

## ABANYOLE WIDOWS' ATTITUDE TOWARD THEIR SEXUALITY

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**Abstract:** A global survey on the sexual situation of widows reveals a general infringement in many traditions and cultures. This in turn impacts on the attitude they have on themselves as women in general, on their sexuality in particular and more so in their widowhood. This article reflects on the prevailing widows' attitude toward their sexuality among Abanyole of Emuhaya. Interview and Focused Group Discussion schedules were used to collect data from respondents. A review of relevant literatures was undertaken to examine and provide a perspective to the study. A conceptual framework of Social Justice was employed in the analysis of the accrued data. Its findings are descriptively presented as narrated themes. The findings are descriptively presented as narrated themes. This study established that Abanyole widows' sexuality is overshadowed with a lot of stigma and suspicion. Women among Abanyole are socialized to prefer male gender. Consequently, they espouse a low self-worth playing a second fiddle to their male counterparts. And as a matter of fact widows are their own enemies. They accept, internalize, repeat, and even project on other widows the ills mated against them. This article recommends that Abanyole, especially women, engage their culture in light of contemporary realities to avert female subjugation that characterizes widow sexuality.

**Keywords:** Widow, Sexuality, widowhood, Abanyole Culture, Gender, Trajectory, women, sex.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This article is part of a study that was carried out among the Abanyole of Emuhaya with a view of establishing the influence of Christianity on widows' sexuality. This section is an exploration of Abanyole widow's attitude toward their sexuality. An understanding of the Abanyole widows' attitude toward their sexuality is critical in appreciating their sexual behavior. This entails the widows' self opinions, perceptions, feelings, emotions and general behavior. It is important to determine the worth, value, position/status, social space and identity that widows espouse first as women, and then in their status as widows. It is also important that one examines the expectations and norms that exist and how they influence widows' attitudes about sex and sexual behavior. Last but not the least is the consideration of women's socialization among the Abanyole and its influence on widows' sexuality.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Literature is herein reviewed to precision context, content and perspective of the study. Literatures relating to the women perception, and especially, widows' were reviewed. The intention being to reveal a women and a widow in terms of their gender positionality and their accruing perception on sexuality.

## Widows' Perception of their Sexuality

Understanding widows' opinion of their sexuality is important to the meticulous discerning and determining the response thereof. Perceptions have to do with the knowledge, attitudes and behavior that people have, embrace and do concerning a phenomenon. Influences are culture bound and just as the culture they are dynamic and conditioned.

However, the perception of widows' sexuality is imbedded in the understanding of the meaning assigned to concepts of women, femininity and widow. It is important to understand who a woman is in general and particularly a widow. The study about and for women is referred to as feminism. Others for fear of the emotions evoked by the term prefer to term it as gender studies. Feminism is generally gaining currency in academia and seeks among other things, as Azuike (2009: 80) articulates, to help "women to relentlessly struggle to lift themselves from their subordinate state and to carve out new roles and identities for themselves". Citing Ezeigbo, Azuike underscored that, "feminism is simply the awareness that women are subjugated and their determination to correct their subjugation" (Azuike, 2009: 80). Such is the work by Joan Acker in 'Women and Work in Social Sciences' that summarizes new knowledge about women working by noting that first, women are no longer ignored by social sciences. Secondly, there is a redefinition of work (employment) to resonate with women situation. Finally, the underlying assumption that male is the generic human being and that the female is the residual category is being dissolved as more knowledge is being generated. Thus drawing conclusion that, such "Changes in our knowledge suggest a subversion and erosion of male bias" (Storberg & Harkess, 1988: 23). It can, therefore, be said to be a reactionary or contextual study occasioned by a general perception that women are subjugated. Feminism as a concept aids in discerning women condition wherever and whenever (Onsongo, 2007: 27-28).

## Woman Revealed

Having considered feminism the researcher will now proceed to explore womanhood. The overriding question is that of identity. Who does society say a woman is? As stated earlier, this question and the accruing situation of the woman forms the preoccupation of the studies in feminism or gender. Studies in feminism or Gender studies have in the recent past unearthed enormous knowledge pertaining women in a gendered sense. Accordingly, Ayanga rightly observes that, "Gender becomes a power and resource distribution mechanism." (Ayanga, 2011: 12). She drew from Mercy Oduyoye's wisdom to underpin the fact that gender issues is pervading and "one of the oldest power struggles of humanity," and is the underlying factor "in the politics and economics of a given people" (Ayanga, 2011: 12).

Women are generally disadvantaged and discriminated globally due to gender relations between male and female (Onsongo, 2007). This situation is more severe in the developing nations. In developed societies women have attained political and economic powers. However, interpersonally women in 'developed' societies still suffer gender based violence. In 'developing' societies, women subordination is harsh. Bride burning is reported in India, rape in South Africa, women assault in Brazil, intimidating situation for women in Muslim world, female infantile as a result of son preference in Asia and female genital mutilation in many African societies. Though many of these oppressive norms are being challenged and changed, sexual discrimination against women persists due to a patriarchal social order (Marger, 2005).

Maseno argues for the existence of differentiation in "woman's position in every national, regional and local spheres as well as the potential for transformation." She goes on to accentuate that "woman in Africa in general could be thought of as standing together, affected in varying degrees by a particular discrimination, such as gender power imbalance" (2014: 23, 25).

Writing on the experience of Tanzania women church leader, Tregellas pursues the same train of thought. She establishes that the church faces a dilemma on how to regard women because of the general disregard accorded

them in the larger society. She observes, "...is painful to women and destructive of their physical and psychological well being. This lack of regard is a denial of woman's human dignity and as such it is an issue that deserves careful consideration within the Christian community" (1997: 60).

Correspondingly, Obwoye relates to us a similar situation of women in the church among the Abanyole. His study established women subordination among the Abanyole:

Women in general are educated to believe that being born female means to be born innately inferior and damaged, that there is something wrong with us. We are told that we are needed as mothers, caretakers, cheap labor in the field and factories. Due to women's low self-esteem, they underrate themselves and leave leadership role to men. The traditional way is that women do most of the work in church and society and men hold most of the leadership (2011: 82).

In the same way, Maseno explains that, "In general, socialization among the Abanyole prescribed division of labor shapes a girls' and woman's identity" (2014: 130). This review demonstrates a general low opinion and social space ascribed to a woman. This impairs that identity of a woman for as she perceives herself in relation to men.

As such the reviewed literatures reveal that women are generally marginalized right from the socialization given from childhood. This is true among the Abanyole as in other societies in the world. This socialization shapes their identity and hence the gender differentiation. The studies are very helpful to this study in terms of informing it on gender differentiation and marginalization that leads to gender disparity among the Abanyole. This was crucial to this study because it is concerned with gender power derived from femininity or masculinity, especially when it comes to bargaining on matters of sex. However, these studies do not explore Christian influence and widow sexuality which are the gaps to be filled with this study.

