Coping and Social Support Strategies of Nigerian Military Widows in the War against Boko Haram

By

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian Army has been engaged in asymmetric warfare with the Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram since 2011, which is the single largest deployment of soldiers in any internal security operation in post-independence Nigeria. Since then, there has been an uncountable loss of military personnel and civilian casualties caught up in this conflict. This study examined how the Nigerian Army widows coped with their husbands' deaths and sustained their livelihoods in the absence of state support. The study looked at the welfare benefits for deceased servicemen in the Nigerian Army, the numerous challenges women faced in accessing the benefits, the influence and support provided by the military widows Association, the coping and social support strategies they adopted and the effect of the deaths on their livelihoods.

The study contained seven chapters that include the background, theoretical and literature review, Nigerian Army structure and organization, widowhood in Nigeria, findings, methodology, and discussions of the study. The background chapter established the rationale of the study, locating it within the limited attention paid to military casualties of the conflict, and the need to understand the impact of the war on widows, and the military community. The theoretical and conceptual framework chapter discussed the bureaucracy, social capital and social support theories, and the extant literature on compensations for military widows, their challenges, and how they differ across various militaries. This chapter examines the coping and social support strategies used by military widows and other war widows in various societies.

The next chapters focused on the Nigerian military and widowhood in Nigeria and discusses the structure, operations, and welfare schemes of the Nigerian Army. This chapter identified the dysfunctional nature of Nigeria’s military bureaucracy as a major factor impeding the payment of benefits to military widows, whereas the chapter on widowhood looked at the coping environment of widows in Nigerian society, and those of military widows from past operations. Further discussed in this chapter was the role and influence of the Nigerian Military Wives and Widows Associations.

Following these were the methodology, findings, and discussion chapters. An interpretive qualitative method was used in this work to describe and derive meaning from the lived experiences of widows of Nigerian Army soldiers whose husbands died

in the war against Boko Haram. The study was conducted over a period of four months from December 2020 to March 2021 in Lagos, Abuja, and Maiduguri in the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria. Data for the study was collected in other sites in Jos, Bauchi, Osogbo and Ilorin, and virtually, through video-conferencing platforms and phone interviews. A total of 29 interviews with widows, and 14 interviews with members of the media, civil society and military communities were conducted during the period of the fieldwork.

A key finding was the difficulties the women faced in accessing their benefits. Most of the participants experienced a lack of support from military officials in processing their benefits and were left alone to deal with a large and inefficient bureaucracy. However, some experienced more difficulties than others. Widows of officers were more able to access their benefits compared to those of non-commissioned officers due to their social status and personal connections within the military. For all widows, accessing benefits was influenced by a system of patronage. It was found that the Nigerian military bureaucracy functions along neo-patrimonial lines, which hampers the efficient functioning of the military bureaucracy and opens the way to corruption and the exploitation of women. Another key finding of the study was the support provided by the Military Widows Association. The discussions revealed that the Association has been able to provide some form of bridging social capital, the lacked the resources and ability to provide linking social capital to access the military institution and the wider civil society.

Without state and associational support, military widows turned to their families and social charities for support. While families provided bonding capital that helped women cope and survive, this was limited by the cultural demands placed on widows in African societies. In comparison with other studies on military widows, an important finding within the African context was that bonding capital was often eroded by the traditional practices that occasioned widowhood, such as property inheritance, forced remarriage, and other forms of social vulnerability and stigmatization. Hence, they resort to other coping resources, such as spirituality, resilience, and personal strength to cope with the loss.

Finally, this study evaluated the impact of death on the livelihood of women. The findings revealed that the death significantly altered the socioeconomic lives and

livelihood strategies of the women. The widows struggled with raising and educating children, playing dual parent roles, and overall family maintenance following their husband's demise. Furthermore, the women's vulnerable conditions were exploited by relatives who demanded their share of the late husband's entitlements to members of the Nigerian military. They also encountered various forms of sexual exploitation, in exchange for their late husband's benefits from Nigerian Army officials.

The study's key conclusions are that Nigerian military widows experienced key difficulties accessing their benefits due to the centralized and dysfunctional nature of the neo-patrimonial Nigerian military bureaucracy. Although it was expected that the Military Widows Association would support the widows, their agency was limited by their lack of capacity to provide the needed bridging and linking social capital, and negative attitudes towards the military by wider society. As a result, they resorted to using different economic, social, and psychological support strategies, depending on the reach of their social capital, status, and education.

The useful recommendations highlighted by this study include the need for the Nigerian military to streamline the bureaucracy associated with payments of benefits. Other recommendations are the establishment of a military ombudsman to address issues of bribery and sexual exploitation perpetrated by officers against widows and NOKs of deceased soldiers, the provision of institutional support to the military widow's association, and the need for the military widows association to extend its activities into the civil society space.

This study was not without limitations. One of them was the challenges of access to the participants. This was expected given the nature of the topic. Also, I interviewed more widows of non-commissioned officers than commissioned officers. This was due to the officer-enlisted ratio present in the Nigerian military. The study would have benefitted from interviews with widows of senior officers, from the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and above for more comparison of experiences. The study's focus on widows, rather than widowers of the Nigerian Army is another limitation of the study. This limitation, however, is a function of the overtly gendered nature of military institutions, and the exclusion of women from combat roles, including in the Nigerian military. Nonetheless, the findings and conclusions of this study are verifiable, generalizable,

and reliable as they compare with the findings of other studies and correlate with the few studies on military families in Africa.

Areas for further research identified by this study include focusing on the deployment and post-deployment challenges among Nigerian soldiers and military families involved in the Boko Haram conflict/and/or Internal Security Operations in Nigeria and studying the narratives of wives and families of disabled Nigerian soldiers in the Boko Haram conflict. Studies of this nature will open new vistas of knowledge on the experiences of serving Nigerian military families and the challenges they face in performing this crucial national duty and service.

OPSOMMING

Die Nigeriese weermag is sedert 2011 besig met asimmetriese oorlogvoering met die Islamitiese terreurgroep, Boko Haram, wat die enkele grootste ontplooiing van soldate in enige interne veiligheidsoperasie in Nigerië ná onafhanklikheid is. Sedertdien was daar 'n ontelbare verlies aan militêre personeel en burgerlike ongevalle wat in hierdie konflik vasgevang is. Hierdie studie het ondersoek hoe die weduwees van die Nigeriese weermag hul mans se dood hanteer het en hul lewensonderhoud volgehou het in die afwesigheid van staatsondersteuning. Die studie het gekyk na die welsynsvoordele vir afgestorwe diensplichtiges in die Nigeriese weermag, die talle uitdagings wat vroue in die gesig gestaar het om toegang tot die voordele te verkry, die invloed en ondersteuning wat deur die militêre weduweesvereniging verskaf word, die hanterings- en sosiale ondersteuningstrategieë wat hulle aangeneem het en die effek van die sterftes op hul lewensbestaan.

Die studie het sewe hoofstukke bevat wat die agtergrond, teoretiese en literatuuroorsig, Nigeriese weermagstruktuur en organisasie, weduweeskap in Nigerië, bevindinge, metodologie en besprekings van die studie insluit. Die agtergrondhoofstuk het die rasionaal van die studie vasgestel en dit geplaas binne die beperkte aandag wat aan militêre ongevalle van die konflik gegee is, en die behoefte om die impak van die oorlog op weduwees en die militêre gemeenskap te verstaan. Die teoretiese en konseptuele raamwerk hoofstuk het die burokrasie, sosiale kapitaal en sosiale ondersteuningsteorieë bespreek, asook die bestaande literatuur oor vergoeding vir militêre weduwees, hul uitdagings en hoe hulle verskil oor verskeie weermagte. Hierdie hoofstuk ondersoek die hanterings- en sosiale ondersteuningstrategieë wat deur militêre weduwees en ander oorlogweduwees in verskeie samelewings gebruik word.

Die volgende hoofstukke het gefokus op die Nigeriese weermag en weduweeskap in Nigerië en bespreek die struktuur, bedrywighede en welsynskemas van die Nigeriese weermag. Hierdie hoofstuk het die disfunksionele aard van Nigerië se militêre burokrasie geïdentifiseer as 'n belangrike faktor wat die betaling van voordele aan militêre weduwees belemmer, terwyl die hoofstuk oor weduweeskap gekyk het na die hanteringsomgewing van weduwees in die Nigeriese samelewing, en dié van militêre weduwees van vorige bedrywighede. Verder bespreek in hierdie hoofstuk was die rol en invloed van die Nigeriese Militêre Vroue en Weduwee Verenigings.

Hierna volg die metodologie, bevindinge en besprekingshoofstukke. 'n Interpreterende kwalitatiewe metode is in hierdie werk gebruik om die geleefde ervarings van weduwees van Nigeriese weermagsoldate wie se mans in die oorlog teen Boko Haram gesterf het, te beskryf en betekenis te verkry. Die studie is oor 'n tydperk van vier maande van Desember 2020 tot Maart 2021 in Lagos, Abuja en Maiduguri in die suidelike en noordelike dele van Nigerië uitgevoer. Data vir die studie is op ander gebiede in Jos, Bauchi, Osogbo en Ilorin ingesamel, asook op virtuele platforms soos videokonferensieplatforms en telefoononderhoude. Altesaam was daar 29 onderhoude met weduwees, en 14 onderhoude met lede van die media, burgerlike samelewing en militêre gemeenskappe gedurende die tydperk van die veldwerk gevoer.

