

## **EFFECT OF SELF-ASSERTIVENESS STRATEGY ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF WIDOWS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS, OYO STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

Widowhood is a significant life event that profoundly impacts the psychological wellbeing of women, particularly in African societies like Nigeria, where cultural expectations and traditional practices often exacerbate the challenges faced by widows. The loss of a spouse typically places widows in emotionally, socially, and economically vulnerable positions, leading to increased risks of depression, anxiety, and other psychological issues. This research examined the effect of self-assertiveness strategy on the psychological wellbeing of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria. The survey, which utilised a mixed method approach, adopted a quasi-experimental design with a pretest-posttest approach to assess the effects of self-assertiveness strategy on 38 widows aged between 21-50 years which were used for the study. Participants for the study were divided into an intervention and control groups. Different self-assertiveness exercises were utilised as intervention while the control group received no placebo. The quantitative data were analysed using ANCOVA, tested at  $<0.05$  level of significant and qualitative insights were gathered through focus group discussions. The results from the study indicated that self-assertiveness strategy significantly improved the psychological wellbeing of widows in the intervention group, with an effect size of 57.6% ( $F_{(1,36)}=48.970$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $\eta^2=0.576$ ). The empirical evidence supports the efficacy of self-assertiveness strategies in various psychological and social domains, including self-acceptance, positive relation with others, autonomy, environmentl mastery, purpose in life and personal growth. Self-assertiveness training has proven to be beneficial in helping widows express their needs and boundaries in a respectful and effective manner, leading to greater psychological well-being and social

functioning. It is recommended to develop culturally and contextually relevant self-assertiveness exercises that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by widows in different settings, and address their specific psychological needs.

**Keywords:** Widowhood, Self-assertiveness, Psychological Wellbeing, Emotional Support, Coping Strategies, Mental Health Intervention

## Introduction

Widowhood in Nigeria is a complex issue influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. It is a societal experience with expectations and traditions that can significantly impact a widow's wellbeing (Anuforo et al, 2024). Traditional customs and rituals, such as cleaning ceremonies and mourning rituals, stigmatise widows and marginalise them (Anuforo, 2024). Cultural beliefs blame women for their husbands' deaths, reinforcing their subordination. Socially, widows face diminished social status, exclusion from families, and limited access to property or inheritance (Dube, 2022). The patriarchal structure further exacerbates these challenges. Gender-based discrimination limits their ability to remarry or integrate into social networks, intensifying feelings of loneliness and abandonment (Amoo et al, 2022). The psychological consequences of widowhood include increased risk of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Financial challenges and lack of support further compound their distress (Amoo et al, 2022).

Psychological wellbeing is crucial for widows, helping them cope with stress, maintain positive relationships, and live fulfilling lives. It encompasses emotional, mental, and social aspects, enabling individuals to cope with stress, maintain positive relationships, and adapt to their new reality. A strong psychological resilience helps widows process their grief and develop coping mechanisms to mitigate long-term emotional consequences (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Psychological wellbeing reduces the severity of mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder, by fostering a positive mindset and emotional stability (Ding, 2021). Widowhood often leads to social isolation, but psychological wellbeing encourages widows to seek out social support and form meaningful connections. It also empowers widows to take proactive steps in rebuilding financial stability, such as pursuing education, starting businesses, or seeking employment (Dube, 2023). A positive psychological state fosters self-confidence and assertiveness, which are essential for overcoming economic challenges (Jandhyala & Kumar, 2024). For widows with children, psychological wellbeing is essential for

fulfilling their dual roles as caregivers and providers. A stable emotional and mental state enables them to provide consistent support, guidance, and nurturing for their children, contributing to the overall wellbeing of the family unit and preventing intergenerational psychological distress. Ultimately, psychological wellbeing is a cornerstone of overall life satisfaction and fulfillment (Ach & Pollmann, 2021).