### **Widow Revealed**

Maseno (2014) in her study on widow's Christology among the Abanyole observes that widows occupy peculiar social space among women. They occupy an intersection characterized with multifaceted marginalization such as gender, marital status, illness, and economic empowerment. This implies the importance of understanding their social situation in order to appreciate their experiences. She contends that widowhood reduces a woman, who is hitherto discriminated on the basis of her gender, to liminality. This, she explains, is because of the gender systems which are patriarchal and perceives a woman from a male dominated structure. Consequently, she established that women and widows among the Abanyole have authority but it is downplayed.

The above mentioned study relates to the current study in the sense that they both explored issues related to widowhood among the Abanyole. Maseno's study is helpful in revealing the inter-section that widows occupy among women and in the large Abanyole society. This is crucial because it affords us to appreciate the double loss that widows experience during their widowhood trajectory. It also aids in shading a light on how widows have embraced Christianity and bring back the memories of their deceased husbands through naming their grandsons. However, the study does not explore issues of Christian influence on widow sexuality. That gap is well filled by this study.

Chen and Prezie's (1995) study reports that widows in India experience high level of deprivation. They outline sources of vulnerability as patrilocality, patrilineal inheritance and remarriage practices. Their report also established that widows are socially isolated due to the injustices leveled upon them such as rumors and accusations, enforced dress and behavior codes, social ostracism and physical violence. Hence, confirming that Indian widows suffer marginalization.

Chen and Prezie's (1995) study relates to the current study in that they both explore widowhood experiences. The current study benefitted from it specifically by reviewing on the sources of widow vulnerability and the injustices widows experience. However, the current study was carried out among the Abanyole while the former was done among Indians. In addition, the current study explored the relationship between Christianity and widow sexuality among the Abanyole. Therefore the contextual and content gap existed calling for another study which necessitated the current work.

### **Widows' Sexuality**

Sexuality of widows is rarely a concern of most academic research and writing. Most studies concerning widows focus on their social and economic marginalization (Newton-Levinson, Winskell, Abdela, Marce, & Rob, 2014). As

stated earlier, sexuality refers to a holistic personality. It comprises of sexual identity, sum of activities, attitudes, attraction, relationships, sexual intercourse and reproductive health involved in bodily system of reproduction hence sexual behavior. This raises issues such as: How does a widow view her body sexually; can a widow allow herself to have sex with someone else? Under what circumstances could a widow continue having sex? Is it only for widow cleansing or even more thereafter? What is the implication of view of widows' sexuality on their access to reproductive health?

There are varied views on the sexuality of widows as there are varied cultures and categories of widows. Owen (1996) carried out a global survey on the widows' attitude on their sexuality. The research revealed a mixed opinion owing to the different social contexts and varieties of widows. The views can be categorized under two main classes: Living without sex and widows who have sex.

Widows for various reasons revert to asexual mode. Owen cites such cases as Indian low caste widows who choose 'celibacy' for cultural and religious reasons. Others will opt for staying without a sexual partner for fear of children from the previous marriage especially in patria-local arrangement. Still other for the previous chilling sexual and family experiences may give up on the matter altogether. Be it as it may, the elimination of this vital component in human life may lead to frustration, low self esteem and depression (1996: 76).

A study carried out on sexuality and stigma of widows and divorced women among Oromiya of Ethiopia found out: Women experience high level of community stigma in relation to their sexuality. Participants fear of community stigma and the actions they took to avert it, further served to marginalize them within their community and had negative impact on their economic, social and health support system and ultimately on their overall well being (Newton-Levinson, Winskell, Abdela, Marce, & Rob, 2014: 916).

Citing the world public opinion, Newton-Levinson et al., ably demonstrated that widows and divorced women are discriminated against even by other women. They established that:

When women separated from men through widowhood or divorce, their sexuality received new emphasis and was constructed as uncontrolled, unpredictable and thus, threatening the community. Widowed and divorced women's sexuality, in short, was perceived as something that must be monitored or reined in. Other women in the community were often the most suspicious in one community. FGDS, for example, one married woman stated bluntly: 'A widow or divorced woman has more sexual desire' ...the assumption was that women without men were desperate to find new men and would use their wiles to do so (2014: 920).

Based on the foregoing, the general attitude on the sexuality of widows is one of infringement. They are suspected and/or feared suspicion by married women who formed vigilantes, their grooming would earn them accusation of trying to woo married men and sex is generally regarded as illicit and shameful in most African peasant societies. Similarly, Owen (1996) writing in his study about, 'Sex and Sexuality' of the widows in West and most industrialized societies, notes that they suffer like their colleagues in developing societies. This is because married women perceive them as potential threats to their marriages. She explains that:

Even in the west, young and middle-aged widows risk being regarded as easily available, sex-starved and anxiously seeking some new relationship. In the West the term 'merry widow', used to describe widows past prime who enjoy themselves, has asexual connotation. Such attitudes account for why married women regard widows and divorced women a threat and are unwilling them in social gathering (1996: 72).

In the same way, Omari (2013) in her study on sexual violence in Eldoret Municipality underscored the fact that among the Kikuyu community men define themselves as the dominant sex and see women as objects at their disposal. This also reflects the sentiments expressed by Owen (1996, 80) whose research work suggest that patriarchal societies view widows' sexuality either as belonging to men or something to be ignored.

Other studies have shown that in-laws are becoming less willing to inherit the widows of the relatives because of the economic burden of supporting a widow and her family as well as the risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS from these widows and vice versa (Agot, 2005 and Ambasa-Shisanya, 2007). On the other hand, an ambivalent picture is painted. An example is with the study carried out among eighty-three widows from Mambai Sub- location, Wodanga, in Sabatia, North Maragoli. The study established that forty-two percent of widows resisted inheritance

while forty-seven percent accepted for reasons of either economic, insecurity or because they wanted to bear sons to affirm their social status (Gwako, 1998).

### Summary and Conclusion

The reviewed literatures are very important to this study. They explore the issue of widow sexuality in various contexts. They also highlight on the situation of widows in various contexts as they try to affirm their position as sexual beings. Revealed also are factors that determine widow's choices pertaining to her sexual life. Summarily, a widow is not in charge of her sexual life. Factor which more often are beyond her control, come to play.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Introduction

This section presents findings and discussion on Abanyole widows' attitude toward their sexuality. Abanyole widows' self-opinions, perceptions, feelings, emotions and general behavior are examined. It is important to determine the worth, value, position/status, social space and identity that widows espouse first as women, and then in their status as widows. It is also important to familiarize with the expectations and norms that exist and how they influence widows' attitudes about sex and sexual behavior. Last but not the least the chapter considered women's socialization among the Abanyole and its influence on widows' sexuality.

