone. A lot of premium is placed on this tradition with regards fulfilling all the rites involved therein. Careful planning is usually done so that immediately after the valedictory services in the third, seventh and fortieth days, the widow goes into seclusion culminating in the cleansing ceremony after the period of seclusion.

While the practice of Widow Cleansing is held on one hand, on the other, it is randomly criticized. Those who uphold the practice conceived widow cleansing as a sacred tradition, a religious practice (sunnahs) and social necessity, from the other end of the spectrum pessimists view it to be a crude ritual, a heathen practice while others view it as a source of embarrassment.

Over and above, the practice of widow cleansing sends conflicting signals across the broader spectrum of society. The statement of the problem in the foregoing is: 'what is the efficiency of widow cleansing'?

1.2-AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the research is to evaluate the effect of Widow Cleansing in society so that critics of the practice and those practicing it will join hands with stakeholders to harmonize and enhance the institution for peaceful co-existence in societies.

In pursuit of the above aim the research objectives outlined for the investigations included among others the following:

1. To underscore the rationale of widow cleansing in social setting
2. To identify the various methods of cleansing widows
3. To bring out the effects of widow cleansing in societies
4. To seek suggestions of participants on ways of harmonizing and enhancing the practice of widow cleansing in societies

1.3 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Research into the efficiency of Widow Cleansing in a social setting is justified for a number of reasons. Basically, the result of such a study would increase knowledge with regards the theory and practice of widow cleansing in social settings.

The project is further justifiable for best religious practices. To this end, the project will bring out the Islamic and Christian views about the practice of Widow Cleansing. This, in turn, will ensure that traditional and cultural practices are not fused into religious practices.

Researchers also add credence to the justification of the study. Researchers need available materials on issues to enable carry out further investigation. This research would serve as ready resource materials for researchers who might embark on further investigations on the efficacy of Widow Cleansing in social settings.

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cole (1998) sees the term cleansing as a relative term. In other words, it is subject to many shades of meaning. On the one hand, it can be used to mean the more to eliminate a particular set of people through violence because of their origin and belief such as in the case of ethnic cleansing. On the other hand, cleansing according to the world encyclopedia could mean purification and vindication from sin and guilt.

The review is pursued in the sense of the second meaning of the concept. Thus, widow cleansing in the view of Cole (1998) has to do with normalizing with the life of a woman after losing her husband. It is a spiritual and religious rite observed after the death of a husband it is part of the culture.

Joe A.D. Alie defines culture as a way of life of people. It includes all the knowledge, ideas, roles, tradition, beliefs and material objects of the society. These are passed from generations to generations, and they enable man to survive on earth. Culture developed as man learned to use symbols and made things. Language is an important aspect of culture. Each society has its own distinct culture. It is learned by each member of society during the process of socialization.

Widow cleansing is seen as a process of socialization. Cole (1998), in Sierra Leone, widow cleansing has become a widely accepted ceremony as an act of physical and spiritual purification.

From the physical and spiritual purification angle, widow cleansing marks a point of departure with the physical contact or feel of the deceased husband. Alie Joe A.D. (1978) found that widow cleansing in the spiritual sense emanates from the belief that going through the rite of purification breaks every spiritual tie to the husband which is often the cause of wet dreams.

In the traditional sense, Mafony (1988) states that the outcome of the ceremony as a determining factor for reintegration into mainstream society after bereavement.

Some studies have been focused on assessing the efficacy of widow cleansing on individuals and society. Mafony (1998) hinted that the use of a large number of resources for the ceremony was not worth it. Similarly, the isolation of widow from active participation in social life for a specified period is a gross violation of one's basic human rights to freedom of association.

Mafony (1998) argue that from an individual perspective, the effects of the ceremony range from psychological, traumatic and moments of hopelessness. He concludes that widow cleansing is a make or break period as its outcome has a lot to do with the widow's future as an individual and relationship with the society.

In contemporary times, widow cleansing has been subjected to serious scrutiny with the view it underscoring its efficacy. One school of thought holds that heathen traditions can only hold sway in a male-dominated and widely illiterate society where women are mere underdog's Sarpon (2000). Others taught argue that widow cleansing is merely supported by men but actually implemented by women. The second school of thought, therefore, holds that widow cleansing can have its odds, but on the whole, it is socially, traditionally, culturally, religiously and spiritually worthwhile. Such dissenting views make widow cleansing an important topic for further investigation.