Self-assertiveness is a psychological skill that involves expressing one's feelings, thoughts, and needs in a direct, honest, and respectful manner. It is crucial for emotional and social resilience, enabling individuals to stand up for their rights, set boundaries, and navigate interpersonal relationships (Ajayi, 2018). For widows, self-assertiveness serves as a coping strategy to mitigate cultural, social, and psychological challenges after the loss of their spouse (Ach & Pollmann, 2021). Assertiveness training equips individuals with the skills to say 'no' without guilt, express feelings confidently, handle criticism constructively, and stand up against unfair treatment or discrimination (Agumadu, Moses & Adeniji, 2020). Widows in Nigeria often face societal pressures, stigmatization, and economic challenges that can lead to feelings of powerlessness. Assertiveness training enables them to make independent decisions, prioritise their needs, and resist undue influence from others. This is especially important in societies where widows are often pressured into unfavorable situations (Awate & Rukumani, 2021). Widows with strong assertiveness skills can establish and maintain healthier relationships with family, in-laws, and communities. Assertive behaviour fosters emotional clarity and reduces stress. Assertive widows are more likely to rebuild their lives and pursue personal and professional growth (Agumadu, Moses & Adeniji, 2020).

Widowhood significantly impacts women's social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing, particularly in traditional societies in Nigeria. In Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, widows face numerous challenges, including discrimination, stigma, and emotional distress due to cultural and societal norms. They are often denied access to property, inheritance, and financial resources, leading to economic dependency or extreme poverty. This financial insecurity affects their quality of life and reduces self-esteem. The grief of losing a spouse and societal pressures often leads to severe psychological distress, including depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Cultural stereotypes and stigmatization alienate widows from their communities, and they may be blamed for their husband's death or forced to undergo dehumanizing rituals (Agumadu, Moses & Adeniji, 2020). Despite the evidence supporting the effectiveness of self-assertiveness strategies in enhancing psychological resilience, these approaches are underutilised

in interventions targeting widows in Ibadan Metropolis. The lack of structured assertiveness training programs perpetuates a cycle of vulnerability, preventing widows from advocating for themselves, challenging oppressive practices, or seeking community support (Agumadu, Moses & Adeniji, 2020).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of the study is to determine the effects of self-assertiveness strategy on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria.

### **Hypotheses**

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no significant effect of self-assertiveness strategy on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria.

The study will be of immense benefit to widows, policy makers, NGOs and the body of knowledge. The self-assertiveness training will help widows cope with their circumstances more effectively. This approach emphasises personal empowerment, emotional resilience, and setting boundaries, which are crucial for dealing with cultural and social pressures. The intervention aims to enhance widows' psychological wellbeing, enabling them to manage stress, maintain healthy relationships, and regain confidence. The study fills existing gaps in literature on self-assertiveness strategy and psychological wellbeing of widows in Nigeria, providing a foundation for further research. It also offers policy recommendations for government and NGOs to integrate psychological wellbeing services into existing support frameworks for widows. The findings can be used to enforce inheritance and property rights for widows, design laws protecting their economic and social rights, and develop community-based initiatives providing vocational training, financial support, and assertiveness workshops. The study can also inform awareness campaigns to reduce stigma surrounding widowhood and encourage governments and NGOs to allocate more resources towards programs addressing widows' psychological and social needs.

The study focuses on widows within Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria who are between the ages of 21-50 and have remained unmarried. It is also limited to the effect of self-assertiveness strategy on the psychological wellbeing of widows in Ibadan Metropolis.

## Literature Review

Psychological wellbeing is the optimal functioning of individuals in their emotional, cognitive, and social lives. It encompasses aspects such as life satisfaction, personal growth, self-acceptance, and resilience (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Carol Ryff identified six core dimensions of psychological wellbeing: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. Self-acceptance involves maintaining a positive attitude towards oneself, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, and embracing life experiences. Positive relationships with others provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. Autonomy allows individuals to act independently, make decisions, and regulate behaviour based on personal values. Environmental mastery involves managing and controlling the external environment effectively, adapting to changing circumstances, and using available resources to improve quality of life. Purpose in life involves setting goals and finding meaning in life, even in adversity. Personal growth involves continuous development of potential, learning from experiences, and seeking self-improvement (Ryff, 1989).

Furthermore, self-assertiveness is the ability to express one's thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and needs in a direct, honest, and respectful way. It is a communication skill that enables individuals to stand up for their rights while respecting the rights of others (Arshad & Waheed, 2023). Unlike aggressive behaviour, which violates others' rights, or passive behaviour, which neglects one's own needs, assertiveness strikes a balance that fosters mutual understanding and respect (Ames, Lee & Wazlawek, 2017).