'n Sleutelbevinding was die probleme wat die vroue ondervind het om toegang tot hul voordele te kry. Die meeste van die deelnemers het 'n gebrek aan ondersteuning van militêre amptenare ervaar in die verwerking van hul voordele en is alleen gelaat om 'n groot en ondoeltreffende burokrasie te hanteer. Sommige het egter meer probleme as ander ervaar. Weduwees van offisiere kon meer toegang tot hul voordele kry in vergelyking met dié van onderoffisiere vanweë hul sosiale status en persoonlike verbintenisse binne die weermag. Vir alle weduwees is toegang tot voordele deur 'n stelsel van patronaatskap beïnvloed. Daar is gevind dat die Nigeriese militêre burokrasie volgens neo-patrimoniale lyne funksioneer, wat die doeltreffende funksionering van die militêre burokrasie belemmer en die weg oopmaak vir korrupsie en die uitbuiting van vroue. Nog 'n sleutelbevinding van die studie was die ondersteuning wat deur die Militêre Weduweevereniging verskaf is. Die besprekings het aan die lig gebring dat alhoewel die Vereniging in staat was om een of ander vorm van oorbruggingsmaatskaplike kapitaal te verskaf, hulle het nie die hulpbronne en vermoë gehad om koppelende sosiale kapitaal te verskaf om toegang tot die militêre instelling en die breër burgerlike samelewing te kry nie.

Sonder staats- en verenigingsondersteuning het militêre weduwees hulle tot hul gesinne en maatskaplike liefdadigheidsorganisasies gewend vir ondersteuning. Terwyl gesinne bindingskapitaal verskaf het wat vroue gehelp het om die hoof te bied en te oorleef, is dit beperk deur die kulturele eise wat aan weduwees in Afrika-samelewings gestel is. In vergelyking met ander studies oor militêre weduwees, was 'n belangrike bevinding binne die Afrika-konteks dat bindingskapitaal dikwels

geërodeer is deur die tradisionele praktyke wat weduweeskap veroorsaak het, soos eiendomsvererwing, gedwonge hertrou en ander vorme van sosiale kwesbaarheid en stigmatisering. Daarom wend hulle hulle tot ander hanteringshulpbronne, soos spiritualiteit, veerkragtigheid en persoonlike krag om die verlies te hanteer.

Laastens het hierdie studie die impak van dood op die lewensbestaan van vroue geëvalueer. Die bevindinge het aan die lig gebring dat die dood die sosio-ekonomiese lewens en lewensbestaanstrategieë van die vroue aansienlik verander het. Die weduwees het gesukkel met die grootmaak en opvoeding van kinders, die vertolking van dubbele ouerrolle, en algehele gesinsonderhoud ná hul man se afsterwe. Verder is die vroue se kwesbare toestande uitgebuit deur familielede wat hul deel van die oorlede man se aansprake op lede van die Nigeriese weermag geëis het. Hulle het ook verskeie vorme van seksuele uitbuiting teëgekom, in ruil vir hul oorlede man se voordele van Nigeriese weermagamptenare.

Die belangrikste gevolgtrekkings van die studie is dat Nigeriese militêre weduwees belangrike probleme ondervind het om toegang tot hul voordele te verkry as gevolg van die gesentraliseerde en disfunksionele aard van die neo-patrimoniale Nigeriese militêre burokrasie. Alhoewel daar verwag is dat die Militêre Weduweevereniging die weduwees sou ondersteun, was hul agentskap beperk deur hul gebrek aan kapasiteit om die nodige oorbrugging en skakeling van sosiale kapitaal te verskaf, asook weens die breër samelewing se negatiewe houdings. Gevolglik het hulle gebruik gemaak van verskillende ekonomiese, sosiale en sielkundige ondersteuningstrategieë, afhangende van die bereik van hul sosiale kapitaal, status en opvoeding.

Nuttige aanbevelings wat deur hierdie studie uitgelig word, sluit in die behoefte vir die Nigeriese weermag om die burokrasie wat verband hou met die betalings van voordele te stroomlyn, die verskaffing van institusionele ondersteuning deur die Nigeriese weermag en ander militêre gesinne en veteraangroepe aan die militêre weduwee se vereniging, die uitbreiding van MIWA se aktiwiteite in die burgerlike samelewingsruimte, en die vestiging van 'n militêre ombudsman om kwessies van omkopery en korrupsie, en seksuele uitbuiting, gepleeg deur beamptes teen weduwees en NOK's van 'n afgestorwe soldaat, aan te spreek.

Hierdie studie was nie sonder beperkings nie. Een daarvan was die uitdagings van toegang tot die deelnemers. Tog was dit ‘n verwagting gegewe die aard van die

onderwerp. Ook het ek meer weduwees van onderoffisiere as onderoffisiere ondervra. Dit was te danke aan die verhouding tussen offisiere wat in die Nigeriese weermag teenwoordig is. Die studie sou baat gevind het by onderhoude met weduwees van senior offisiere, van die rang van luitenant-kolonel en hoër vir meer vergelyking van ervarings. Die studie se fokus op weduwees, eerder as weduwees van die Nigeriese weermag, is nog 'n beperking van die studie. Hierdie beperking is egter 'n funksie van die openlik geslagtelike aard van militêre instellings, en die uitsluiting van vroue van gevegsrolle, insluitend in die Nigeriese weermag. Nietemin is die bevindinge en gevolgtrekkings van hierdie studie verifieerbaar, veralgemeenbaar en betroubaar aangesien dit vergelyk word met die bevindinge van ander studies en korreleer met die min studies oor militêre gesinne in Afrika.

Gebiede vir verdere navorsing wat deur hierdie studie geïdentifiseer is, sluit in fokus op die ontplooiings- en post-ontplooiingsuitdagings onder Nigeriese soldate en militêre gesinne betrokke by die Boko Haram-konflik/en/of Interne Veiligheidsoperasies in Nigerië, asook die bestudering van die vertellings van vrouens en gesinne van gestremde Nigeriërs soldate in die Boko Haram-konflik. Studies van hierdie aard sal nuwe uitsigte van kennis oopmaak oor die ervarings van dienende Nigeriese militêre gesinne en die uitdagings wat hulle in die gesig staar in die uitvoering van hierdie belangrike nasionale plig en diens.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to fallen soldiers of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN), who have paid the supreme price in the line of duty; to Nigerian military widows, orphans, and families of fallen soldiers, for bearing the heavy burden of the supreme sacrifice; and to the serving Nigeria soldier, who despite all odds, is always willing, able and ready, to serve the Fatherland, in honour and dignity.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AFN – Armed Forces of Nigeria

BF – Benevolent Fund

COAS – Chief of the Army Staff

CNO – Casualty Notification Officer

DCMA - Department of Civil-Military Relations

DOAA – Department of Army Administration

DEPOWA – Defence and Police Officers Association

ISOs – Internal Security Operations

ISWAP – Islamic Province in West Africa

KDF – Kenya Defence Forces

KIA – Killed in Action

MIA – Missing in Action

MIWA – Military Widows Association of Nigeria

NA – Nigeria Army

NAFC – Nigeria Army Finance Corps

NAFOWA - Nigerian Airforce Officers Wives Association

NAOWA – Nigerian Army Officers Association

NOK – Next of Kin

NOWA - Nigerian Navy Officers Wives Association

NAWIS – Nigeria Army Welfare Insurance Scheme

MPB – Military Pensions Board

VO – Visiting Officer

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

In August 2014, Nigerian soldiers' wives took to Maiduguri's streets, a major conflict theatre of the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria, to protest over the inferior weapons given to their husbands to fight Boko Haram. The women linked the deaths of their husbands at the hands of the terrorist group to the inferior weapons provided by the Government. They were enraged that the families of fallen soldiers were abandoned by the military (Ilo, 2014). This action was considered a public revolt against the Nigerian Army. The protest represented a way of airing their women's grievances against the army authorities and the agony and trauma of losing their husbands (Onyebukwa, 2016)

This protest evoked a counter-reaction from the then Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Ken Minimah, who threatened to *''throw the women out of the barracks''*, stating that a repeat of the act would ensure that he *"tell soldiers to use koboko (horsewhip) on the wives and bundle them out of the barracks."* The statement by the Army Chief reminded the women of their tenuous position in the military institution, their civilian identity, and non-immunity from military discipline and control as 'civilians'. For the women, this protest revealed how they took advantage of their ''ambiguous positionalities'', 'civilian-military liminalities' or "paradoxical positioning" (Hyde 2015:51, Baaz and Verweijen 2016:282) to express their grievances against the military institution.