2.1 RATIONALE OF WIDOW CLEANSING

Widow cleansing is widely practical ceremony among religious sets and ethnic groups in the world, Cozan (1979). According to Islamic sources, most Muslim practice widow cleansing to place a physical and spiritual boundary between the living and the dead while the elsewhere relationship is maintained by continuous sacrifices and prayers for the peaceful response of the dead. (Ali Shayte 2001).

Among certain ethnic groups, the widows and the 'Badigbas' – (custodians of culture), agree that widow cleansing is an act aimed at physical and spiritual purification of the dead.

The above shows that widow cleansing has a religious and cultural rationale. However, the attempt at linking the two have often times sparked serious reactions and citizens from religious circles.

Ibrahim S Kamara in his foundation of Islam (2000) unpublished urged argued that any link with rearwards widow cleansing and Islam was in the remote part following the migration of full Muslims into Sierra Leone to spread the Islamic faith and in the process introduced their culture which was copied by indigenous Sierra Leoneans.

Kamara accepts some religious rational in widow cleansing as Islam also believes in respect of the dead, purity during mourn and mutual understanding between the widow and the deceased husband's relatives. He, however, condemns the heathen and ritual aspect the culture has brought into the widow cleansing exercise.

In his lecture on the purpose of life, Mohamed Dadat (1996) touched on the significance of honesty, service and obedient. He notes that these elements go a very long way to define the purpose of life. A close look of widow cleansing suggests that the above elements are crucial in determining the rationale of widow cleansing.

"Badigbas" (custodians of culture) reveal that widow cleansing is done to test a widow's honesty to her deceased husband. They claimed that some men died leaving their widow in early pregnancy. Therefore, to verify the status of the widow vis-à-vis her procreative role in marriage, there is a need for a period of break from social activity. This will subscribe to her honesty, obedience, and loyalty in the service of the man she vowed to leave with for better and for worst.

A traditionalist like Sarapan (1999) believed that widow cleansing is a traditional right that every woman in the circumstance must abide by to preserved society. She claims that participation has very much to do with social cohesion, vindication from guilt and suspicious and reintegration in society.

From the above, it is clear that widow cleansing was observed for social cohesion and cleansing from seen and to prepare the way to have a future partner. It will hand the widow respect among her womenfolk and society at large. A woman's faithfulness to her deceased husband is also laid bare through the process of widow cleansing.

Mafony (1998) states that ethnic groups are united by traditional practice such as widow cleansing as such practices have shared values, ideas and rational. From this suggestion, it could be deduced that another rational of widow cleansing is unity among ethnic groups.

Finally, most witnesses seem to subscribe to the fact that widow cleansing was rite observed the break and kept apart from the spirit of the dead husband from the life of the widow allowing her to live a normal again.

2.2 THE WIDOW CLEANSING PROCESS

Arthur Abraham (1978) identified three processes in the widow cleansing process. They include:

- Pre-cleansing process
- Cleansing
- Post-cleansing

Pre-cleansing has to do with the preparation before the cleansing is a concern with that actions aimed at consolidating the cleansing.

Kamara identified variations in the process. In the event of the death of a chief he is believed to have the burning desire to reunite with his favorite and that is why none of his wives is allowed to get married until after a period of one year or even after the cleansing ceremony at the end of the forty days set aside to limit her from total involvement with the rest of the community. A witch doctor normally administers the cleansing of the late chief's wives.

From the foregoing evidence, authors who have paid attention to this ceremony have not come out with the fact of criticism of the cleansing ceremony of widows. The idea of the cleansing ceremony for widows was seen as acceptable norms, and so was not criticize. And so it is evident that the cleansing of widow upon the death of their husband spread across all the tribes in Sierra Leone.

An unpublished pamphlet copied by Mr. D.F Momoh, dean of the faculty of social studies at the northern polytechnic at Makeni, state that, when a man dies a leave his wives, they are expected to marry a man from the late husband family he further states that 'in this case, the new husband is not expected to carry out all the formalities of the marriage rites was previously done in the first marriage. The norm then was that the interested man in the window in the deceased family would formally present himself to the widow, ' i.e., a family with 'cola nut' to declare his intention of remarriage the widow, which would usually take place after the cleansing process.

This was quite normal, and nobody has ever raised any eyebrows on the practice from either the widow or the widow's family.

2.3 EFFECTS OF WIDOW CLEANSING

Dadat (1997) state that, this practice has ceased to be taken kindly, as it has come to be considered as treating of widows as objects of inheritance like any other property left behind by the deceased husband. Besides, the practice has a wide range of socio-economic implication which has seen this type of marriages fail.