Self-assertiveness is an essential personal and interpersonal skill that empowers individuals to handle challenges effectively, build healthy relationships, and enhance their self-esteem. It is especially critical for individuals in vulnerable situations, such as widows, who may face discrimination or social stigma. Self-Assertiveness can be measured using: *Open Expression* - the clarity and confidence which involves expressing oneself clearly and confidently without hesitancy; *Self-Direction* - the ability to take initiative, make independent decisions, and manage one's actions and learning processes without relying on external guidance. It involves setting personal goals, planning how to achieve them, staying motivated, and evaluating progress; *Emotion Control* - this involves communicating in a calm and controlled manner, even in challenging situations; and *Consideration for Others*: this indicates balancing self-expression with consideration for others' feelings and opinions (Ryff, 1989).

Before practicing assertiveness, individuals must understand what it entails and how it differs from passive or aggressive behaviour. Educational programs and workshops are effective tools for building this foundational knowledge (Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani, 2023). Assertiveness often involves using "I" statements to express feelings and needs without blaming or criticizing others. This approach encourages ownership of emotions and minimises defensiveness in others. Also, learning to establish and communicate personal boundaries is an important aspect of self-assertiveness. Boundaries define what behaviour is acceptable and help individuals maintain control over their personal space and time. The ability to decline requests or demands that conflict with one's priorities or values is a vital assertiveness skill. Saying no respectfully but firmly prevents overcommitment and builds self-respect (Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani, 2023).

More so, assertiveness involves not only self-expression but also active listening to others. Paying attention to others' perspectives fosters mutual understanding and reduces conflicts. Practicing assertive communication in a safe environment, such as role-playing scenarios with a counselor or peer group, helps individuals build confidence. Assertiveness is reinforced by non-verbal cues, including maintaining eye contact, using an assertive tone of voice, and adopting an open posture. Furthermore, emotional resilience allows individuals to remain assertive even in emotionally charged situations. Techniques such as mindfulness and stress management can help individuals regulate their emotions. It is also imperative to join support groups or seek counseling which provide a safe space for widows to share their experiences, learn from others, and develop assertiveness skills. Gradually practicing assertiveness in less intimidating situations before addressing more challenging ones builds confidence (Himaja & Kiran, 2021). Being self-assertive promotes self-respect and a sense of personal value (Immanuel, 2020). Practising open and respectful communication fosters stronger interpersonal connections (Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani, 2023). It also reduces stress and anxiety by helping widows manage conflicts constructively (Arshad & Waheed, 2023). Assertiveness empowers the widows to take control of their lives and resist manipulation.

Widowhood is a life event that significantly impacts an individual's psychological and emotional well-being. The psychological challenges faced by widows are profound and multifaceted, including grief, depression, anxiety, and changes in identity and social status. A wide body of empirical research has investigated these psychological challenges and the coping mechanisms that help widows navigate this transition. One of the most well-documented psychological

challenges faced by widows is grief. According to Nwokoro & Ogba (2019), the loss of a spouse is a deeply distressing experience that often leads to complicated grief, especially when the individual has lost a partner with whom they had a strong emotional bond. Research has shown that widows tend to experience more intense and prolonged grief compared to widowers, possibly due to social and emotional factors (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017). Another study by Chikezie, Obioma & Emenike (2020) found that women, including widows, are more likely to ruminate about their grief, leading to prolonged emotional distress. Findings reveal that this prolonged grief can also be associated with poor health outcomes and a decrease in life satisfaction (Ding, et al, 2021). Depression is another significant psychological challenge for widows, often triggered by the loss of emotional support and social connections. Research shows that widowhood increases the likelihood of developing depression and anxiety disorders (Doherty & Scannell-Desch, 2023). Widows often experience feelings of loneliness, helplessness, and social isolation, which contribute to these psychological symptoms.