### Widows' self- perception of their sexuality

In considering widows self-perception the researcher sought to establish widows' gendered self-rating and how it contributes to their overall discrimination in the society. The data generated related to widow's sensuality, widow's views on their identity, widows' view about intimacy and widows' views on sexual intercourse. Overall, it could comfortably be said that widows have low rating of themselves by comparison with their male counterparts.

### Widow's Attitude on her Sensuality

Hillman (2012, 11) describes sensuality as follows:

Sensuality can be defined as the experience of pleasure from one's senses leading to an increased awareness of and appreciation for one's own body. Such pleasure may be generated via sexual activity specifically, but also from any activation of the sensory organs. It is essential to note that sensual pleasure can be experienced with or without another person, and that expressions of sensuality are vast and quite individualized. Examples of sensual activities may include taking a hot bath or shower, noticing the breeze against one's face, having a massage, listening to music, lighting candles, getting one's hair done, eating a wonderful meal, molding or shaping clay, dressing up in beautiful clothing, splashing in puddles, lying in a feather bed, wearing silky underwear, singing in a resonant choral group, holding hands, using fragrant body lotions, dancing, engaging in foreplay, feeling muscles warm and loosen during exercise, or appreciating artwork. While sensual activities may induce sexual excitement, the inherent goal of the activity is not sexual intercourse or climax.

Women among Abanyole have a generally low self rating in relation to their male counterparts. All women that participated in this study thought and acted as though there is something special about being male. This may be attributed to their socialization which imprints in them the idea that male is the default and superior sex (MYW FGD).

Women in Bunyore have learned that they accrue their identity from males. Therefore they always emphasize their husband's name in their introduction. In fact some will go all the way, when using English, to insinuate that his name is their 'addresses'. Some, upon marriage, change their name by inserting their husband's name on their official documents. Failure to do so is deemed to be a sign of noncommittal.

Another observation to that effect is the title with which women [wives] in Bunyore refer to their husbands. The standard title is omwami wanje which directly translates to, my lord. Such a title is not just in word but enacted in day-to-day family life. The women care and serve men among Abanyole. They do all the domestic chores which

include food production on the farm and trading to earn a family's living. They can only own anything through their men.

During one of the elder's FGD's that was held at Osore's home, the researcher observed a general acceptance of low rating among Abanyole women. As we were settling down for our discussion, his wife showed up to greet us. One of the elders requested our host to give his wife a chair. He replied that, *omukhasi sasinjilwanga ta* loosely translated as, 'a man is not supposed to surrender his seat to a woman'. He also noted, *omukhasi sabolwa m'mbela ta, alo'le m'mbikhole*, rendered as, 'a husband is not supposed to apologize or accept wrong doing to his wife, just demonstrate it in kindness'. I thought that such sentiments would irritate the wife or at least evoke a discussion but to my surprise the wife and all elders present confirmed it to be so.

MYW leaders' FGD observed that women in Bunyore are taken and treated as part of properties in the name of their fathers which eventually change hands to their husbands in exchange for bride price. They noted that women in Bunyore, regardless of their status, are over burdened and get exhausted early in the day. The family pressure greatly affects how women in Bunyore feel about themselves. They rarely experience pleasure as there are hardly opportunities to familiarize and appreciate their own bodies. They said that it is time that women in Bunyore broke the shackles of low self esteem perpetuated by male chauvinism and take seriously their role and responsibilities as women for the community's prosperity. They noted that days of exclusivity are long gone and what men can do, women can do it better. They illustrated that sanity been restored and progress realized since Emuhaya began to deploy women in Provincial Administration and other leadership positions.

Reverend Mrs. Carolyne Otinga, the Associate Director - Youth Ministries (COGEA [K]) seem to be at home with the notion of women playing a second fiddle as they assume their rightful position in marriage. While exhorting a would be couple on a pre-wedding party at Ibubi Church of God (26/11/2016) she emphasized that the bride's academic and economic status does not count in a marriage institution. "When it comes to the institution of marriage, you put down your academic credentials. You are now going to be someone's wife. Do not regard yourself in light of your credentials, position or the amount of money you earn," she advised. She went ahead to illustrate with her own situation noting that when at home she is a Mrs. Otinga and nothing more. She has to undertake the domestic chore including the care of the farm above and beyond her employment where she earns a leaving. "You are a helpmate and as such don't usurp the man's position and glory. *Wacheni mume awe mume, bibi awe bibi*" which means that each spouse take their rightful social space. In essence the man is rightfully the head and default leader. On a whole, the exhortation intimated that marriage will thrive in

The context of female spouse's unequivocal submission, respect and honor to the male. And thus, these are a must virtue that every woman ought to cultivate.

### Widow Views on Identity

The generally low self esteem women have becomes worse in their widowhood. This is due to the emotional and psychological pressure that she undergoes during funeral and burial rites and subsequent reality that dawns on her that her spouse is buried and she has to face life on her own. Widows in the FGD's noted that such a reality is the most difficulty to come to terms with.

During funeral widows eulogize their deceased husbands noting their duties and responsibilities which will henceforth not be effectively attended to. Widows in the FGDs noted that a husband is like a hedge whose demise opens up a floodgate of discrimination and intimidation to the bereaved family. Widows feel inadequate to challenge such intimidations that arise from cultural assumption that discriminate against them.

Among Abanyole a widow acquire a new not so coveted title, *omukhasika*, *omukhuchakhili* and *omulekhwa* meaning a woman who has buried her husband; one with bad omen resulting from death/contaminated and a deserted one.

Nabutete (MYW FGD) suggested that most women in Bunyore are 'widowed' long before their spouses actually die. She noted that most men in Bunyore have failed in their responsibility as providers and family beacons. They have left their wives to fend and provide for families. They also have failed to provide much needed inspiration to the family, especially to the children. As such the boy-child in Bunyore requires attention for the stability of family. These very sentiments were also expressed by the elders in their Focused Group Discussion. They noted that most

social institutions beginning with the family are now manned by women. Men are relegating their duties in family, church and civil society to women.

However, it is notable that these sentiments are reactionary. What the respondents are communicating is that men have relegated their duties as heads of social institutions such as family. The women complain that their men are no longer responsible subjecting them to widowhood-like experiences long before they actually die. The MYW FGD was categorical on this. But even in such redefinition, the women note that widowhood transcends the sum total of the social responsibilities accorded to either gender.