On the socio-economic challenges of the deceased ceremonies a government strategy paper known as the 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (P.R.S.P) is trying to explain the causes and effect of poverty in our nation, states that one factor for the state of poverty of our nation is the high concentration of deceased ceremonies in our communities.

It emphasizes that the ceremonies need high funding from the day of the death of an adult to the fortieth day ceremony. However, it needs to be pointed out that in spite of the high funding required for these observances, they are very important as a forum for a reunion of faraway relations and settlements of dispute among family members. This is what the P.R.S.P document has failed to point out.

Also, the paper states that widows are discouraged from taking part in any socio-economic activities. This cannot be overstated as being totally wrong. The fact is that the period of non-participation of a widow in socio-economic activities is a necessary period for the widow to shape up from the psychological breakdown due to the death of the husband. It should be seen as a preparation period of her mind to face the realities of life without the departed husband, the actual essence of the end of the ceremony of cleansing.

However, there is another belief that within one hundred and thirty days, the widow is still tied to marital laws after the death of her husband. The widow by these laws is obliged not to have any sexual affair with any man as this would be seen an adulterous act.

In recent times the cleansing of widows has assumed another dimension thereby it has come to include aspects of proving the widow's innocent of the husband's death.

This aspect of the cleansing widows is a serious concern of sections of modern societies as they see it as a violation of human rights in the sense that it impinges on discrimination treatment of women in society.

This is why the cleansing of widows ceremony is a critical subject with the current dispensation of modern democracies.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This chapter outline the method and procedures used to collect, compile and analyzes the data in this research. It also clarifies other aspects of the methodology such as the design of the study, the study area, research population, sampling procedure and sample size, Below is a breakdown of the methodology.

3.1 STUDY AREA

The name "Sierra Leone" dates back to 1462, when Portuguese explorer Pedro da Cintra, sailing down the West African coast, saw the tall mountains rising up on what is now the Freetown Peninsula and called them the "Lion Mountains," or "*Serra Lyoa*." Successive visits by English sailors and later British colonization modified the name to "Sierra Leone."

Sierra Leone is located on the west coast of Africa, north of the equator. With a land area of 27,699 square miles (71,740 square kilometers), it is slightly smaller than the state of South Carolina. Sierra Leone is bounded by Guinea to the north and northeast, Liberia to the south and southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The population of Sierra Leone is 4.7 million people, the majority being children and youth. In all, there are 16 ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. The largest of these is the Mende, found in the Southern and Eastern Provinces. Next to them in number is the Temne in the North. The third largest group is the Limba, also in the Northern Province, followed by the Kono in the Eastern Province. There's also the Koranko in the North as well as Yalunka, Loko, Soso, Madingo, and Fullah. On the coast, north and south are the Bullom and Sherbro followed by the much smaller groups of Krim, Vai, Gola, with the Kissi further inland in the Eastern Province. The Western area, including Freetown, is more mixed in population but is basically the home of the Krio.

3.3 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The design of the study is largely descriptive. This is so because it involves the use of question and answer procedure between researcher and respondents on the issues relating to the practice of widow cleansing. Data obtained from such interaction was carefully recorded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software so as to provide vivid descriptions of the results and finding of the study.

3.4 RESEARCH POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The population for the conduct of the study was drawn from the tribes mentioned and from stakeholders in the cultural and traditional affairs of the country. Essentially, mature men and women and especially widows formed the research population. Quota sampling was used to select the sample size for the study. Along this line, twenty respondents were drawn from the various population groups identified bringing the total of respondents to one hundred.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The instruments used for the data collection process included questionnaires, structured interviews, and observations.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The main thrust of the study was to underscore the efficiency of widow cleansing using selected tribes in Sierra Leone. In the end, the following research objectives were outlined and vigorously pursued in the investigations:

1. To underscore the rational of widow cleansing in social settings
2. To highlight the process or procedures of cleansing widows
3. To bring out the effects of widow cleansing in societies

4.1 RATIONAL FOR WIDOW CLEANSING

TABLE 1: WHAT IS THE RATIONALE FOR WIDOW CLEANSING?