Furthermore, a study by Chikezie, Obioma & Emenike (2020) indicated that the experience of widowhood leads to a heightened vulnerability to depression, particularly among women. This is often due to the multiple roles widows must take on, such as caregiving and household responsibilities, leading to feelings of overload and stress (Oyedele & Ajala, 2024). Women who experience the death of a spouse are often more likely to report anxiety and emotional distress due to a loss of social and financial stability (Baloyi, Nene & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022). This stress is further compounded when the widow has to navigate the changes in her social identity and role in the family. Social isolation is a critical factor contributing to the psychological difficulties of widowhood. A study by Peña-Longobardo et al (2021) found that widows who experience social isolation have poorer mental health outcomes compared to those who maintain strong social connections. Isolation can be both emotional and physical, with widows often withdrawing from social activities and feeling disconnected from their communities. In contrast, research has also shown that adequate social support can buffer the psychological effects of widowhood. A study by Anuforo (2024) demonstrated that widows with strong social networks experienced less psychological distress and were more likely to recover emotionally from the loss. Social support from family, friends, and communities can help widows cope by providing emotional comfort, practical assistance, and social interaction (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019).

More so, widows often experience role strain, particularly in the case of older women or those with young children. A study by Amoo (2022) found that widowhood leads to increased role



overload, as widows have to adapt to single-parenting, financial responsibilities, and managing all household duties alone. These additional responsibilities, combined with emotional distress, can lead to heightened stress levels. Despite the significant psychological challenges, some widows demonstrate resilience and the ability to adapt. A study by Oyedele & Ajala (2024) highlighted the concept of resilience in coping with grief and loss. While some widows may experience prolonged distress, others show remarkable recovery and even personal growth following the loss of a spouse. Factors such as personality traits (e.g., optimism), coping strategies (e.g., emotional regulation), and perceived social support play a crucial role in resilience (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). Problem-focused coping strategies, such as seeking social support, engaging in new activities, and seeking professional help, have been associated with better mental health outcomes for widows (Awate & Rukumani, 2021).

Self-assertiveness strategies aim to help individuals communicate their needs, desires, and rights confidently while respecting others. These strategies are particularly relevant in improving personal well-being, mental health, and social functioning, especially for individuals who struggle with passivity or aggressiveness in social situations. The efficacy of self-assertiveness techniques has been extensively studied in various psychological domains, including self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, anxiety reduction, and conflict resolution (Kaciak & Memili, 2024). This empirical review explores the evidence supporting the effectiveness of self-assertiveness strategies. Self-assertiveness is often associated with improved self-esteem, as it helps individuals express their thoughts and emotions without fear of judgment. Research has shown that individuals who practice self-assertiveness tend to experience increased feelings of self-worth and personal empowerment. A study by Ames & Wazlawek (2014) investigated the relationship between self-assertiveness and self-esteem in a sample of young adults. The results demonstrated that participants who underwent assertiveness training reported higher self-esteem and greater emotional stability. Similarly, a study by Lazreg, (2021) found that assertiveness training significantly increased self-confidence in women, especially in interpersonal and work-related situations. These findings support the notion that self-assertiveness helps individuals feel more competent and worthy in their interactions with others.

Self-assertiveness has been shown to have a positive impact on anxiety reduction, particularly social anxiety. Many individuals with social anxiety disorder tend to avoid expressing their needs and opinions, which exacerbates feelings of isolation and fear of rejection. Self-assertiveness training helps individuals confront these fears and express themselves more openly,



thereby reducing anxiety. A study by Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani (2023) evaluated the effectiveness of assertiveness training in individuals with social anxiety disorder. The study found that participants who completed an assertiveness training program exhibited significant reductions in anxiety, particularly in social situations. The researchers concluded that assertiveness training could be a valuable adjunct to cognitive-behavioral therapy for individuals with social anxiety disorder. Furthermore, self-assertiveness strategies play a key role in improving interpersonal relationships by helping individuals set boundaries, express needs, and communicate more effectively. Research has shown that assertiveness is crucial for establishing healthy relationships, as it fosters open communication and mutual respect. A study by Moss et al (2021) explored how assertiveness affects relationships. They found that individuals who practiced self-assertiveness were more likely to express their emotions and desires in a constructive manner, which led to greater relationship satisfaction. Self-assertiveness has also been found to improve stress management by helping individuals cope with external pressures and internal emotional turmoil. By asserting their needs and setting healthy boundaries, individuals are better able to manage stressors and reduce feelings of being overwhelmed. A study by Phillips (2021) examined the relationship between assertiveness and stress reduction. The results indicated that individuals who were trained in assertive communication reported lower levels of perceived stress and greater emotional resilience.