On the contrary, there are those whose breakthrough comes with the demise of their spouse. Some confess that when their spouse passed on they felt a big load removed from their lives opening up a new horizon in life. Jessica, (not her real name O.I.), confided that her husband was an impediment to the family's progress. He was given to drinking and would squander family resources. Because she couldn't take any more, she opted to separate with him for a while. She took her children to her parents and left to find a job. The husband lived a deplorable life as a pauper. Upon his death the family recalled this wife, with the community offering to put up a temporary house for her. She has since changed the family narrative. Her family is well and in an established homestead

These sentiments were repeated at the MYW FGD. One widow among the women leader recounted how her husband suppressed her potential of serving the community through the Maendeleo Ya Wanawake initiative. He seriously fought her involvement in the movement accusing the group of being spearheaded by prostitutes, divorcees and single mothers who have no morals. He threatened her colleagues and refused her opportunity to take up a secretarial job that she had been offered at the then Vihiga District office. All this happened while he could not pay children's fees and adequately provide for the family.

The widow is now able to take on various responsibilities including the one at the Maendeleo ya Wanawake office. The family is well in an established homestead. Children are in good schools and their fee is guaranteed courtesy of her salary and honoraria. Women in general and specifically widows have the capacity to run their families and as such do not require sympathy but opportunity.

### **Widow's Intimacy**

Hillman defines intimacy as,

[Q]uality of the interpersonal relationship among two people in a romantic interpersonal relationship, who may or may not be actively engaged in sexual activity. Attachment style, prior family dynamics, sexual identity issues, and self-esteem may all contribute to the level of intimacy experienced (or desired) by an individual. In practical terms, intimacy could be manifested by a subjective feeling of love or satisfaction when in the partner's presence or when thinking about the partner, the degree of appropriate self-disclosure between partners, and the willingness or ability to value the partner's needs and desires as well as one's own. For the purposes of this text, intimacy will be used to refer exclusively to emotional intimacy (i.e., interpersonal satisfaction and subjective feelings of closeness) (2012, 10-11).

As observed by Alati (2016) the Abanyole world view perceives sex as a preserve for men. The wife is expected to satisfy the husband's desire and it is not expected for a woman to publicly express sexual desire. This subjugation of women by men worsens in widowhood. The general observation is that women in Bunyore shy from discussing matters of sex because they feel ill equipped to handle the subject (cf. Musara 2016).

However, as earlier on cited from Amadiume, the Abanyole culture had an in-built mechanism that aided a woman, whatever the assumption, to still emerge on top of the game all the same:

Sex was not forced on a woman; she was constantly surrounded by children and other people [...] The sanctity of motherhood meant that women were treated with respect. One woman might desire an intense relationship with her husband; another might see marital obligations as a necessary but loathsome duty. Some might abandon their relationship with their husband and shun "men and their trouble". Indigenous architecture and male/female polygyny made these choices possible. (1987, 114).

### Widow's Sexual Intercourse

The attitude of culture towards widows' sexuality is varied from positive to negative and from permissive to restrictive. This significantly affects the expression of sexuality among the widows. The majority of widows and other respondents engaged in this study saw celibacy as the default sexual behavior for a widow. They observed the cultural and social complexities surrounding widow's sexuality with pity and just hoped that she could be able to abstain from sexual activity altogether.

All the respondents were of the opinion that widows have a freedom to choose either the way of celibacy or sex within marriage. The second option, Osiako (O.I.) noted, is open to all young widows, that is, those below sixty years of age. She, however, observed that this must be within Christian teachings and principles of sexual purity. In that sense, sexual behavior of a widow is no different from that of other women or Christians.

### Gender and sexual agency

Here the discussion is on gender as a factor of sexual agency among Abanyole. Generally in the Abanyole thinking there is only two genders: male and female. They do not have such thing as transgender. Sexual agency among the Abanyole is understood to depend on ones gender. It is similar to what is indicated by Villanueva in her study on female sexuality in Puerto Rico. She explains that,

The concept of sexual agency was defined by Laws (1980) as the power to choose and control one's sexuality. Feminist argue to what extent are women's sexualities shaped by socio- cultural forces; and to what degree are women agents of their own sexualities, redefining existing constructions of female sexuality (Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Baber (1994) suggests that sexual agency can be developed in order to reshape sexual beliefs and behaviors. Sexual agency is not static, it draws from past experiences, and has the potential to modify previous sexual scripts and behaviors (1997, 19).

### Men

The elders FGD noted that the Abanyole expect that men take the lead in matters concerning sex. They are expected to be the ones to 'see' and ask a good woman's hand in marriage. It is assumed that a woman can live anywhere and with anybody. In fact, they are said to be clan-less and tribe-less. The Abanyole men are also raised to know that women have no decision to be taken serious. This therefore gives men a sense of entitlement to sexual activity and the enjoyment thereof (Alati, 2016). This may explain the Abanyole men's insensitivity to the emotions of women. So far men are the custodians of matters concerning sex among the Abanyole.

### Women

Among the Abanyole it is unthinkable for a woman to initiate sexual activity. A woman behaving suggestively to a man is deemed a prostitute and so abhorred by the society. Women are socialized to wait on and serve their men. This makes women among the Abanyole disadvantaged when it comes to standing their ground in matters relating to their sexuality (MYW FGD). Their views are in line with what is observed in Carpenter's study that adolescent boys have an upper hand compared to girls in sexual negotiation skills. She notes that some women gain this skill as they mature through life experiences that include dissatisfying sex in their marriage, psychological and social development that come with age. She laments that some of these experiences erode women's sexual agency (2010).

### Categories of widows

According to the widows there are three main categories of widows depending on their age and status in their clan. These are omukhaye (elder), omukhasika (widow) and omulekhwa (free for marriage). Each category accords a widow a specific status in the community and influences her sexuality in specific way as demonstrated below.

### Omukhaye

This is a woman of status in the society. She could be in her marriage or berieved. She stands out from the rest because of the space and privilege earned in the society as a result of her character. Normally they are first wives in



polygamous marital arrangement that have successfully grown up children [most of which have established their own families], aided their husbands in earning honor in the society through their industry and wisdom and smoothly transitioned their families from a monogamous to a polygamous marriage arrangement. Women who are widowed while in this category are considered elders in the community. They are therefore unlikely to be dragged into marriage. Komba (O.I.) fondly refers to such as *mtoto misa*, altar boys/girls, meaning that they no longer experience sexual urge.

### **Omukhasika**

This refers to a widow that is available for remarriage but on her terms. Her priority is to care for her former matrimonial home and the children of the deceased husband. She only gets into a temporal 'marital' arrangement to meet particular needs of her family. In such marriage arrangements she remains on top of the game determining who she can marry, terms and conditions. They usually terminate the relationship at any opportune time. The elders (FGD) nostalgically remembered Kinyore songs that castigated a man who married a widow as the only wife. Such men were deemed unmarried for such unions could be ended in the middle of the night at slightest provocation and when the widow feels that her 'inheritor' no longer adds value to her life.

