Title of Article:  Widows’ population and the challenges of widowhood rites: The case of the Awori of Ogun State, southwestern Nigeria

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Abstract:  Across many societies in Nigeria, widows of all age categories exist and form a significant part of the human population. One striking feature is the much greater number of widows relative to widowers. A large proportion of these widows are without formal education and have low level of income and therefore lack economic empowerment. More worrisome is the traditional widowhood rites observed by widows irrespective of age, in the name of culture. Though the experience of widows varies from one society to another, the practice tends to be more entrenched in the rural communities. Utilizing data from the survey of 942 widows in six Awori communities together with results of Focus Group Discussions among widows, in-depth interviews among widowers and opinion leaders as well as evidence from literature, the paper presents the cultural explanation and gender construction of death as well as the social construction of widowhood. It examines the widowhood rites in the study area together with their challenges. The widowhood rites include confinement indoor, sitting on a mat, observance of vigil, wearing of dark clothes, use and disposal of separate utensils as well as taking of special bath. The paper concludes by making recommendations for policy.

Keywords:  Widows, population, widowhood rites, Awori, Nigeria