CARING FOR AFRICAN WIDOWS AND THEIR CHILDREN AS THEY RENEGOTIATE CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS

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Our Time Together:

• Widowhood Today

• Key Issues Facing African Widows & Children

• Biblical Instruction

• How You Can Help
Widowhood Today
“The most neglected of all gender and human-rights issues is widowhood.”

-- Margaret Owen
author, *A World of Widows*
founder, *Widows for Peace Through Democracy*
260 Million Widows Worldwide
The Loomba Foundation

Million

585

Children of Widows Worldwide
Key Issues Facing African Widows and Their Children
“Failure to focus on the conditions in which widows live in many different cultures and countries is particularly reprehensible considering the seriousness of the deprivation suffered, and how badly it affects their welfare and that of their children.”

-- Marie Antoinette Sossou, PhD
University of Kentucky
1 in 4 Women in Africa is a Widow

Crane, 2014, p. 17
# Key Issues:

- CHILD’S EDUCATION
- WIDOW CLEANSING
- GIRL-CHILD DEPRIVATION
- ABUSE
- PROPERTY GRABBING
Child’s Education

• Cycle of Poverty: When not forcibly removed by relatives, children are pulled from government schools (fees) and put into *cash-earning work*

• Physical and sexual abuse

• More than **29 million children** will be excluded from schooling in 2015

• **#1 concern** for widows
Widow Cleansing

• A widow is viewed as “unclean after the demise and burial ceremonies of her late husband”

• The ritual whereby the widow and a male cleanser perform sexual intercourse in order to cleanse evil spirits and prevent the woman from disease and insanity
Girl-Child Deprivation

• Widows focus resources on male children to appease in-laws and ensure survival
• Sometimes the widow is incentivized
• Increases the likelihood that the widow will have an educated son care for her in old age
• Girls often are recruited as prostitutes, worse
• Also known as “son preference” globally
1.5 Million Children Whose Mother is a Widow Die Each Year Before Age 5

The Loomba Foundation
Abuse

• Her social status appears to be inextricably linked to their husband’s, and when he dies, a woman is likely to lose her place in society, lose basic rights, and to become a victim of life-threatening abuses.

• 33% of widows, or **86 million**, have suffered physical abuse.

1 United Nations, 2 The Loomba Foundation
Property Grabbing

• Widows and orphans are among the most vulnerable in Africa

• Nearly one third of African widows affected

• Violent: 31% of widows receive death threats against her children

International Justice Mission
Grace’s Story
(Video) International Justice Mission
Biblical Instruction
Hebrew word for widow is *almanah*
Root word *alem* = unable to speak

Aramaic: *alem* is akin “to be in pain”

Greek: *chera* = forsaken

In Africa, widow is synonymous with “witch,” “beggar,” or “wife of the grave”  

1 African Bulletin
80+

Biblical References

Addressing the Widow
1 Timothy 5:5  The widow who is really in need and left alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.  

James 1:27  Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress.
How You Can Help
Global South
(Christianity’s Current Trajectory)

1900
Total Christian Population

2% Africa
World

2010
Total Christian Population

22% Africa
World

Hickman, A. W. (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary)
Be Built Up

Ephesians 4:11-12

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up”
International Widows’ Day

June 23

“Restore their human rights through education and real empowerment to alleviate the poverty and discrimination into which widowhood can plunge them”
Get Involved

International Justice Mission
ijm.org

Tirzah International
tierzah.org

Adopt A Widow
adoptawidow.org
Ways to Serve

• **Pray** for widows and their children

• **Invite** widows and their children into your everyday life

• **Speak** about injustices around the world

• **Start** a widow care/prayer group at church
References


References


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