### **Omulekhwa**

This is a young widow available for marriage to whoever that is willing. Such widows are willing to abandon their matrimonial homes to start over again in a new marriage arrangement. The widows and elders (FGDs) participating in this study maintained that any woman that is survived of a husband and buries him according to her culture is a widow. The elders and marriage officers specifically invoked the provisions in the Marriage Act of Kenya Constitution that provides for the declaration of the marital status at the time of solemnization. They noted that the lady is a spinster, divorcee or a widow. Thus *omulekhwa* refers to any such a woman that is survived of her husband and is available for unrestricted remarriage.

### **Widows' attitudes toward Sex**

As earlier noted, women, especially widows, among the Abanyole have been socialized to refrain from conversing about or exploring matters of sex. Erotic feelings and expressions are not condoned. A woman who freely speaks about it or seems conversant with the subject is deemed ill-mannered and suspected to be a whore. Hence, they are suspicious of sex and any related activities.

As Audre Lorde writing about, 'The erotic as Power,' observes,

We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused and devalued within western society. On one hand, the superficially erotic has been encouraged as a sign of female inferiority; on the other hand, women have been made to suffer and to feel both contemptible and suspect by virtue of its existence. It is a short step from there to the false belief that only by the suppression of the erotic within our lives and consciousness can women be truly strong. But that strength is illusory, for it is fashioned within the context of male models of power. As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non rational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by male world, which value this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fear this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves. So women are maintained at a distant/inferior position to be psychically milked, much the same way ants maintain colonies of aphids to provide a life-giving substance for their masters (2005, 168).

Likewise, the majority of widows among the Abanyole espouse a negative and restrictive attitude about sex which breeds their seemingly naïve and incompetence in negotiating sex issues.

### **Expectations and Norms that influence Widows' attitudes**

Expectations and norms that influence widows' attitudes toward their sexuality emanate from peoples' philosophy and the socio-cultural values attached to sex and sexuality. Generally widows as women have a particular socialization that instills a second fiddle player mentality in them. Norms and expectations cement this perception in relation to their male counterpart.

A widow is expected to mourn her husband for a period of time. During mourning, the widow is supposed to find a fellow widow to cook and do most of the domestic chores for her. The caretaker widow also instructs and advises her on the expectations and norms relating to widowhood and accompanies her on all her errands. The widow is expected to visit the place that the late husband lived [if different from their matrimonial home], church, and her native home as a way of 'taking back his ghost'. It is during the mourning period that fidelity of the widow is put to test. Because of the Abanyole's belief that people do not just die and that infidelity, especially of the wife, is the leading cause of the deaths of husbands, the wife is expected to demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt that she is innocent. This is done by requiring the widow to sit by the corpse for the entire period before burial. If one she was unfaithful she would develop ill health and die as a result. The widow is also required to bear a flower wreath which is believed to signify fidelity and in the event that she was unfaithful, she would fall sick and eventually die. Most of the ladies interviewed and in the discussion groups reported to have witnessed such deaths (MYW leaders FGD, O.I.). The events related here by the women resemble what the Bible records about in Numbers chapter five on the Law concerning jealousy.

A widow is expected to observe seclusion until she re-married or at least cleansed. A widow is expected not to go to people's homes or cross through their fields for a period of time. It is believed that death is a bad omen and a bereaved widow carries with her impurities (obukhucha) and bad omen related to death. The seclusion period is intended to protect the entire family from sharing in the deceased husband's vengeance in case the widow's promiscuity was responsible for his death. This is done by ensuring that the widow's utensils,

Beddings and clothing are separated from the rest of the family members. The widow is also restrained from entering any of the houses around or crossing through crop fields for this would lead to other deaths and crop failure. One widow related that it was explained to her that her urine burning up grass whenever she urinated illustrated her bad omen. A widow is seen as carrying a curse or death with her (Esibila widows FGD & O.I.).

According to the widows involved in the study, it is expected of every widow to remain faithful to the deceased husband by caring for their matrimonial home (Esibila & Kima widows FGDs). Among the Abanyole the bride price cements marriage that even death cannot undo it. Therefore love and commitment of any woman reaches its zenith in the maintenance of their matrimonial home and care for their children in the event that the husband passes on. Hence, any subsequent relationships are temporal and at best carried out in the widow's first matrimonial home. To cement this expectation the Abanyole have a ceiling of only one cow (yelikokhe) given to the widow's parents in the event that a subsequent relationship has children. It is not a bride price but a legal seal for the ownership of children born out of a widow. Otherwise, she remains the deceased's wife, and in the event she dies she is buried next to the late husband. One widow expressed her disappointment that she was the only foolish one of the widows that had broken this norm by leaving her matrimonial home and moving into her brother-in-law's home following the death of his wife. This is in spite her children's care and her frequent visits and maintenance of her matrimonial home that is less than a mile away (Tefena – not her real name O.I.).

A widow is expected to observe chastity until all the burial and funeral rites for the deceased husband are concluded. Among the Abanyole, burial of a family man takes place within four to twenty-one days depending on his age and status. There are several funeral rites that follow and might take between one to ten years also depending on age and status. Meanwhile, the widow is expected to remain chaste otherwise she won't be able to lead or fully participate in such occasions. It is held that widows who involve themselves sexually before finishing these rites break their promise and would die if they eat or use any of the proceeds from such a rite. Others opt for cleansing herbs but one widow who is an herbalist and an expert in Abanyole traditions refutes it attributing many untreatable ailments and premature deaths to such actions (Widows & elders FGDs).

A widow is expected to respect and honor her in-laws (Etemesi O.I.). It was noted that marriage among Abanyole is not just about the couple in question but involves the entire families or clan. As such the wives do not just belong and submit to a husband but to the entire family and clan in the pecking order. A widow is expected to show respect and honor to her in-laws by working with them, consulting with them and at times submitting to their demands in order to have their support and assistance in matters of her family. One widow recounted of how her brother-in-law forced her into accepting him to remarry her by threatening that if that was not granted nobody else should remarry her. Since she had a very young family, without income of her own and depended on the family to process the late husband's benefits, she gave in (Salome, not her real name O.I.).

A widow was expected to lead and fully participate in all rites in honor of her deceased husband. The Abanyole have many burial and funeral rites. During these rites the widow is the center of attention. She leads the entire family into honoring her deceased husband. Many of the rites have severe implications to the widow's life depending on whether she was faithful to the deceased (Omuka I.O.).