Tellingly, the reaction of the Army Chief is pertinent when viewed against the backdrop of women's historical relationship with the military institution. As wives, they are integral to the military institution (Enloe, 2000; Fucella, 2012). They are incorporated into the military institution, where they serve to support their military husband and the institution's needs. The supporting roles of women in the military began in the early modern Armies of Europe and America as "camp followers" (Hacker, 1981; Mayer, 1990). As camp followers, they followed the soldiers on their duty tours. They maintained the regiment by performing domestic chores, providing emotional support,

and other auxiliary services, such as medical care, for soldiers and officers on these campaigns (Lomas, 1997a). However, their roles as camp followers came with discipline challenges and distractions to the troops (Ailes, 2012). Nonetheless, these women's provision of support services became legitimised and accepted over time as the military institution became bureaucratised and professionalised (Hacker, 1981).

Although marriages were generally discouraged in the early armies, soldiers who wanted to marry had to seek the permission of their commanding officer (Hacker, 1981; Janis Lomas, 1997b). Those who received permission were considered "being on the strength of the regiment", while those who married without orders were considered "off the strength of the regiment"[1]. Also, there were limits on the number of wives a regiment could have; as such, officers were given preferential treatment compared to the rank and file (Pedersen, 1990). Recognised wives were eligible for welfare benefits and compensations if widowed. In contrast, the military largely ignored unrecognised wives, and they were not considered for welfare benefits nor recognised as army widows if their husbands died. (Mayer, 1990; Lomas, 1997b). Relief laws and public charities supported widows of the rank and file (Thomas, 1989).

This structuring was in place in European Armies, particularly Britain, until the First World War, when there was a need to accommodate all military widows, including those on and off the strength. This development followed the aftermath of the various British expansionist wars that warranted overhauling the system of compensations previously administered by public charities and implementing a state-funded pension arrangement that catered for both widows of officers and the rank and file (Riedi, 2018). Like Britain, other militaries also underwent this phase of the evolution of social policies for their servicemen (Lanthier, 2004). The growth and evolution of the military institution have necessitated the need to have robust and comprehensive benefit plans and legislations for widows and families of service members who died in service of the State.

African militaries had a different trajectory from their European and American counterparts regarding payments of pensions and compensations to widows and

[1]A regiment is a military unit,and being on the strength of the regiment means being considered and recognised as part of the unit's human and material resources.

families of fallen soldiers. African soldiers were used as mercenaries in the two World Wars in which they participated, and compensations for wartime injury and death differed from those of their fellow European counterparts (Njung, 2020; 2019; Mordi, 2019). While these wars introduced death benefits for service members, the civil wars and insurgencies fought in different post-Independent African states hampered the full applicability of these laws. Also, like soldiers who fought for the British and French colonies (Njung, 2020; Schmitt, 2020), war veterans and widows in African states have experienced challenges accessing the benefits after their husbands' death. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, political patronage, and corruption are some of the reasons identified for the non-payment of these benefits to war widows (Oguna, 2016; Owolabi, 2017; Deng, 2021). This is no different for the widows of soldiers in Nigeria.

Widows and families of soldiers in African militaries actively combating terrorist groups within national territories or are part of regional and continental military missions have borne the biggest brunt of these conflicts (Williams, 2016; NTVKenya, 2017a; Sagbe, 2021). War casualties in these operations are publicly unavailable, and for the most part, are contested among military and government authorities in troop-contributing countries. An instance is the African Union (AU) peacekeeping mission in Somalia (AMISOM) there is no accurate figure on the number of slain military casualties (*IPI Global Observatory*, n.d.) This is also the case with the Nigerian military which has been engaged in asymmetric warfare with the Islamist terrorist group Boko Haram and the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP)[2] since 2009.

The Boko Haram conflict is the largest single deployment of soldiers in any internal security operation in post-independence Nigeria. It is also the longest military operation conducted on Nigerian territory since Independence. The Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), and the Niger Delta Insurgency, which began in 2003, ended with a Presidential Amnesty Programme in 2009 – although there is still an active military joint task force in the region, named Operation Delta Safe (Nigerian Army, 2016). The conflict spans the northeastern part of the country to the Lake Chad region, leading to a high loss of military personnel and infrastructure and resulting in high casualties. An estimated 10,000 soldiers are estimated to have died in the Boko Haram conflict (Ajala, 2021a).

[2] Refer to the split between BH and ISWAP, and how 2009 is

Limited attention has been paid to military causalities of the conflict, despite the huge losses suffered by this critical population. It is important to grasp the context of casualty losses and how this affects the wives and families of the fallen soldiers as this helps situate the impact of the war on military widows, families, and the wider military community. It also shifts the research agenda from civilian/humanitarian causalities of the conflict with its inherent focus on conflict-affected women (Ajayi, 2020), to another category of women affected by conflict, who are equally not protected by the State, despite the availability of welfare laws and policies. The attendant development in military family policies, and concern for the wellbeing of the military family in the 21st century across advanced militaries, also make for a unique study. This is crucial as it helps to situate the distinction between a military widow (or widow of the State), and non-military or civilian widow in African societies, like Nigeria, where widowhood is regarded as a "social death" (Ewelukwa *et al.*, 2002; Owen, 2003).

Wives of slain combatants are entitled to certain benefits and privileges across different militaries. These provisions are also in the laws establishing the Armed Forces of Nigeria. Sections 40 and 41 of the Nigeria Armed Forces Act (2004) and Section 8 (2a-e) of the Nigeria Armed Forces Pension Act (1979) spell out the payment of pensions to widows and next of kin following the death of those in active service. However, these widows often struggle to access benefits and often lose access to their military support structures upon the death of their husbands.

Like war widows of other African militaries who have experienced hardship and abandonment after the loss of their husbands in wars (Baaz & Verweijen, 2016; Oguna, 2016; Deng, 2021), Nigerian Army widows of the Boko Haram conflict have difficulty accessing state support after their husband's death. The survival and coping strategies adopted by the women are unknown, and there has been no research on this in Nigeria. Accordingly, this study aims to establish the institutional responses of the army to the plight of these terror-widowed women; understand their socio-economic well-being relative to their one-time 'military' status; examine the various forms of social support available to them and the impact of these support systems on the livelihoods of these women. The knowledge derived from this study shows the survival strategies utilised by the women and how they navigate everyday living

without their spouses who ‘paid the supreme sacrifice for the country’s territorial integrity.

To properly evaluate the situations of Nigerian war widows, this study has engaged a wide range of literature on war widowhood across different geographies and how widows have coped. The literature looked at the rationale behind the introduction of compensations for war widows, its forms and challenges across various state militaries, and how it initially developed from charity- based assistance, to a reward of sacrifice and service (Holmes, 1990; Lomas, 1997a). In some countries, war widows’ pensions were motivated by the State’s political ideology of martyrdom, (Zahedi, 2006) and in others, it laid the foundations for the development of a welfare state (Lanthier, 2004).

Another aspect of the literature engaged with looked at the different coping and social support strategies adopted by both military widows, and other conflict affected women. For military widows, wartime death is a sudden and traumatic occurrence that is complicated due to factors such as the notification of death, geography of death, the social, and political circumstance of the death. Military widows also deal with a series of losses, such as the loss of their military identity, and other benefits associated with military service (Harrington, 2017; Wehrman, 2021). These make the conditions of coping difficult for them, as their post-bereavement lives are largely dependent on the recognition of their grief and sacrifices by the State (Zahedi, 2006; Tunaç and Küçükkaraca, 2020; Shorer, Dekel and Nuttman-Shwartz, 2021).

To mitigate the impact of death, some military widows have turned to religion and family as sources of support, and others have relied on military widows’ association, and other post-bereavement groups established by military veterans, and widows of fallen soldiers to gain support and assistance in managing the bereavement process and transitioning to civilian life. These groups are present in different militaries, and their functional capacity is largely dependent on their agency, and autonomy (Lomas, 1997a; Miller, 2016; Dooley, et al., 2019).

Women widowed in other forms of violent conflict have encountered different economic, cultural, and social difficulties upon the demise of their husbands. Their coping strategies are limited, as they are not often supported by the State, and they

are also prone to different forms of physical, structural, and sexual abuses as widows in the absence of family support systems. Accordingly, they turn to gender and religious based charity organisations for support and survival (Sossou, 2002). Evidently, similarities exist in the coping and social support strategies adopted by war widows, and/or conflict affected women. However, the distinctness of a military widow's identity, the socio-political recognition, financial and non-financial rewards for her sacrifices distinguishes her civilian/non-military widows.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Military wives are constantly faced with the risk of injury and death in peace and wartime. The risk of death is more heightened during the war as military wives engage in what Moelker *et al*. (2015) call 'spectator warfare'. Though they are not deployed to the war front, they are directly affected by war outcomes because, for them, the war's impact is not limited to the conflict theatre alone but rather continues on the home front, where they deal with a series of war losses and pains (Titus, 1984). The loss of a serviceman cascades through multiple social networks, from the surviving immediate and extended family to close friends, the military family, and the nation at large (La Morie & Murphy (2011).