	WHAT IS THE RATIONALE FOR WIDOW CLEANSING?				
	PHYSICAL PURIFICATION	SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION	TRADITIONAL/ CULTURAL RITE	BREAKING THE BOND BETWEEN THE DEAD AND LIVING	A PROOF OF FAITHFULNESS AND LOYALTY
TRIBES LIMBA	2 10.0%	4 20.0%	4 20.0%	5 25.0%	5 25.0%
THEMNE	4 20.0%	4 20.0%	4 20.0%	3 15.0%	5 25.0%
FULLAH	7 35.0%	4 20.0%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%	2 10.0%
MENDE	7 35.0%	1 5.0%	4 20.0%	6 30.0%	2 10.0%
LOKO	5 25.0%	1 5.0%	8 40.0%	4 20.0%	2 10.0%
Total	25 25.0%	14 14.0%	22 22.0%	23 23.0%	16 16.0%

After the survey, it was realized from table 1 that the main purpose of widow cleansing is to physical purification as it carries 25% of the entire responses given. Breaking the bond between the dead and the living with specific reference to the wife or wives left behind by the deceased is also considered greatly by these tribes. Their responses were graded as 23% representing 23 respondents. Maintenance of the culture as set by their forefathers was also another reason held in high esteem for this process. The total response accounted for 22% of the total responses. However, different tribes have their reason for going through the widow cleansing process. From the responses gathered, it could be seen that the Limbas are more concern on breaking the bond with the dead and purifying the widow or widows that is/are left by the deceased. Unlike the Themnes, they are focusing on the proof of faithfulness. They want to ascertain if the woman was impregnated before the death of the husband. The issue of breaking the bond is considered least in their rationale. The fullahs believed that because of the relationship that has existed between the widow and the deceased, there had been a bond. Therefore their main focus on the widow cleansing is to break that bond and set the woman free from the spirit of the deceased. The Mendes believed in physical purification and the breaking of the bond. They believed that the widow would have to be given to the younger brother of the deceased and therefore has to be purified physically and pronounced clean for any other man to wed again. This is done alongside the aim of breaking the bond between the two. The Lokos believed in maintaining their tradition and physical purification.

4.2 CLEANSING METHOD PRACTICED BY TRIBE

TABLE 2: WHICH CLEANSING METHOD IS BEING PRACTICE BY YOUR TRIBE THE MOST?

	WHICH CLEANSING METHOD IS BEING PRACTICE BY YOUR TRIBE THE MOST?					Total
	EMERSION	BLOOD SACRIFICE	SECRET SOCIETY ASPECT	RELIGIOUS RECITATION	PEACE OFFERING	
TRIBES AS LIMBAS RESPRESENTED IN THE SURVEY	8 40.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	3 15.0%	5 25.0%	20 100.0%
THEMNES	5 25.0%	1 5.0%	5 25.0%	3 15.0%	6 30.0%	20 100.0%
FULLAHS	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	6 30.0%	5 25.0%	5 25.0%	20 100.0%
MENDES	3 15.0%	2 10.0%	6 30.0%	3 15.0%	6 30.0%	20 100.0%
LOKOS	5 25.0%	3 15.0%	5 25.0%	4 20.0%	3 15.0%	20 100.0%
Total	23 23.0%	10 10.0%	24 24.0%	18 18.0%	25 25.0%	100 100.0%

The various tribes do practice similar methods of cleansing if not all. However, each tribe has a specific method they prefer most than the others. Generally, the tribes do prefer peace offering as a means of widow cleansing as it carries 25% while the secret society aspect accounted for 24%. Furthermore, the process of water emersion followed with a percentage score of 23%.

Focusing on the tribes individually, it is recorded that the Limbas do practice more of water emersion than all the other methods. 40% of their widow cleansing process is done via emersion while 25% of the process is done through peace offering. The other methods accounted for 35%. The Themnes, however, relied on peace offering (30%) as compared to emersion and secret society aspect that accounted for 25% each. Secret society aspect (30%) is held in high esteem by the Fullahs. Religious recitation and peace offering is next considered in the cleansing process. The Mendes accepted the means of secret society and peace offering as their primary method is widow cleansing. By the research figures, 30% of the responses responded in the affirmative for secret society aspects as well as 30% for religious recitations. The Lokos believe in emersion and secret society for the widow cleansing process.

4.3 EFFECT OF WIDOW CLEANSING

TABLE 3: WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF WIDOW CLEANSING?

