The Influence Of Self-help Groups In Enhancing Social Integration And Decision Making Among The Widows

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Introduction / Background

Globally, Studies show an increasing number of widowed persons, Global Widows report 2015, 258 million, 9% global increase. In India, 46 million, China 44 million, Kenya - 1.4 million. In Africa, armed conflict, HIV and AIDS among the factors contributing to widowhood. Loss of a spouse precipitates disruption of the family and related instability; affects social integration and decision making. The role and resultant effects of widows participating in groups.
Widowhood still is a global challenge. They face socioeconomic challenges. In Kenya, limited attention has been given to the options and opportunities available for the widow to reconstitute the family and to enhance their socioeconomic conditions using resources within their reach.

Many widows have been thrown out of their homes by in-laws; The government, the church has not come out strongly in support of widows.

Widows can be productive members of the community; participating in community or income generating projects, equipped with skills through their participation in self-help groups.
Study objectives

1. To examine the influence of self-help groups in enhancing social integration among the widows.
2. To examine the influence of self-help groups in enhancing decision making among the widows.
Brief literature review

Studies on widowhood by Martha Chen in India- Challenges facing the widows and how selfhelp groups have helped them in making decisions.

Studies by Worlds Women on Widows, Global widows report 2015

In Kenya by Regina Oboler among the Nandi, Ambasa – Shisan among the Luo Women, Among the Taita by Nelly and the active role played by the widows in church

Studies on the widows and selfhelp groups

Theoretical Framework- Social Exchange Theory, Network Theory and the theory of Redefinition by William Thomas
Methodology

The study was carried out in Nandi Central District part of the wider Nandi County in Rift Valley Kenya.

Research Design - A survey design was used – useful for both descriptive and exploratory. Population of the study - Target population were widows in the District obtained through; The chiefs from twenty locations, subchiefs and village elders, The Constituency Development Fund Kapsabet and snowball method.

Probability and Non-Probability sampling was used to get the sample size of 250 widows out of 2940 (sample frame)
Proportionate stratified sampling was used to ensure adequate representation of the strata.

Methods of data collection; Questionnaires both open and close ended, FGD’s, Key Informants, Case Histories- purposively selected from each location.

In order to achieve the objectives, the study looked at the visit before the loss and after the loss of the spouse and how the selfhelp groups have enhanced their socioeconomic status.
FINDINGS

The visits before the loss of the spouse

The study looked at the visits before and after the loss of the spouse to measure social integration. **Family member visits** - 72.5% (174) daily, 14.2% (34) weekly and 7.9% (19) monthly.

**Relatives’ visits** - 38.3% (92) weekly, 34.6% (83) monthly and only 11.7% (28) quarterly.

**Friends’ visits** - 48.3% (116) daily visits, 37.5% (90) weekly and none paid nor quarterly nor yearly visits.

**Church member visits** - majority 90% (216) weekly visits, while 7.9% daily visits and none paid neither quarterly nor yearly visits.
Findings

The visits after the loss of the spouse

**Family member visits** - 47.9% (113) daily visits, 20.3% (48) weekly visits and 16.1% (38) monthly visit. The levels of interaction from the family members changed.

**Relative visits** - majority 36.4% (84) monthly visits and 20.3% (48) yearly visits; suggests that relatives change their interaction status after the death of the spouse.

**Friends’ visits** - 37.6% (89) daily visits and 33.3% (79) weekly visits implying that friends have the highest levels of interaction.

**Church visits** - 82.3% (195) weekly visits.
Findings

1. The findings show that when the spouse was alive the family visits were frequent, upon the loss of the husband they decreased. (Reasons from the respondents)

2. Friend visits decreased; The married family friends visits reduced mainly affecting the young widows due to the fact that the wives the friends feared that the widows could snatch their husbands.

3. Need of financial assistance affected level of interaction. The widows cited loneliness and isolation. (considered a burden)

4. With increased responsibilities the respondents hardly have time to go out and socialize with others.
Continuation

It was observed that the young group of widows get into relationships with men, get more children and this becomes a burden; causing stigma and lack of respect from the family.

With regard to the church, the level of interaction increased. Members are encouraged to assist and visit the widows in their homes, integrating the widows into the community, preaching hope, organizing harambees for the childrens’ school fees, medical fees among others.

It was established that some churches are more active than others. For the Muslims, the widows rely on well wishers for dependency
Continuation

relatives decreased their visits by 36.03%, followed by family members by 32.33%, and church members decreased visits by 17.96%. This suggests that church members are more involved in consoling the widows.

Role Played by Group in Communal Activities

Self-help groups played a key role in organizing communal activities, helping the widows to interact with each other and the members of the community.

Activities included Environmental conservation practices, Initiation and wedding ceremonies, visits to members, trainings and workshops, income generating projects, community meetings such as barazas.
One widow had this to say:

"Since I joined the group, I am not lonely anymore. I interact with the members, they encourage me and my self-esteem has come back. Now I feel like a human being. God bless the groups." 41 year old kabirirsang location.
61.1% (138) reported that their spouses made decisions regarding education, 54.9% (124) were involved in family issues/development, while 39.8% (90) made farming decisions and 17.3% (39) made decision on selling land/property.

Men are the main decision makers and women make complementary decisions. In line with a study by Regina Oboler, upon the loss of the spouse, the woman finds herself in a dilemma to make certain decisions on her own, due to the cultural orientation and has to consult extended family in some cases.
Participation in groups empowered them to make family decisions. The frequency of meetings, trainings organized by the groups, allocation of duties such as leadership roles, facilitated acquisition of decision making skills.

**Group Activities that Help in Decision Making** - Seminars/training forums, participation in community activity, Guidance and counselling, finance education/services, group discussion, leadership role in the group, family cohesion, economic/social empowerment. Some groups instilled strong leadership skills- Arwos, Tiryo, Lolmininga, Terige- would sell honey. Also enhanced their self-esteem.
Findings indicated that 32.9% (55) of the respondents participated in seminars and training forums organized by the self help groups, 27.5% (46) participated in group discussions during their meetings, 13.2% (22) participated in guidance and counseling sessions organized.

Self help groups in India have empowered women in decision making and ascending to leadership positions. They banned the local sale and consumption of alcohol and chewing tobacco among the village men and youth, they organized several sit ins at the local liquor store to get it to close down (IFAD, 2000).
Recommendations

The widows who did not belong to any group (23%) missed out on opportunities that would have helped them.

The government, the church and other stakeholders in the area should help create awareness on the importance of integrating the widows into the community.

The work of the Non Governmental organizations should extend their wings to cover the whole county.

The political leadership should be open to all men and women, widowed and non-widowed.
Recommendations

The study found out that the religion one belongs to played a role in the participation of Groups.

The study found out that some spouses died due to HIV AIDS virus and their wives face a lot of stigma; need for support and counselling services.

The existing groups need to be strengthened by equipping them with leadership skills and introducing variety of activities that are income generating.

Finally, the Kenyan Government should come up with a clear policy on widows as a vulnerable group.
Conclusions

Evident from the study that widowhood is on the rise and it is a major challenge to the Kenyan government.

This is due to the impact of HIV AIDS in society, road accidents among others, consequently, the government and other stakeholders should continue opening and creating opportunities where widows can sustain their families, awareness on the importance of integrating the widow into the community. Education should also be emphasized. This will discourage school dropouts and enhance empowerment especially on the girl child.
Areas for further study

Leadership dynamics in Selfhelp groups