The broad effect and complexities attached to wartime deaths make it more traumatic and distressing for survivors as it is influenced by several factors, which are ''circumstances surrounding the death; the manner of death notification; the geography of the death; the age of the deceased; the age of the survivor(s); the condition and existence of bodily remains; military rites and rituals; death investigations; the service member's commitment to his or her duty; the survivor's view of war and military service; dealing with military and government bureaucracy'' (La Morie & Murphy, 2011). The Boko Haram conflict has caused severe human loss to Nigeria's military population. It has created sudden widows and left several children fatherless. The impact of the war has not only been felt by the immediate family but also by other extended relatives of the deceased soldier. For wives of the deceased soldiers, surviving after the death of their husbands and breadwinners has been an arduous task in the face of the difficulties of accessing the limited state and non-state support.

By understanding how army families deal with war-front uncertainties, this study uncovers the coping and social support strategies used by these widows; specifically, how they navigate everyday living in the absence of their spouses who “paid the supreme sacrifice”, for the territorial integrity of the country. This is important considering the unique case of the Boko Haram conflict. The war is an ongoing military operation embarked upon by the Nigerian military against the Islamist terrorist groups, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State in the West African Province. The war is of an asymmetric and unconventional nature, and Nigerian soldiers are typically unprepared and trained for these kinds of warfare. It is an ongoing conflict that has both loss of military lives, and created an unprecedented number of bereaved military widows, and orphans in the Nigerian military community.

The study probes and examines state failures to fulfil its social contract duties, the effectiveness of state and non-state support systems for these widows, and their effect on the livelihoods of these women and their families. The study aims to advance existing literature on the subject by examining not only the responsiveness of state and non-state actors but how the death circumstances have made them adopt new survival strategies in the face of a sudden change of status and identity.

This study contributes to the knowledge gap on military families in African military studies. This research is significant because of its focus on a marginalized section of the military family whose lives are tenuous, as the realities of their existence are woven around the battlefront. They are marginalized at military operation planning, policymaking, advocacy, and support levels. In most cases, they are abandoned and neglected by the authorities, with little or no support from civil society. These actions impugn on the worth of their sacrifices, and agency as “widows of the State”. Finally, this research would provide more information on the strength and weaknesses of existing policies for the welfare of families of military personnel in Nigeria.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The main research question is: How do Nigerian military widows of the Boko Haram conflict cope with the death of their husbands and what livelihoods strategies do they adopt where the state fails to provide the necessary support?

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study seeks to achieve the following research objectives:

(1) Examine the legislation and the responsibility of the Nigeria Army's to support Army widows.

(2) Establish the influence and support of the Nigerian military widow's association to war widows of the Boko Haram conflict.

(3) Evaluate the forms of coping and social support strategies adopted by the widows.

(4) Determine the effect war deaths have on the livelihoods of widows and their families.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the interpretive method of qualitative inquiry that examines how people make sense and meaning of their realities. According to Berg (2001:7), qualitative research seeks to answer questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. They provide a means of getting unquantifiable facts about how people make sense and give meaning to their daily lives. It is within the confines of the social relatability of qualitative research and its capacity to provide rich descriptive and interpretive accounts of social realities, as opposed to the quantitative and statistical research, that necessitated this approach to this study.

The interpretive epistemology is used in this work to provide rich descriptive accounts to understand and derive meaning from the experiences of widows of Nigerian Army soldiers whose husbands died in the war against Boko Haram. The method seeks to portray their strategies of social support, coping, and survival and explain their everyday life as war widows. The information is derived from interviews with the respondents, regarded as co-producers in the knowledge and meaning-making process.

Interviews for this study were conducted with 43 participants. Participants for this study were mainly widows of Nigerian Army soldiers whose husbands died in the theatre of operations in northeast Nigeria. The data for this study were inductively coded and

analysed thematically using the Atlas Ti 8 computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Codes and Themes are important aspects of the data analysis process. The six phases of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006): getting familiarised with the data; coding the dataset; generating themes; reviewing the themes collected; defining and naming the themes, and producing the report are also used in this study.

1.6 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study contains seven chapters presented in the following structure:

Chapter One introduced the study's background and explained the study's rationale, the research question, and its objectives. The chapter provides a brief overview of the design and methodology, which is discussed in detail in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two detailed the theories and extant literature used in this study. These theories provide a framework to explain how Nigerian Army widows of the Boko Haram conflict have coped and survived after their husband's losses. The theories/concepts used in this study are bureaucracy, social capital, and social support. In terms of literature, the chapter examined literature across different Euro-American, African, and Asian militaries to have a wide understanding of how military widows across global militaries have coped with wartime loss and bereavement.

Chapter Three examines the structure, operations, and welfare of the Nigerian Army. It looks at the structure and composition of the institution, the various operations, and their effects and the welfare benefit available to members of the institution.

Chapter Four discusses the subject of widowhood in Nigeria and its various coping and survival strategies. This chapter examines the effects of the Boko Haram conflict on Nigerian military widows.

Chapter Five discusses the methodology of this research study. It addresses the philosophical assumptions of the study, rationale for the study, sites of the study, selection of participants, data collection methods, data analysis, ethical clearance, reflection on the research process, limitation, and conclusion sections.

Chapter Six presents the study's findings on the challenges of accessing pension benefits, the influences of the military widow's association, the support provided by members of the military and civil society, the effect of deaths on the women's livelihoods, and the coping strategies they have adopted.

Chapter Seven discusses the study in line with the extant literature on military and war widowhood. The discussion follows the findings of the study to reflect on the coping and social support strategies adopted by the women in the face of limited state support and assistance. The chapter presents useful recommendations for the Nigerian military community (comprising of the military authorities, military wives, widows and veterans' associations, and other military interest groups), and the wider civil society in Nigeria.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter detailed the theories and extant literature used in this study. These theories provide a framework to explain how Nigerian Army widows of the Boko Haram conflict have coped and survived after their husband's losses. The theories/concepts used in this study are bureaucracy, social capital, and social support. In terms of literature, this study examined literature across different Euro-American, African, and Asian militaries to have a wide understanding of how military widows across global militaries have coped with wartime loss and bereavement.

2.2 THE MILITARY AS A BUREAUCRACY

Bureaucracy is a concept that explains the processes and structures behind the functioning of public organisations, and governments. Weber conceived bureaucracy as an ideal type of organization that is rational and impersonal and managed by bureaucrats or administrative officials (Weber, 1947). Rationality ensures the use of acceptable and appropriate means to achieve specific organizational goals, and the impersonal nature of bureaucracies supposes that there are no preferential treatments or personal considerations (Rudi, 2008). The authority of large-scale bureaucracies' rests on the legal-rational forms of legitimate authority. This kind of authority lays its claims to legitimacy by issuing its legal enforcement of obedience and adherence to the rules. According to Weber, "obedience in legal authority is legally established impersonal order. It extends to the persons exercising the authority of office under it only by the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of the office" (Weber, 1947: 328).

The characteristics of an ideal type bureaucracy are: hierarchical organisation of office; the use of rules laws, and administrative orders, technical expertise and efficiency, organizational management of administrative acts, decisions and records, application of rules; impersonality, rationality and impartiality; ; a specified area of competence, obligation and authority to carry out administrative duties; specialised training and apprenticeship; and separation of administrative staff from ownership of means of production or administration (Gerth & Mills, 1946; Blau, 1952). These

aspects of a bureaucracy are applicable in all governments and public administrations and institutions, including the military.

Military institutions are large bureaucracies, hierarchically structured with strict and enforced rules and regulations (Weber, 1947; Janowitz, 1959; Miewald, 1970). The bureaucratic structure of the military is concerned with the day-to-day administration of the institution in both war and peacetime. To ensure the efficient functioning of the military there are various regulations pertaining to force procurement, force preparation, force deployment and force sustainment (Davis, 1948; Janowitz, 1959).

Beyond the day-to-day functioning of the military, the military bureaucracy together with the political class, administer the national security affairs of a state (Altunok, 2018). An effective military bureaucracy is necessary for a strong military that promotes military professionalism. In contrast, a dysfunctional military bureaucracy often leads to unprofessionalism in terms of the conduct of officers and soldiers which undermines military efficiency and impartiality. (Shields, 2004; Williams, 2009). Though bureaucracies are part of a state's administration, military bureaucracies differ from civil bureaucracies in that they demand unswerving loyalty to the chain of command. Within the military there is the need for bureaucratic control, individual compliance with rules, development of routinely prescribed, reliable patterns of activity, compliance with fixed patterns of administrative responses. Although certain circumstances may require a different type of response, prescribed and fixed patterns of response are adopted because of the bureaucratic regime (Constantinescu,& Popa 2011). However, inefficiencies can creep into the chain of command where officials act without legal authority, and usurp formal rules and order. This inefficiency is caused by unresponsive individuals or groups which can lead to long delays in the system in addressing certain issues or fulfilling certain tasks.

Another weakness of bureaucracies is where officials do not act impartially or impersonally (Constantinescu &, Popa 2011). Bureaucracies are not autonomous of their situated social, cultural, and political systems and as such, its impersonal nature may be overturned and become subject to whims of select individuals and groups (Rudi, 2008). This creates dysfunctional bureaucracies that relies on patron-client relationships and other forms of social connections to function and deliver services.