Younger widows were expected to be re-married within the late husbands' clan and bear children. According to the majority of the Abanyole, younger widows are those in child bearing age. Such widows would be under pressure from all quarters to re-marry and have children. In case of remarriage the script is clear: It is within the clan. The widow is expected to choose one of the brothers or first cousins of the late husband that she deems responsible and that she can live with. The two are then expected to go public so that everyone is aware of the 'marriage' for sexual sanctity. Young widows who are not re-married are looked at with suspicion and their relationships monitored closely by the volunteer female village vigilantes (Elders FGD).

Re-marrying widows are expected to undergo a cleansing rite. Jessica (O.I.) reported that an elderly woman in her village organized for a male cleanser to fulfill the rite on her in preparation for the son re-marrying her. She explained that this woman got information that her son was interested in her. She was young and had just been widowed. The woman feared that her son would be the first to have sexual relations with her risking a wrath of her deceased husband. The woman talked to Jessica and they agreed that she negotiates and pay a cleanser to pave the way for her son's 'marriage'. This shows the heightened concern and community's involvement to ensure wellness and prosperity by observing sex code.

This scenario was related to the two widows' Focus Group Discussions. Asked of their opinion on the act, the women seemed surprised that such acts are still happening and denounced it as bizarre. They noted that such code dehumanizes widow because of the exposure and emotional strain of engaging in a sexual act with a person that is not ones choice not to mention the number of people involved. However, the researcher noted from their facial expression that the women have no problem with the practice except for the shame it creates in public discussion.

### Factors for Widow's self Attitudes

Several factors have been noted to be responsible for the widows' self rating. They include Self esteem, prevailing culture, the family environment and women socialization.

#### Self Esteem

The MYW FGD reported that women among the Abanyole have a generally low self esteem compared to men. They noted that the low opinion accrues from the kind of socialization and status ascribed to women by the culture. They observed that the Abanyole culture is characterized with gender power that naturally subjugates their women to their male counterparts. This characterization is cemented in varied degree by institutions such as churches schools, and government.

Men among the Abanyole own and control all the factors of production. Many women among the Abanyole still think that a woman cannot own land and other properties, except via a man i.e. the father, husband, or son. The women in the Esibila FGD emphatically noted that the home belongs to the man. Women are just brought in. And anything the woman accrues as a result belongs to the husband. The MYW FGD in the same vain noted that some men are threatened by their women's progress and industry that they become stumbling blocks in their way. They intimidate them with flimsy accusations calling them names and threatening them with violence, separation and divorce. As a result many women learn not to compete in acquiring education and properties.

This is the situation of widows among the Abanyole. They feel very inadequate in many ways. Many of them are not well endowed in terms of education and life skills to negotiate the murky waters of life without their husbands. Some do not have basic literacy skills, are ignorant of their basic rights and do not know where to seek justice. Hence, they find themselves at the mercies of their in-laws and government officials who often take advantage. The sense of loss of their spouse and the tedious hustles to keep the family wears their self esteem even more.

This is how one young widow painted a picture of a widow's the self esteem among the Abanyole,

A widow among Abanyole is nothing but a statistic [Siabukulwamo oluchendo].” You can’t stand in the cause and successfully defend yourself. Your fate is in the hands of your in-laws. Sometimes you just overhear of the family’s resolutions concerning you from their wives. You are accused of all and sundry [ochikhwanga kosi, oli ebarabara]: husband stealing, promiscuity, name it....My experiences after husband’s death included: unfair land subdivision, lack of proper healthcare, lack of school fees and feeling of insecurity. The pain intensifies at the times he used to come back home, now that he is not. You miss him. The family menu changes suddenly [for me as a house wife because the bread winner is no more]. Thus widows see themselves to be of no value [low self esteem]. They are not respected and anybody can point them an accusing figure (Tefena – not her real name O.I.).

Thus widows among the Abanyole suffer low self esteem. This is aggravated by their widowhood experiences that amplify gender power that marginalizes them the more. This is conspicuous in the event a widow is not endowed with education and negotiating skills with which to stamp her authority (cf. Azuike 2009).

### Cultural perception

Dinah Musindarwezo’s article, ‘Affirmative Action: Women Rights still a far Cry in Africa aptly portrays the contemporary cultural behavior toward women that is herein extensively quoted:

If women’s right were to be measured by the number of laws and policies so far initiated towards that specific goal in Africa, the African woman would be liberated on earth! The reality, however, is far from this. Policy makers at high levels in the continent continue to put women’s right on the agenda but with negligible or hardly any positive impact.

In fact with the glaring gender gaps in economic, political, and social platforms much more still need to be done. Women and girls in Africa are unaware, disempowered or denied opportunity to access economic, political, social and cultural rights. Women are exposed to gender based violence (GBV), harmful traditional and religious practices, denied rights to employment in a favorable and just condition, right to food, housing and quality healthcare as well as social security and employment benefits.

Women further lack access to and ownership and equitable benefit of resources such as land and other means of production that is necessary for suitable development. It is therefore time for African governments to put actions where promises are and fulfill the urgent need for respect and total rights for women in Africa (Musindarwezo, 2016).

There is a profound lip service promotion of women agenda by most institutions, including family, schools, governments and churches. But any spot check reveals a culture of gender power relation always in favor of men. As such it is a norm that everything, including women, is at men’s disposal. Women are just behind successful men! Any independent and successful woman is looked at with suspicion and mistrust. This attitude is prevalent among the Abanyole and could be responsible for the delayed development of its people as observed by the DGSDO (O.I.) and the MYW leadership (FGD) in this study area.

Disillusioned by this dilapidating state, most women jealously and ignorantly guard and support the cultural perception that associate a woman with meekness that is characterized with innate weakness. They in turn perceive themselves to have emotional impairment that cannot be trusted with any strenuous and challenging

Task. They see themselves as beings that can easily be cheated, convinced, coaxed, emotional, and undiscerning (MYW FGD).

### Environmental Influence

The prevailing social environment greatly influences the way women and widow’s attitudes toward themselves. Positive and enabling environments breed positive and efficacious attitude of the widows. On the contrary, the negative and demeaning surrounding create negative and dependent attitude among women about themselves. The attitudes that significant institutions (family, government, church and media) and people communicate about women shape and affect their perception. The elders, church and women leaders and widows who participated in

this study noted that a lot still needs to be done to create an enabling environment for gender parity among the Abanyole as in the global society (Atiti; Ongundu O.I.s and FGDs).

A woman has always been associated with family and domestic chores. And her success is always sought in that region. Consequently, women who have excelled as politicians, entrepreneurs and professionals appearing for interviews on any the media are never let off the hook without being asked how they juggle their public life with family (The Standard, 19/11/16).