Self-assertiveness is important for resolving conflicts in both personal and professional settings. By allowing individuals to express their views and negotiate more effectively, self-assertiveness strategies can lead to more constructive and collaborative conflict resolution. A study by Senyah (2021) on assertiveness training for conflict resolution found that individuals who learned to assert themselves in difficult situations were more likely to engage in constructive problem-solving and negotiation. The study indicated that assertiveness reduced aggressive or passive behaviours and promoted mutual respect in conflict situations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

According to Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT), people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are interconnected. It even goes so far as to imply that people's actions and thoughts have an impact on their emotions and behaviours. In other words, as one changes, the others will also change in tandem (Beck, 1967). An individual experiencing discomfort or anxiety may engage in cognitive patterns and emotional responses that only contribute to intensify their negative

emotions. This idea holds that a person's mental processes have a crucial role in determining their psychological state. A person's interpretation of the world can be significantly altered by changing their thought process (Denecke, Schmid & Nüssli, 2022). This kind of method can assist in addressing harmful thought patterns and serve as a foundation for treating anxiety problems. Mental barriers that keep people from reaching their objectives are known as unhelpful thinking styles. Because we have been trained to believe them over time, they are frequently unconscious and difficult to identify (Denecke, Schmid & Nüssli, 2022). For example, when a widow believes that society views her as having killed her spouse, she is unable to succeed in life and has allowed this thought pattern to become ingrained in her life.

Self-assertiveness which refers to the ability to express one's own needs, desires, and feelings in an open, direct, and respectful manner is an important trait for personal empowerment, especially for widows who may face unique social challenges after the death of their spouse. Cognitive behavioural theory can be applied to understand how a widow might develop or enhance her self-assertiveness (Beck, 2021). Widows may learn to assert themselves by observing others who exhibit self-assertive behaviour. If they see other women, that is, friends, family members, or even public figures, assert their needs or express themselves confidently, they may be motivated to emulate such behaviours. For example, if a widow sees a friend confidently handle social interactions or express her needs in relationships, this may encourage her to adopt similar strategies. The presence of a supportive role model or peer group can make a significant difference in encouraging assertiveness.

More so, a widow's ability to notice and internalise assertive behaviour will be influenced by her emotional state, personal beliefs, and level of attention. If the widow is particularly focused on navigating her new life challenges and overcoming grief, she may pay more attention to behaviours that reflect strength and assertiveness. Also, her ability to retain these behaviours will depend on her cognitive capacity to process and remember the observed behaviours, and whether those behaviours align with her personal experiences and goals. Therefore, for a widow to successfully reproduce self-assertive behaviour, she must first believe that she can act assertively, despite any emotional or social barriers. Motivation plays an important role also, if the widow sees that self-assertion leads to positive outcomes, for instance, respect, autonomy, or better social interactions, she is more likely to be motivated to incorporate such behaviours into her own life. This is particularly relevant when considering how a widow may need to negotiate

social expectations or family dynamics, where self-assertion could be fundamental to regaining control and autonomy in her life (Ames, Lee & Wazlawek, 2017).

Vicarious reinforcement is necessary for encouraging self-assertiveness. If a widow sees other women being rewarded for asserting themselves, maybe through positive social outcomes or personal success, this can create a sense of belief that assertiveness is worth pursuing. Social support, including family and friends, can provide additional reinforcement, either by directly encouraging assertive behaviours or by offering praise and recognition when assertiveness is demonstrated (Oyedele & Ajala, 2024).

### **Methodology**

The research study adopted both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and also employed a pretest-posttest quasi experimental design. The group was divided into two, comprising the experimental group and the control group. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select the participants for this study. The selection of participants for this study was based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria and the population consisted of widows in Ibadan South East and South-west in Ibadan Metropolis who were between the ages of 21 and 50 years. The population comprised a total of 121 out of which 38 participants were purposefully selected based on their regular attendance of meetings and also due to their ability to read and write. However, for the qualitative aspect of the study, 5 participants were selected based on their observed level of participation and temperaments. Ethical principles were observed which involved the widows' autonomy as well as the right to informed consent.