Neopatrimonialism emerged from the Weberian discourse of domination and legitimacy, found in the traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational authority. Neopatrimonialism, according to Erdmann & Engel (2007) is a post-Weberian invention of two types of domination: a traditional subtype, which is patrimonial domination, and legal-rational bureaucratic domination. Patrimonialism is a system based on informal or personal relationships that facilitate benefits and service delivery, and the legal-rational authority is a formal system of ideology and law that prescribe laid-down guidelines for state institutions and their bureaucratic officials (Bratton & Van De Walle, 1994; Pitcher, Moran & Johnston, 2009).

The merger of these two types of domination explains the definition of neopatrimonialism as a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines. Officials hold positions in bureaucratic organisations with powers which are formally defined, but who exercise those powers as a form of private property (Clapham, 1985: 48). Under neo-patrimonial arrangements, relationships of loyalty and dependency pervade a formal political and administrative system and leaders occupy bureaucratic offices less to perform public service than to acquire personal wealth and status. The lines between private and public realms are blurred, and indistinguishable.

Neo-patrimonial rule takes place within the framework of, and with the claim to, legal-rational bureaucracy or ‘modern’ stateness. Formal structures and rules do exist, although in practice the separation of the private and public sphere is not always observed. The two systems, i.e., the patrimonial of the personal relations, and the legal-rational of the bureaucracy exist together, and are not isolated from each other. The patrimonial penetrates the legal-rational system but does not control its functions, rather, the two systems complement each other, such that, individuals either use their personal networks to facilitate service delivery, or resort to state structures, in the absence or lack of bureaucratic officials/patrons (Erdmann & Engel, 2007:104-105). Neopatrimonialism is associated with state failure and corruption. It leads to the abuse of state resources for personal gains, undermines institutional functioning, state legitimacy and capacity (Yurtseven, 2021). Where neopatrimonialism become embedded in the military bureaucracy, this can be particularly harmful for individuals

and broader society, given the power and influence of the military over the citizenry. In Chapter Four, I explain further how neopatrimonialism has affected the functioning of the Nigerian military bureaucracy.

2.3 THE MILITARY AS A TOTAL AND GREEDY INSTITUTION

The military has been described as a total and greedy institution. These descriptions have been established in the literature and are useful in understanding the nature of the military or militaries. Erving Goffman describes a total institution as one secluded from the wider society for a definite period, where individuals live enclosed and organised lives, and are beholden to the nature of the institution (Goffman 1961: 11, 12). The military is typically described as a total institution as it is often isolated from society in in terms of physical location/structures, communal character, hierarchical order, administrative authority, organisational discipline and control (Goffman, 1961; Soeters *et al*., 2006). Other examples are orphanages and homes for the blind, sanitariums and mental hospitals, jails and penitentiaries, and abbeys and monasteries (Goffman, 1961). While Goffman specifically uses the residential barracks to represent the military, the description of a total institution and its use in the existing literature collectively points to the military organisation (Maringira, 2016; Soeters, 2018; Barnao, 2019).

The total institution framework is not without criticisms. It is not as homogenous as Goffman claims. Likewise, the degree of formal administration does not have a fixed pattern, and these variations are not neatly delineated, nor are their implications clearly stated (Davies, 1989). Davies (1989) poses three questions about total institutions: the degree of openness or closeness, the extent of their bureaucratic and formally administered character, and their compatibility with family life. The military institution is open; members enlist voluntarily and exit freely, following institutional regulations, except for conscript militaries. It is formalistic and bureaucratic but incompatible with family life, like other total institutions. The conflicting relationship between total institutions and family life emanates from its greedy nature that constrains the sustenance of domestic or family life (Goffman, 1961).

Military personnel are confined between two greedy institutions: the armed forces and the family, with the family involved in all kinds of military activities as part of their

devotion to the institution (Segal, 1986). As we see below through the greedy institutions concept, the armed forces, and the family both make strong claims on the devotion of the individual, who, is both a service personnel, and a parent, or a partner in the family. Hence, the individual is caught between two greedy institutions, the military and the family and has a dual loyalty problem (Moelker & Van Der Kloet, 2006).

Greedy institutions, like total institutions, seek exclusive and undivided loyalty from their members. Unlike total institutions with physical boundaries, greedy institutions erect non-physical and symbolic boundaries for their members which restrain individuals' freedoms. Greedy institutions make huge demands on their members regarding commitment, loyalty, time, and energy (Segal, 1986:9; Coser, 1974). The survival of greedy institutions depends on their members' commitment and loyalty. In this regard, both the military and the family demands devotion, attachment and sacrifice of both men and women for sustenance, even more so for women as they are culturally expected to give allegiance to their families (Coser & Coser 1974:92).

Militaries, as greedy institutions, make different demands on their members. Some of the demands are specific to the military lifestyle, such as the injury or death of the service member, postings to foreign missions and trainings, war and peacetime separations and deployments (Segal, 1986). Other demands of the military lifestyle indirectly affect the military spouse. These demands require the spouse to perform certain obligations, like conforming to certain behavioural standards, volunteering and participating in military activities, adhering to and respecting military regulations and authority, and overall, being a model "military wife" (Segal, 1986; Enloe, 2000:162). Despite these constraints, military wives benefit from these institutional pressures as they are socialised into military life, and are part of a supportive network and family associations that aid the stressful demands of military life that soldiers need to endure (Segal, 1986:23).

Since its original application in 1986, the greedy institution thesis has been used as a conceptual framework to understand the conflictual and symbiotic relationship that exists between the military and families of its service members. Other studies built on this conceptual framework have focused on its diverse applications in several areas, such as the tensions between work and family life, negotiating the roles-based expectations for military wives, use of support structures, deployments, and

relocations. Research on work/family conflict in the military has established that though the family and the military are greedy institutions, the military's greed is heightened during deployment periods. Also, modern militaries have programs and policies that cater to the needs of military families to ensure their commitment and to provide them with support (Bourg & Segal, 1999; Vuga & Juvan, 2013; De Angelis & Segal, 2015b).

Harrell's (2003) study on the expectations for military spouses found that class roles among military spouses are culturally constructed and gendered to suit the constant demands of the military. The existence of spousal associations and other formal support groups that supposedly assist the greedy military do not erase the stereotypes of rank and status associated with military spouses; rather, they reinforce them (Gribble & Rachael, 2017; Ziff & Garland-Jackson, 2020). As such, military wives tend to use informal support networks to cushion the effects of deployment (Dandeker et al., 2006). Informal support systems are favoured because of the difficulties in negotiating the dependent, greedy and hierarchical nature of the military community support networks (Moelker, Bowen, & Manigart, 2015). The widely-held belief and assumption that seeking formal military support in certain matters may equally affect their spouse's career contributes to the widespread use of informal support systems among military wives (Segal, 1986).

Expectations of duty, comittment and obligation imposed on the military spouse provides a foreground for understanding how military wives manage the risks of combat deployment and death where they serve to support both their military husband and the institution's needs (Aducci *et al*., 2011; Jervis, 2011). The demands of deployment generated by the military institution test the personal, social, and economic coping resources of military wives and families (Willerton, Wadsworth & Riggs 2011). As a result, military wives are expected to cope and demonstrate soldierly qualities of stoicism, courage and bravery in maintaining the homefront during this period (Aducci *et al*., 2011). However, not all military spouses exhibit this resilience, as the impact of deployment is higher in some spouses than in others, and other spouses deal with the challenges of couple communication, fear of separation and the unknown, and the feelings of grief and loss separately. These challenges, fears and feelings have necessitated the adoption of different coping and survival

strategies amongst military spouses during periods of deployment Chambers, 2013; Davis *et al*., 2011; De Burgh *et al*., 2011; Mccubbin *et al*., 1976.)

The greedy institution framework is still relevant despite the massive global social, cultural, and political/military changes that have occurred since its initial conception. One of such changes is the nature of warfare. The nature of war has drastically changed from the conventional warfare to the asymmetric and unconventional battles. This change has prompted a greedier military, as service members are frequently deployed to high conflict zones, and they experience a heightened risk of combat-related death in these operations (De Angelis & Segal, 2015). To compensate for the lifelong impact and demands of military service, militaries generally offer financial and non-financial support to bereaved family members as a form of recompense for the loss incurred. These supports are underpinned by various factors as discussed below.

2.4 STATE SUPPORT AND COMPENSATIONS TO WAR WIDOWS

The nature of military life and its demands has necessitated the provision of material and non-material support to by State to the families of fallen soldiers. These benefits aim to reward families of fallen soldiers and compensate for their loss. The supreme sacrifice of wartime death is repaid with financial rewards, either a death benefit, gratuity, a widow's pension, or a combination of different allowances depending on the country. The non-financial rewards include state support – through provision of bereavement/counselling services (Dooley *et al*., 2019) and a memory of gratitude, honour and remembrance (Holmes, 1990).