	OVERALL, WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF WIDOW CLEANSING?									Total
	SOCIAL COHESSION	ACT OF VINDICATION	PROOF OF FAITHFULNESS	REMOVAL OF ILL LUCK	DISCOVERY OF CAUSE OF DEATH	BREAKING THE BOND	STRESS	STIGMA	FAMILY DISUNITY	
LIMBA	1 5.0%	2 10.0%	1 5.0%	0 0.0%	7 35.0%	2 10.0%	3 15.0%	1 5.0%	3 15.0%	20 100.0%
THEMNES	1 5.0%	1 5.0%	4 20.0%	1 5.0%	1 5.0%	2 10.0%	0 0.0%	2 10.0%	8 40.0%	20 100.0%
FULLA	1 5.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	3 15.0%	4 20.0%	2 10.0%	1 5.0%	4 20.0%	1 5.0%	20 100.0%
MENDE	3 15.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	5 25.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	0 0.0%	20 100.0%
LOKOS	2 10.0%	4 20.0%	3 15.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	2 10.0%	1 5.0%	2 10.0%	20 100.0%
Total	8 8.0%	11 11.0%	12 12.0%	11 11.0%	16 16.0%	10 10.0%	8 8.0%	10 10.0%	14 14.0%	100 100.0%

There is no process without implications. To this widow, cleansing is no exception. Following the data collection, it is realized 16% of the respondent regardless of tribal affiliation said that widow cleansing is done to discover the cause of death of the deceased, while

14% of the respondents believed that widow cleansing creates family disunity especially if the wife is accused of killing the husband. Another effect that was high in the line was proof of faithfulness.

The tribal effects differ from the general perception. With the Limbas, widow cleansing implies that the cause of death will be known before the ceremony is completed. Their report, therefore, reads that they are 35% certain that by the time the process is completed, the cause of death would have been known. They also believed that the process implies that it puts the women under undue pressure thereby resulting in stress for the rest of the process. The Temne top focus is that the process brings disunity between families especially the family of the deceased and widow. 40% of the Temnes respondent hold on to this view, while 20% believes it leads to determining if the widow is faithful or not. 20% of the Fullas believed that the process leaves an everlasting stigma on the woman if she is presumed guilty as the community will always be seeing her as a murderer. In the same vein, 20% also believes that the process brings to light the cause of death of the deceased, while 15% thinks the process will remove any type of bad luck from the widow. As for the Mendes who believe the widow will have to get married to the younger brother of the deceased think the effect is widow cleansing is to clean the woman of ill luck. This is the view shared by 25% of the Mende respondent. 15% also sees it that this brings social cohesion and integration into society again. If the woman refused to go through the process, she would be isolated. 20% of the Lokos believed that the process implied that a widow would be vindicated from the suspicious act. 10% of them also believe that its help brings to light if the widow is guilty or not. If she is proven innocent, it vindicates her of the act.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The research found position used as a negative effect on the practice of individuals and society. On the positive end of the spectrum, widow and digs, as well as opinion leaders, revised that widow cleansing build cohesion in society. They said so because of this belief, after unifying the faithfulness and innocence of the widow with regard the death of her husband. Relatives of both parties share a clear conscience and rejoice the fact that the ceremony had cleared all suspicious in the widows of doubling relative about the nature of the death.

Another positive effect of widow cleansing put forward by participants in the course of the investigation was the ceremony was an act of vindication and a proof of the faithfulness of a widow. According to respondents, husband sometimes dies to leave a widow pregnant. Sometimes the stage of the pregnancy could not be verified until after a certain period. Equally, some husband died under mysterious circumstances leaving doubts in the minds of close relatives' interested parties. However, participants reveal that after the cleansing ceremony and the confirmation of the widows' innocence and faithfulness, the widow felt vindication and fulfilled. A further positive effect of widow cleansing according to participants was the process words of evil spirits and ill luck occasioned by the mystical power that surrounded a widow after the death of her husband. Respondents also stated that a similar positive was the breaking of the bond between the living and the dead husband.

On the negative end of the spectrum, people engaged in the investigations revealed that widow cleansing was anti-social because it's isolated the widow from free participation in many social functions for the rest of the period of seclusion. They say it as a gross abuse of a person's basic human right of freedom of association.

Moreover, widow interviewed condemned the practice because of the stress and stigma attached to it widows disclosed that though out the period of seclusion, they remained in the perpetual stress of desiring to have it all over. The worst-case scenario cited was, if the eventual ceremony proved a widow culpable somehow, she was shunned by society and viewed with a negative eye. This could sow the seeds for disunity and chaos among families.

It is observed a woman who submits herself to the practice of Widow Cleansing on her husband's death does not only attain purification and vindication from sin and suspicion, but the practice also evokes respect from society. A woman who painstakingly submits herself to the rites of a Widow Cleansing is likely to find love in another husband especially if such a woman is still young. All psycho-social and traumatic problems are overcome after widow cleansing.

However, it is also noted that a woman goes through a lot of constraints during the process of Widow Cleansing. There might include material, financial and human constraints. While others hail Widow Cleansing as a religious practice, a 'sunnah' and socio-cultural rite, others view it as heathen, ungodly and superstitious.

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