For the quantitative approach, Modified Kuppuswamy Scale (Kumar et al., 2022) and Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale (Lee, Sun & Chiang, 2019) was adopted; and for the qualitative approach, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) method was used. The modified Kuppuswamy Scale takes into consideration the demographic data of the participants while Ryff's Psychological Wellbeing Scale was used to test the level of the participants' psychological wellbeing. These were merged as a single instrument and were administered to the participants before and after the treatment. More so, series of assertiveness activities ranging from: Three Zones of Emotions, Empty chair, Unfinished business (Sutton, 2021); and Start. Stop. Continue. Change. Share, Magic Lantern, Tree of Knowledge (Anderson, n.d) were used as stimuli

instrument for self-assertiveness exercises. The participants were engaged for one and a half hours each time during the nine-week intervention session.

The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was done in four (4) sessions. Each session lasted one and half hours and during the session, the participants were encouraged to be open-minded on issues as it relates to them using the guided questions to channel the course of the discussion along the right path. This group comprised a total of five participants.

To ascertain the impact of the assertiveness training on the group designated for the experiment, the null hypothesis was tested using the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). However, the focus group discussion produced qualitative data that was captured and transcribed using thematic categorization, which was synthesised and examined based on the information obtained.

## Results

The hypothesis of this study was tested at  $< 0.05$  level of significance, using ANCOVA (Analysis of Co-variance). The data collected were presented as follows:

H<sub>01</sub>: There will be no significant effect of self-assertiveness strategies on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, Nigeria.

**Table 1: Analysis of covariance of the effect of self-assertiveness strategies on the psychological well-Being of widows**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1697.585	2	848.792	29.433	0.000	0.621
Intercept	665.394	1	665.394	23.074	0.000	0.391
Pretest	607.574	1	607.574	21.069	0.000	0.369
Treatment	1412.183	1	1412.183	48.970	0.000	0.576
Error	1038.159	36	28.838			
Total	17082.000	39				
Corrected Total	2735.744	38				

**Source:** Field Survey, 2024

Table 1 shows that there was a significant effect of self-assertiveness strategy on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State ( $F_{(1,36)}=48.970$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $\eta^2=0.576$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that the self-assertiveness training was an effective strategy on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State. Also, the eta square value of 0.576 shows the contributing effect size of 57.6%.

**Table 2: Estimated marginal means of self-assertiveness strategies on the psychological well-being of widows**

Treatment	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Self-assertiveness	26.977	1.407	24.122	29.832
Control	14.306	1.107	12.062	16.550

Table 2 shows that participants exposed to self-assertiveness strategies had higher mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score of 26.977 on the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, than the participants in the control group with mean score of 14.306. This means that participants exposed to self-assertiveness (treatment group) performed better than those in the control group. It implies that self-assertiveness strategy was an effective method that could enhance the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis.

The Focus Group Discussion participants were asked if they were afraid to voice their opinions, even when they were in opposition to the opinions of most people. They voiced their opinion:

*“I used to get scared when my opinions didn't align with others'. I tend to keep my thoughts to myself in order to avoid confrontation since I'm afraid of possible conflict or rejection. But no more! The self-assertiveness training has taught me to voice my thoughts with confidence, even if they are different from other people's. Speaking up feels empowering”.*

Another participant said:

*“With this training, I’ve found my voice. I realise now how important it is to express myself, even though I used to keep back. Knowing that I can defend my convictions is freeing”.*

A participant said:

*“I used to be nervous when I disagreed with other people, but these days I see it as a chance to improve. Knowing that my viewpoint enriches the discussion, I’ve learnt to politely assert myself”.*

Another said:

*“I was afraid and frequently kept my thoughts to myself before to the training. However, I now have the confidence to express my opinions. I’ve come to understand that my voice counts and that I shouldn’t be afraid to express my opinions, even if they don’t align with the majority”.*

From the above viewpoints, it is evidence that even though their opinions are unpopular, they believe they have been able to find their voice. Their newfound confidence has enabled them to boldly and clearly give their viewpoint to conversations, thus allowing them to express themselves without fear or favour. This showed that self-assertiveness techniques have a major positive impact on widows' psychological health in Ibadan Metropolis.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results in this study showed that the psychological health of widows in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State, was significantly impacted by the self-assertiveness strategy. This suggests that the self-assertiveness approach has a positive impact on widows' psychological health in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State. The higher score of the treatment group compared to the control group participants on widows' psychological well-being further supports the impact of self-assertiveness technique. The results of this study are consistent with a prior study that found that an assertiveness training program helped depressed female adults change how they saw themselves, speak more easily, express themselves clearly, and ultimately feel better about themselves (Arshad & Waheed, 2023).