The payment of war-widow pensions in several militaries was determined by different factors, such as one, the political ideology or cause underpinning the war. For instance, social revolutions, wars of Independence, and wars over territorial spaces motivated the payment of widows' pensions in Iran, Israel and India (Zahedi, 2006; Hatwal, 2015; Atwal, 2017; Shalev & Gal, 2018; Shamgar-Handelman, 2019). Likewise, the imperial wars of conquest and the need to relieve public charities of supporting war widows necessitated the development of a comprehensive structure for pensioning war widows in Britain (Thomas, 1989; Janis Lomas, 1997b). In other militaries, war widow's pension has also been central to the reconstruction of states, and the development of a State welfare system (Lanthier, 2003; Pavan, 2019).

War-widow compensations were underpinned by state **c**onstruction of power, control and meaning that are tied to warfare in different militaries. The payment of pensions and allowances for war widows was determined by the State on behalf of the absent husband. As such, the woman must be deserving of pensions through different eligibility measures. She must show morally acceptable conduct, the death of her husband must be through proven military service, and pensions can be forfeited through remarriage (Mcclintock, 1996; Prechtel-Kluskensa, 2016).

The widow was seen ‘‘as a custodian of her dead soldier’s memory, and she had to live up to his sacrifice by her exemplary behaviour’’ (Lomas, 1997: 53). For this reason, war pensions in First World War Britain, for instance, was not ‘‘to be claimed as a right; but as a reward of service; and could be terminated, if the widow or dependent is unworthy of the Royal Favour’’(Thomas, 1989:62; Lomas, 1997:54). Hence, wives, and other dependents of servicemen in World War 1 Britain, were placed under police surveillance, treated as ‘’wholly dependent on their male breadwinners and subject to moral scrutiny’’ (Riedi, 2017:768). The state took its role as surrogate for the husbands seriously, while also making benefits contingent on the ‘‘temperance, diligence, and chastity of their wives’’ (Pedersen, 1990: 996). Through this, these militaries embarked on different forms of social control for widows of their deceased soldiers who died for the State. These forms of social control, were not without challenges, such as how the payment of pensions widows was regulated by state officers, and how they, in other cases, dealt with inflexible and rigid bureaucracy that sought to enforce regulations and conditionality (Lanthier, 2004).

In other militaries, war widows’ pensions were regarded as socially and culturally traumatic for the women. One of these reasons were the socio-cultural practices that allowed inter-family marriages within the family of the deceased, and the continuous struggle with state bureaucracies for recovery of land/pensions belonging to their late husbands (Atwal, 2017)., Furthermore, the cultural assumption in patriarchal that a war widow’s pension was a reward that was a result of her marriage to the husband’s family, rather than an award to her alone was another layer of trauma that the women had to deal with (Atwal, 2017; Tunaç & Küçükkaraca, 2020). Having established the different considerations for war widows’ pensions, it is necessary to look at the forms of military benefits in various militaries, and the challenges of accessing them.

2.5 MILITARY BENEFITS, TYPES AND CHALLENGES OF ACCESSING THEM

Euro-American militaries developed their pension legislations in the aftermath of the different territorial and global wars they engaged in between the 17th and 20th centuries. These wars led to the dissolution and breakups of families, as husbands and sons were deployed to assist in the war efforts. Their prosecution on mass mobilization efforts of persuasion, and conscription meant that the State assumed the parental responsibilities left behind by the men who sacrificed for the nation (Skocpol, 1992:106; Mcclintock, 1996).

Prior to the State provision of military pension for military widows, welfare for deceased soldiers and their families were provided by philanthropic bodies and charities. Widows and children of killed in action servicemen were assisted by a collaboration between the State and Charity bodies (Thomas, 1989; Lomas, 1997). This collaboration helped set the precedent for the state administration of benefits to soldier's wives, and other dependents(Lomas, 2000; Riedi, 2018). Access to these benefits were encircled by various eligibility criteria, as mentioned in the earlier section. Remarriage of widows was a basis for losing pensions, as some widows lost their pensions upon remarriage in some militaries (Glasson, 1900; Damousi, 2001b; Smith, 2020). However, this policy has changed in different militaries (Australian Government, no date; Shorer, Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2021).

The amount payable to a widow depended on her husband's rank and the exact cause of his death, and in other States, the pensions were only enough to cater to the basic needs of the women and their children. The pensions provided the widows and their children with basic wages, according to the number of children. Some widows felt that monetary compensation stained their husband's memory, and they had to preserve it (Damousi, 1999a). Irrespective of the provisions, the pensions for war widows were insufficient for the women and their families. To mitigate the meagre pensions, some nations, like France, adopted the child of its French soldier who died on the battlefield. These orphans were described as "Pupille de la Nation or "Ward of the Nation," and a state department was created to support and assist the children (Lanthier, 2004).

Different Euro-American and Asian militaries have laid-down legislations and policies that stipulate the kinds of benefits deserving of widows and family members of

deceased soldiers. These benefits, which are paid to the deceased individual's eligible partner and children, are tax- free, and cover a guaranteed income payment for the survivors, either monthly, or as designed by the State, child education assistance grant, housing allowances, and other social security benefits. Unlike previous years, war widows' pensions, is not dependent on the remarriage status of the widow, but paid until the recipient dies (Sagar, 2017; Sura, 2021; Australian Government, n.d.; Department of Families and Commemoration, n.d.; Fallen Soldiers Families Pensions And Rehabilitation Law, n.d.; Ministry of Defence, n.d.).

These legislations are also present in African militaries; however, they were developed following the use of African soldiers as mercenaries in the First and Second World Wars (Schmitt, 2020). These legislations and policies cover a range of benefits such as payments of pensions and gratuities to widows, children or dependents of officers, medical benefits, burial allowances, housing leave stay of 90 days, and other allowances (Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004; RSLAF, 2004; Kenyan Defense Forces, 2019) The payment of entitlements was also once predicated on eligibility clauses in African militaries. War widows in Kenya during the Second World War were exempted from hut taxes, and their families were given a financial award for the sacrifices of their sons, however, they could lose their benefits upon remarriage (Owino, 2010:251). Likewise, widows of the Operation Linda Nchi in Kenya, are also at risk of losing their pensions if they enter new relationships following their husbands' demise (*Kenya: KDF*, n.d.).

Beyond the eligibility clauses are other challenges that are peculiar to African militaries. A major challenge in this regard is the corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies that have hindered the non-payment of these benefits to the widows. Excessive bureaucratic complexity hindered war widows of the Kenyan Defence Forces Operation Linda Nchi against Somalia from accessing the death benefits of their spouses. This had a huge impact on their daily survival as they were not only dependent on the income of the deceased spouse, but on the military support structure (Oguna, 2016).

In the same light, military widows in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have also experienced serious difficulties in claiming the entitlements of their late husbands or partners (Long, 2013). The unclear and undocumented marital status, ambiguities

surrounding the widowhood status of the wife, the adoption of biometric payment systems and its intrinsic challenges of capturing the real beneficiaries compounded the plight of war widows in Eastern DRC (Baaz & Verweijen, 2016). Likewise, widows of government soldiers of the Sierra Leonean civil war mobilized themselves and made continuous demands to the government for the payment of pensions and other entitlements due to their late husbands who died in the civil war (King, 2006:254). These instances shared above show that despite the availability of laws and policies, war widows of African state militaries still encounter challenges in the processing and payment of their due entitlements and pensions by their respective African militaries. The current experiences of African military widows were equally faced by war widows in other military geographies. Therefore, one would like to know how these women once supported themselves in the face of state neglect.

2.6 SOCIAL SUPPORT FOR MILITARY WIDOWS AND ITS CHALLENGES

The presence of widows within the military institution is a reminder of the nature of military service. Upon the demise of their husbands, military widows lose their identity, and wider connection to the military community (LaMorie, & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011; Wehrman, 2021). They also find themselves dealing with the social and economic realities of grief peculiar to military widows, such as dealing with military bureaucracies, fighting for recognition of their grief, and ensuring that the sacrifices of their husbands are duly preserved (Lomas, 1997b; Damousi, 1999). In this regard, widows of various militaries have established associations to provide support and advocacy for military widows. These Associations, which were established in the aftermath of wars, were motivated by the absence of state support, and neglect of the widows by their various military institutions (Lomas, 1997b)

Military widow's' Associations have carried out different campaigns related to the plight of women in the Associations. They have, in various militaries, fought for the expansion of widows' pensions, campaigned against the taxation of widows' pensions, advocated for war pensions as compensation for their husband's lives rather than government philanthropy, and pushed a legislative change to allow the continuation of pensions for remarried war widows (War Widows Association, no date; Thurley, 2021). Additionally, these Associations have also provided social, economic, and emotional support for war widows, through the provision of group solace and comfort from each

other, and learning of economically viable skills and ventures to support the benefits received from the State (Damousi, 1999a)

As much of their advocacy is tied toward military widows, military widows associations often enter a period of decline or inactivity, following the cessation of the conflicts that often precipitated their establishment. At this stage, however, they have become organized, and can maintain a bureaucratic distance from the military. Getting to this stage is an uphill task, as members of the Association often try to negotiate their military - civilian identities, while ensuring that their demands are met. In some militaries, the role of military widows associations have been performed by the military wives associations and this has stymied the establishment of military widows associations to look after and meet the needs of military widows (MWAK, 2021). We then turn to how the concepts of coping, social support, social capital and how it relates to the issues of widowhood.