Intimidation of women in families contributes to their generally low esteem. Families where women are physically or verbally abused breed emotionally impaired women. In most families women are treated as cheap things that can be picked and discarded at will. Sometimes their value is trivialized to baby industries as in Mwende's case whose hands were mutilated because she could not bear children. However, while consoling with Ms Jacqueline Mwende, a victim of gender based violence, Machakos Governor's wife Mrs. Lilian Ng'ang'a assured her that, "You are a woman by the role you play in the society and not the number of children you have".

Such is true for church institutions and leaders that wink at women's abuse. Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya (Fida) chairperson, Josephine Mogire said religious leaders may be contributing to violence in families by urging partners to just keep praying. Mogire said, "Pastors should stop telling people to continue staying in their marriages to a point that they are killed because of women who find themselves in abusive relationship should have the courage to walk out." (Daily Nation 04/08/2016).

Ameso (O.I.) does not mince his words while addressing issues pertaining to women and the Church of God of his days. He fondly recalled,

There was no female among the leader in the church when I began ministry in 1968. The pastors then never allowed a woman to preach. A woman cannot bless [okhubita] or grace/preside over a rite/ritual [okhwem'mel'la omulukha]. A 1996's Yellow Paper [a manual for conducting COGEA (K) sacraments] outlined six ordinances: baptism, Holy Communion, Baby dedication, Laying foundation, House dedication and burial rite. None would be presided over by a woman. Even preparation of the Holy Communion elements was undertaken by men. They believed that menstruation made women unclean. Hence unfit to preside over any sacrament.

The Yellow Paper sought to preserve the sanctity of the church. It is only a stubborn woman [Omukhasi owe imbichi yenyene] who would want to preside over these rites.

Today the church has accepted female pastors and leaders because of the desire to please people. Even our own culture does not permit a woman to demarcate a boundary – it is an abomination. Generally, women are not allowed to preside over sacred rituals.

Governments also have a duty of protecting women against violence and creating enabling environment. An example is the plan by the County Government of Mombasa to separate male and female Ferry passengers following cases of sexual harassment at the Likoni channel crossing. This was even after the National Government gave the Kenya Ferry services sh. 250,000 to install powerful cameras to monitor sex pets among other criminals aboard the vessels as was reported by Patrick Beja (The Standard, August 4, 2016).

The international scene holds lots of hope for women. Peter Apps in his article, "Women Leaders taking over Super powers" observed that by mid January 2017 three of the six largest economic powers of the world will be led by women. These are Angela Merkel of Germany, Theresa May of England and Hillary Clinton of US. He noted that these are a deserved leadership responsibility since each of the women has competed for the position. He observed that each of the women have made it in very unlikely fronts given the gendered political and social landscape in their nations. He underscored that only Rwanda and Bolivia are above gender parity in national level political representation. Germany is at 37%, United Kingdom at 29% and United States at 19% and at position 96 worldwide. He cited Hillary Clinton's sentiments at the 1995's U.N. Conference in Beijing that, "...human rights are women rights and women rights are human rights."

Although Clinton did not clinch the American presidency as was widely predicted, thanks to the mind boggling US polling system and tsunamic political landscape, a strong statement was sent. It was an achievement enough for Mrs.

Clinton to win a nomination and endorsement of a major political party. This means that regardless of uneven playing ground, women are effectively playing the game of politics and ceasing every opportunity thereof.

Generally the Abanyole culture, as in other societies, has created an environment that intimidates women and widows.

### Women Socialization

During field research the widows and women opinion leaders were required to reflect on specific attitudes and perceptions communicated to women in their socialization among the Abanyole. The following assumptions were found to be held strongly among the Abanyole, both men and women, and impacted greatly on widows' sexuality.

Male child is preferred to the female. One widow (Salome, not real name O.I.) related that an average home among the Abanyole displays preferential treatment in the way it brings up their children that is always in favor of the male child. She narrated of how she was sent out of her matrimonial home because she only had two daughters. Her mother-in-law mourned the son noting that he had 'gone with his head'. This is because male children are heirs to the man's estates and carry on his name in the clan. A senior clergy and a widow in the study area related of her experience of male child preference in her growing up this way as previously cited:

Our father was a Quaker pastor and our mother a very devoted women leader in the same church. Their marriage was blessed with five girls only. We lived a very happy life in our family. But growing up I realized that something was not right. My mother and father were the talk of the extended family because they did not have a son. They would be reminded of that at every opportunity. I remember one day my grandmother came to our house and told my father to drop his pastoral duties and marry a second wife in order to have an heir. She even offered to talk to my mother for him if need be. My father told her in our hearing that that would never happen and that we [her daughters] were heirs enough. She turned to our mother accusing her to have cast a spell at my father that he would not marry another wife. She also used to refer to us [girls] as frogs. My father kept his word to his grave but life in the extended family was not conducive for us girls and our mother (Impromptu conversation while attending a church function in the Study Area).

Patriarchal attitudes ingrained in the Western system of education as administered by missionaries and colonial governments set up in Africa served to discriminate against women. The majority of the widows that are in their fifties and sixties are illiterate and without means of income. One widow (O.I.) noted that her father could not send her to school simply because she was a woman and taking her to school would make her grow a big head thus be unfit for marriage. He instead educated his sons. These sentiments are aptly captured by Azuike,

Western colonization, unfortunately, had very little or no respect for women. For instance, when missionaries established the formal educational system in Africa, they did so by infusing some patriarchal ideologies into the educational system, one of which was the belief that boys, rather than girls would benefit more from the school system. For years, women's history became that of docility and sheer domesticity. Consequently, young girls were to stay at home to practice and perfect their domestic skills which included how to behave as appropriate Christian housewives who knew how to sew, cook and maintain proper hygiene. The boys, on the other hand, were taught how to read and write. This ushered in the first gender gap between boys and girls that has apparently persisted over the years, particularly in Africa.

...Odenigbo's elderly mother, popularly called Mama, abhors Olanna for being well educated, polished and highly independent. In her estimation, 'educated women' are abnormal women who have received 'too much schooling which ruins a woman'. (2009, 81, 88)

Girls are raised up to be married away in the neighboring clans. Women are referred to as abakoko meaning bridges. They bridge two communities. Hence their place is guaranteed not in the community of birth but of marriage by way of bride price. Every normal woman of marriageable age is expected to get married and start her family i.e. bear children. Therefore the Abanyole do not expect their daughters of marriageable age to remain among their clans. Women in the village ensure that the community does not suffer a loss of burying any of their daughters for lack of husbands to marry them.

Sometimes the marriages were arranged and on basis other than love. One widow recalled of a song they used to sing, Ing'ombe yambila andaloba. She noted that long time, women were given in marriage to those who could afford to pay bride price. And because many families were poor and could not afford the cows, many women were available and could be hawked around.