It also reduces stress and anxiety by helping widows manage conflicts constructively (Arshad & Waheed, 2023). Assertiveness empowers the widows to take control of their lives and resist manipulation. According to the results, which were consistent with other studies (Immanuel, 2020; Mostofi & Rouzbahani, 2023; and Arshad & Waheed, 2023) which revealed that self-assertiveness promotes a sense of personal value and self-respect which was lost as a result of

loss and grief. Some societal practices sometimes rob widows of the ability to express themselves openly and freely, the result from this study clearly reveals that self-assertiveness strategy which the widows were exposed to provided them the opportunity to practise open and respectful communication which can foster stronger interpersonal connections and this is in agreement with (Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani, 2023). More so, the result shows that the participants in the treatment group exhibited decreased anxiety episodes and improved self-acceptance and autonomy to effectively manage their daily life. The results of the major effect of the self-assertiveness approach showed that the psychological well-being of widows in Ibadan Metropolis was greater for those in the treatment group than for those in the control group.

After losing a partner, widows may experience feelings of powerlessness or dependency. The results of the focus group discussion showed that they were able to effectively and clearly communicate their needs, wants, and boundaries and this sense of empowerment which is in line with the study by Golshiri, Mostofi & Rouzbahani (2023) which helps them feel more in charge of their lives by confronting their fears and expressing themselves more openly, thereby reducing anxiety. The widows' self-worth and confidence were boosted by the activities they participated in, which gave them the tools to advocate for themselves and stand up for their own interests and this resonates with the study by Lazreg (2021) which found that assertiveness training significantly increased self-confidence. This enhanced psychological well-being and a more positive self-image. People who experience bereavement may feel helpless or helpless to change their situation. By cultivating these assertiveness abilities, the widows were able to actively shape their lives and make choices that were consistent with their values and objectives, which decreased their sense of helplessness and increased their sense of autonomy (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019).

Consistent with other researches, the findings demonstrated that self-assertiveness exercises enhanced successful communication, which encompasses both assertive self-expression and sympathetic listening to others and according to Moss et al (2021), improves positive relationship with others. Better communication and setting clear boundaries allowed them to have more balanced and healthy relationships with their friends and family, which increased their emotional support and sense of social connectedness and improved their general well-being. The widows gradually repressed their needs and feelings or avoided confrontation, which made them more stressed and anxious. Nonetheless, they were able to constructively resolve disagreements and assertively express themselves during the activities, which reduced internal



tension and external stressors and enhanced emotional regulation and mental health, which is also in line with Kaciak & Memili (2024). Chikezie, Obioma & Emenike (2020) indicated that the experience of widowhood leads to a heightened vulnerability and loss of dignity, therefore the result of this finding reveals that the widows' increased resilience in the face of hardship was facilitated by the self-assertiveness abilities they acquired from the strategy. They are now more capable of handling the difficulties, disappointments, and changes that come with being a widow as the strategy provides emotional comfort, practical assistance, and social interaction (Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019).

### **Conclusion**

Self-assertiveness plays a critical role in improving the psychological well-being of widows by enhancing self-esteem, reducing social isolation, managing stress, fostering empowerment, and improving conflict resolution. By learning to assert themselves, widows can better navigate the complex emotional and social challenges associated with widowhood. Given the potential benefits, self-assertiveness strategies should be incorporated into support programs for widows, either through targeted workshops or counseling, to help them regain control over their lives and enhance their emotional, psychological and mental health. The existing literature and empirical evidence support the idea that assertiveness training can be an effective and empowering intervention for widows. It is however, recommended to develop culturally and contextually relevant self-assertiveness exercises that acknowledge the unique challenges faced by widows in different settings, and address their specific psychological needs.

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