2.7 COPING, SOCIAL SUPPORT, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND WIDOWHOOD

2.7.1 COPING STRATEGIES

Coping is a series of processes adopted by individuals to avoid, manage, or minimize the impact or outcome of life's events that threaten their lives (Blum, Brow & Silver, 2012). Lazarus & Folkman (1984:141) defined coping as the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This definition supposes coping as a process-oriented concept that is directed towards specific context or conditions, like loss of a child, spouse or other stressful events etc. It is a dynamic and iterative action, woven around a thread of continuous appraisals and re-appraisals in a shifting person-environment relationship'' (Lazarus, 1984).

The coping theory is based on the appraisal thesis which states that ''people are constantly evaluating their relationships with the environment with respect to their implications for well-being'' (Lazarus, 1999:75). Existing in three forms, it is concerned with how an individual evaluates personal stakes in a given person-environment relationship (primary appraisal), what can be done to manage the situation (secondary appraisal) and re-appraisal, which is the subsequent coping actions adopted after the

initial forms (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1991; Folkman *et al*., 2001). Coping involves a changing relationship process between the individual and the environment, in how the person-environment relationship and emotional response is determined and the person- environment interaction is being managed (Eckenrode, 1991). Its dynamism is tied to situational demands and individual which are in a constant state of continuous change.

Coping mechanisms are mediated by different individual strategies directed towards the source(s) of distress. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) described these strategies in two forms: namely problem focused coping and emotion focused coping. The problem-focused coping strategies is essentially directed at managing the distress, while the emotion-focused coping is targeted at regulating the emotional response to the problem (Lazarus, 1984:152). These two forms of coping jointly facilitate and obstruct each other in the coping process, depending on how it is adopted by the individual (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping theory has been adopted to explain the stressful demands faced by military wives and families experiencing military deployments, and studies have shown that military spouses used both problem focused and emotion focused strategies to manage deployments and post deployment related stress (Dimiceli, Steinhardt & Smith, 2010; Dursun & Sudom, 2015; Braun-Lewensohn & Bar, 2017).

Meaning making and social support are techniques adopted for coping. Meaning making as a coping strategy helps people to make sense of the stressor by finding a purpose or a beneficial understanding of the situation. It is helpful to the extent that it facilitates an acceptable outcome (Park, 2013). The ability to make sense of the loss helps to mediate the impact of violent death and mitigate social and health complications arising from the event (Neimeyer, 2019). Meaning making helps to decrease distress levels, and results in increased emotional growth, and helps to decrease levels of loss related distress (Neimeyer *et al.*, 2010). Meaning making in loss is mediated by the availability of social support, as higher levels of support is important in post-bereavement adjustment (Boyraz & Horne, 2012).

Social support does not exist only as a sub-set of coping strategy, it is also a concept that has multiple interpretations. It has been described as perception or experience that one is loved and cared for by others, esteemed and valued, and part of a social

network of mutual assistance and obligations (Wills, 1991). Social support has been explained as: support available to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community; the content of social ties; tangible and intangible resources individuals gain from their network; and the emotional, social, and financial assistance obtainable from one's network (Song, Son & Lin, 2011:1-7). It is of four kinds, informational support, counselling support/ instrumental support, active support and material support (House, 1981:39; Cobb, 1976:300; 1979:93), and composed of primary groups that support or assist in meeting physical tasks, satisfying emotional needs and maintaining solidarity (Dean & Lin, 1977). In essence, it involves seeking emotional, instrumental, and material aid from family, friends, and members of a close-knit network to help cope with a life event or situation.

Social support requires the existence of a stress event for it to be functional, and the kinds of stressors (agents or events) determine the commensurate support level. Social support and coping intersect each other, as they are directed towards alleviating the effect of a stressful event on an individual (Thoits, 1986). It enables coping and adaptation to crises, and its efficacy is in providing the needed resources to mitigate the effect of the stressful (Cobb, 1976; Vernberg, 1985). Also, the different forms of social support: instrumental, informational, emotional, and appraisal encourages coping through their provision of financial aid and services, information and resources needed to manage stressful events (Wilcox & Vernberg, 1985:7). Social support is regarded as effective when they come from similarly situated individuals, i.e. individuals who have experienced similar situations as they provide significant buffers to mitigate the impact of the event (Thoits, 1986:420). Support and counselling networks or groups of similarly affected individuals, like widows typically fulfil these functions or duties (Collins & Pancoast, 1976).

The multidimensional and extensive concept of social support necessitates its applicability across different contexts. Jacobson (1987) applying a cultural context to social support, found that the concepts work in a symbiotic manner. The cultural context informs the meaning of social support and social support, in turn, elucidates the cultural aspect. In this regard, social support is not autonomous of its cultural environment (Jacobson, 1985). There are also differences in social support seeking across cultures, and ethnic groups. These differences inform the extent of

cautiousness in seeking and receiving social support, and the structure, type and form of social support (Dilworth-Anderson & Marshall, 1996; Kim et al., 2008). Some studies have also reported how formal and informal forms of support within the military community have been a vital support buffer and preference for military families dealing with military family and work demands (Moelker, Andres & Poot, 2006; Huebner, Mancini & Bowen, 2009; Dandeker and Eversen, 2015; Bowen *et al.*, 2016).

Social support has certain drawbacks. One of which is the extent of social support effectiveness which is dependent on the size of an individual's social support network, sources of support, kinds and extent of support rendered, the attributes of support providers and recipients (Vernberg, 1985; Taylor, 2011). For example, Nwokoro & Ogba (2019) found that widows in South East Nigeria who belonged to indigenous social support groups, and other faith based organisations received valuable, beneficial and instrumental support in time of their need. Also is the inequality in social support across social classes, groups, and gender. Individuals who belong to professional associations, and networks, community groups, church and school associations and so on, have the potential to benefit from their social networks, as compared to people without such formal or informal networks. This limits the extent of social support (Taylor, 2011).

In terms of gender, social support is more complex for women than men, as they are considered key providers of support. While this is usually the case, in the sense that women are natural support and caregivers, they do not often receive the support they give (Schilling, 1987). This gendered nature is more complex for widows, as the correlation between social support, adaptation and adjustment to widowhood is dependent on several social, cultural and psychological factors, such as the type and source of support, the length of widowhood, the adjustment period, financial status of the widow and patriarchal relations within broader society. (Bankoff, 1983; Miller, Smerglia & Bouchet, 2004). What emerges from the discussion on coping strategies is the importance of networks and how they intersect at various levels to provide social support. Hence, it is important to engage in debates around the issue of social capital as a form of agency that women use when their livelihoods are threatened.

2.7.2 SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORIES

The coping and social support theories utilized in this study are supported by the social capital approach. Social capital has been defined in various ways by its leading theorists, namely James Coleman, Pierre Bourdieu and Robert Putnam. Bourdieu (1983:21), describes social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network or… membership in a group" (1983:21). For Coleman (1988), and Putnam, (2000; 1993) social capital "is a resource available to an actor and refers to connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them". An additional definition of social capital given by Putnam, as "those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families who make up a social unit" (Hanifan, cited in Putnam 2000:16) is worthy of consideration. It shows how social capital is integral to everyday survival among individuals and families, and accentuates the positive nature of human sociability and its utility (Portes, 1998:2). These aspects of the concept are critical in understanding how Nigerian Army war widows individually and collectively utilize their social capital resources to meet, facilitate and deepen their social access and relations with other members of the Nigerian military community.

Putnam (2000;16) describes social capital across three categories. namely bonding, bridging, and linking social capital. Bonding social capital is inclusive, inward-looking, exclusive, and homogenous. Useful for "getting by", it is used within close-knit groups such as family, friends and neighbours, women and men's groups, community associations, (Putnam, 2000; Hawkins & Maurer, 2010; Claridge, 2018a). Bonding social capital is a natural form of capital found in a network of immediate family members, friends, and similarly situated individuals. It consists of resources generated through personalized social relations, promotes reciprocity and solidarity within primary social networks.

Bonding capital brings individuals closer who know each other. These ties may be "dense" and "strong", such as those found between family and friends, or they may be weak, as between acquaintances (Olivier, 2015). Despite its social ubiquity, bonding social capital among women is affected by violent conflicts, natural disasters, and widowhood, as they typically suffer the most consequences of these tragedies. The

negative impact of widowhood is most felt on women's bonding capital as they lose their social identity (as wives), and need to develop new bonding capital with other similarly situated women, as a way of getting by their daily lived experiences as widows (Molyneux, 2002; Boateng, 2010).

Bridging social capital, on the other hand, which is good for "getting along", describes connections that link people's social groups and classes. These connections assist in creating platforms between heterogonous or socially disparate communities and groups. They are outward-looking, heterogeneous, and serve as sources of external access, links and information (Putnam, 2000; Claridge, 2018a). Without bridging social capital, bonding groups can become isolated and disenfranchised from systems and services that provide support (Boateng, 2010). An established bridging capital is necessary to further access to formal institutions and structures, a component of linking capital.