In many cases when marriages faced problems the extended family intervened insisting that the stability of any marriage depended on the wife not the husband. This resonates with Proverbs 14:1 which suggests that success of family/marriage is depended on the wife.

The MYW leadership (FGD) noted that the assumption that women are weaker sex has been exploited to their disadvantage. They are making efforts to correct such mentality which has been used to sideline women in socio-economic development programs. The former MYW chair of the larger Emuhaya, Ingolo reported to have fought this mentality until she is now happy that Emuhaya is bringing its women to the limelight. She noted that

the organization has worked closely with the government to ensure that women are considered for administrative positions for which they have proven effective.

The widows' FGD both at Esibila and Kima seemed to agree with weaker vessel and sex assumptions. They pointed out that women could not be entrusted with enormous and strenuous responsibilities on their own. They are driven by emotions and can't keep secrets. They also noted that women lack cunningness and shrewdness required in political sphere. They observed that women work well under the authorities as God intended it according to the Holy writ.

One of the informants on the Abanyole culture on widowhood and a widow also observed that women bear the burden and blame of all sexual acts. She wondered whether men are objects that are only acted upon that always go scot-free on their sexual behavior (Osiako O.I.). Like the biblical woman caught in the act that was brought to Jesus deserving stoning while the man was let off the hook (John 8: 3-11), Abanyole women bear all the blames and responsibility of sexual acts. They are accused of luring men, being irresponsible, loose, and opportunists while men recoil as innocent babies dragged into the act.

Generally widows are on the receiving end of the village vigilantes. This is because they are perceived to be sexually starved and on the loose hunting for other women's husbands (Tefena – not her real name O.I.). Thus, they are suspected and sometimes bitterly confronted by peers on sheer suspicion.

Another widow observed that among the Abanyole as in other cultures of the world, women are at the service of men (Hillmans 2012). Terms such as esiombo, esichong'o and ehuri (Sibelenje O.I.) as the Abanyole would fondly refer to their women/wives suggests their assigned place and value. They are perceived as ornaments, precious objects, soothers and relievers of stress for men. They are also seen as maidservants assisting men to accomplish domestic light routine tasks that make life comfortable.

A widow (Esibila widows FGD) noted that a wife become a property of the husband and by extension his family and clan upon payment of bride price. It is common among the Abanyole to hear a husband refer to his wife as my property or a man to fondly refer to a sister-in-law as 'my property'. As noted earlier, the bride price guarantees the bride of her place and her needs in the community that she marries into. This applies whether the husband is alive or dead.

And as a property the woman has freedom within specified provisions. They are bound to the norms and expectations of the communities within which they are married. Among the Abanyole it is provided that the wife submits not only to the husband but to the entire family. And as a property, there are procedures of changing ownership in the event that the original owner is deceased. Since marriage and bride price for a woman among Abanyole is done once in her life time. It is expected that in the event that the husband dies the woman is automatically taken up within the same clan in order to maintain the late husband's home, family and name.

And finally, among Abanyole a woman's worth is in her ability to give birth to children, preferably male (MYW Emuhaya, Esibila widows & Kima widows FGDs; Salome O.I.). The women involved in the study noted over and over that a woman's currency in the Study Area goes up with the bearing and naming of male children. One widow

caused laughter when she illustrated that her late husband almost returned meat he had bought the family when a birth attendant met him with 'news' deceiving him that she had delivered a fourth daughter in a row. They also noted that the bride price was for bearing children. In the event of marriage dissolution the issue of bride price did not feature in cases where there were children. Women who could not bear children for some reason were considered to be wasting their husbands' time. In extreme cases they would be insulted as just filling the husband's toilet.

In most cases such a situation was resolved through polygamous unions where the husband would marry another woman that was able to bear children. Or, in case the husband was responsible, a close relative of the husband would be able to sire children for that man with his wife. In this case the family would in agreement with the wife find a 'good' person for the task and seek the consent of her family by sending one more cow known as *eyobwibi/eyobulimo/eyolwibulo* that allows her to bear children for the husband by another man of her choice within the clan and with the family consent. The person siring children is under obligation not to claim or even mention the act under whatever circumstance (Otenyo O.I.).

In case of a remarriage, a husband who sired children would pay one cow to the widow's parents as a seal of ownership of these children. Otherwise the children belonged to the deceased by virtue of the bride price paid (Esibila widows & Elders FGDs; Sibelenje & Ameso O.I.).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This articles' objective was to establish widows' attitudes on their sexuality among the Abanyole of Emuhaya. The objective answers the question: What is the prevailing widows' attitude toward their sexuality among the Abanyole of Emuhaya? It is found out that the Abanyole widows, as other women, prefer the biological male sex. They have hence become their own enemies by perpetuating a notion that they are a second best sex.

However, the study also ascertained that just as was in other African traditional societies, empowered women among Abanyole are challenging this patriarchal dominance. First, such empowerment is politico-religious

Where women endowed with spiritual powers and/or in top leadership positions of their denominations/society redefine womanhood and wage war against patriarchal oppression. Second, this empowerment is through education (rounded, not just literacy). Widows endowed with quality education are freer. They have the capacity to know what they want and have the ability to reach out for the same in an honorable way. It is worth noting that in traditional African societies holistic education was provided that catered for the needs of women who experienced trajectories in life such as widowhood. Such education considered the breadth of sexual needs and expression providing for acceptable means and avenues for gratification. Such Indigenous Knowledge (IK) as reflected on in the Abanyole way of life, provided for alternatives for a widow's sexual life. Last but not the least is economic empowerment. This refers to a widow's ability to freely generate and exploit economic resources. Widows endowed with such capacity are able to manage their affairs, including sexuality, authentically.

Consequently, this study established that widows among the Abanyole have a generally low self-rating. This consciousness has contributed a lot to their plight. They conform and conspire with perpetrators of widow oppression. They effectively accomplish this task by accepting and/or not speaking out against the vices fashioned against them. As such, Azuike's (2009, 90) concluding remarks in her study on *Women's Struggles and Independence in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus and Half of a Yellow Sun* is befitting. She notes the need to rid the society of sexism situating the task squarely in hands of women who are nurtured for the same. Her words are timely truth for the situation of the Abanyole women in general and specifically the widows.

There is need for the transformation of deep-seated, stereotyped and long held attitudes which tend to hinder progress in the lives of African women. In other words, it is imperative to address all oppressive structures and situations in our societies in order to encourage and to sustain lasting peace in our homes and in the world at large. The biblical story of creation reiterates that men and women are made in the image of God! Therefore, wouldn't the most peaceful solution be for both genders to co-exist peacefully without one subordinating the other?



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