Linking social capital, concerns the social connections between individuals, communities and formal institutions and how they access resources, ideas, and information from them (Woolcock, 2001). It is concerned with relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society (Claridge, 2018b). This dimension complements the bonding and bridging social capital roles and acts as a "vertical bridge" that links excluded people, unequal power relationships, and powerful institutions (Halpern, 2005; World Bank, 2000).

Social capital has gendered dimensions, and affected different classes of women, like widows. Widowed women whose late husbands belonged to craft societies in early modern Germany were restricted from participating in guild activities through a litany of patriarchal regulations, such as cancelling their guild licenses upon remarriage. Another was the regulation of their right to continue their family's workshop and restriction on certain guilds. These instances highlighted in the study showed how men controlled industrial guilds used social capital to restrict and limit women's participation in guild activities (Ogilvie, 2004). This instance showed how social capital components, such as norms and sanctions, and the characteristics of social networks, like closure, can benefit certain social classes or be used for exclusionary purposes. Also, the prevalence of widowhood rites, harmful social practices, and the loss of

family and kinship ties among widows in African societies negatively impact the workings of social capital (Ajayi *et al*., 2019; Pemunta & Alubafi, 2016). The social capital utilized by widows arise from their membership and belonging to widows' groups, and other similarly existing associations.

Social capital is not without its criticisms. These criticisms extend to its validity as a concept or a theory. Scholars Fine (2001) and Haynes (2009) argue that social capital is not social, not capital, and not a theory. These arguments concern its ambiguity, measurement, and applicability. The major negatives of social capital are its exclusionary tendencies, excess demands on members, and restriction on individual freedoms. Portes (1998:15) identified the negatives of social capital to include exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions and curtailing of individual freedoms. The last point is that network members see another member's exit as inimical to the network's advancement (Portes, 1998; Sato, 2013). Another limitation of social capital is its propensity to perpetuate inequality among social classes or groups. This is because access to social networks is unevenly distributed. Others may use their access and social capital to advance their personal or group interests at the expense of others who may not be so endowed with either financial or cultural capital to get by (Field, 2003:74).

The key components of the Putnam's social capital definition "tangible substances or resources", "goodwill, fellowship, and social interactions", and the satisfaction of individual and communal needs", and its categories, "bonding, and bridging, and "linking" as proposed by (Woolcock, 2001), are useful in explaining how the Nigerian Army widows tapped into their horizontal and vertical social networks to navigate their coping and survival. This study attempts to utilize the social capital concept by interrogating the existence of bonding social capital at the individual level (i.e., between the widows), bridging social capital at the meso/organisational level (i.e., at the level of the military widow's association, the military wives associations; and other veteran groups), and linking social capital at the macro-level (with a focus on the Nigerian military and defence bureaucratic structure. Having established the concept of coping and social support, we then examine how the war widows utilise various coping and social support strategies.

2.7.3 COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES OF WAR WIDOWS IN AFRICA

Widows face similar challenges irrespective of their widowhood condition. They are faced with the social realities of new socio-economic roles, and the need to adopt various survival strategies. Other concerns are related to status loss, economic security, children's welfare, inheritance rights, cultural practices, and remarriage. These experiences are situated within the broader socio-economic and cultural environment of wifehood (Cattell, 2008). Widows provide support to themselves by being part of various gender-based, social and faith-based organisations that provide post bereavement support and assistance (Sossou, 2002; Nwadinobi, 2014). These associations exist for women widowed by armed conflict, widows of rebel armies and other women affected by wartime violence. This section examines the coping and social support strategies utilized by conflict-affected widows in different societies, and the roles played by war widowhood support groups across different cultures and social contexts.

Women survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide belonged to two separate associations[3] established for rape survivors and genocide widows in the country (Zraly & Nyirazinyoye, 2010; Berry, 2015). The associations were established in 1995 by genocide survivors and widows of the genocide (StepUpRwanda, no date; Avega Agahozo, 2010; The Gruber Foundation, 2011). The organizations have provided different forms of social support and welfare to genocide widows and their dependents, advocated for justice and commemorated genocide victims, and participated in the national reconstruction and reconciliation processes (Avega Agahozo, 2010). The women used the sanctuary of the associations as a means of economic support, and for social and emotional connection with other genocide survivors (Berry, 2015). The women used storytelling as an agentive method of coping, support and amongst themselves. This was a way of reclaiming agency and self-empowerment as their situation made them susceptible to social stigmatization, isolation and trauma (Garretson, 2015). Also, they used symbolic tropes derived from ethnolinguistics words of ''kwihangana (withstanding), kwongera kubaho (living again), and gukomeza

[3] These associations are ABASA, and AVEGA. ABASA means 'we are all the same'', or ''we share the same fate'' in Kinyarwanda. AVEGA – is a French word, which means 'widows of the April Genocide', while AGOZO is Kinyarwanda word that means 'dry your tears'.

ubuzima (continuing life/health)" to negotiate their coping trajectory. Through the use of these symbolic cultural tropes, they were able to make meaning of their lived experiences (Zraly & Nyirazinyoye, 2010), and make life-long meaning from belonging to these social support networks. (Picco, no date; Avega Agahozo, 2010). The provision of both emotional and economic support showed how these associations met the instrumental and expressive support features of social support (Lin, 1986).

Women in other African countries affected by war in states such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Mozambique, and Republic of Chad adopted various coping strategies, tapped into their expansive network of kin, and kindred to survive the conflict. Age-long social principles of social capital, reciprocity and support for personal and communal sustenance was utilized during this period. The women also established war widows' associations that provided various forms of legal, socio-economic assistance to them during and after the war. Their social networks and associations was also useful for post-conflict peace-building processes (Owen, 1996; King, 2006; Rubimbwa & Mugisha, 2010; Tripp, 2015). The war and post war experiences of the women made them adopt various survival strategies for coping and support (Aning, 1998; Liebling-kalifani, *et al*., 2011; AFELL, 1998). These strategies spread across personal, familial, communal, and livelihood support structures (Abreu, 1998; Aning, 1998; Deacon, 2010). Women engaged in risky cross border trade, invested in small scale and low capital businesses, belonging to self-help organizations that provided credit facilities, and utilized their entrepreneurial capacities in refugee camps to survive the harsh realities of war time conditions (Women's Commission of the Human Rights League of Chad and the Editors, 1998; Aning, 1998; Liebling, 2012; Tripp, 2015).

The above studies have shown how war widows used the social support networks available to them to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of conflict. However, these networks have rarely resulted in any socio-economic benefit for the widows (Brück & Schindler, 2009), nonetheless was an observable model of coping and group survival across the different post-conflict African societies. These groups and networks were born out of the urgent need to adapt and rebuild lives after the conflict, by using the collective cultural capital embedded in social networks prior to the outbreak of war in these societies. In this regard, the catalyst for women's survival strategy rested in their

use of the wartime coping strategies available to them as they assumed the responsibility for sustaining families, households, and kinship networks during war conditions and are required to act for their survival and the social reproduction of their families and households.

2.7.4 COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES OF MILITARY WIDOWS

The death of a military service member results in the sudden creation of widowhood and change in the economic and social well-being of a military spouse (Blackburn, 2010). As a military spouse's existence is linked to the military in terms of income, support and housing (Burrell *et al.*, 2006), the loss of the soldier-husband translates into a loss of livelihood, and frequently the beginning of economic hardship for the surviving family (Damousi, 1999). The death of a spouse in military service is more than just the unexpected trauma and pain that comes with sudden death. It entails the loss of identity, of the social appellation as a 'military family', of 'military housing', and connection to the wider military community (LaMorie, & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011; Wehrman, 2021).

The sudden change in marital, social, and financial status of military wives is intertwined with different challenges that require a plethora of coping and social support strategies. These challenges include dealing with war related complexities and grief, single motherhood, family pressure, and forced relocations, cultural stigma and discrimination, and psychological and economic difficulties of widowhood (Pannilage and Gunawardena, 2016, 2017; Society and Lanka, 2017). Military widows, in most cases, are grieving with ''burnt dog tags, bent wedding rings and mangled body parts'', which may or may not be recovered depending on the geography of combat, circumstance of death, and condition of body remains and war circumstances, leading to a state of complicated grief (Harrington & Dsw, 2011). The inability to view body remains makes grieving difficult for military widows who may refuse to come to terms with the realities of their husband's death (Damousi, 1999).

Combat-related or wartime death creates conditions of young widowhood for surviving spouses. Young adult widowhood is often an indelible marker of war, and for military widows, the everyday realities (like single parenthood, isolation and lonesomeness) are incomparable with their accustomed long periods of deployment (Harrington,

2014). These losses may be especially challenging for young widows since losing a spouse at a young age is considered an “off-time event” (Elwert & Christakis, 2008). Young widows of slain combatants are therefore faced with emotional, physical, and social difficulties that threatened the existence of their family unit. A young widow may be forced to abandon her child with the family of her late husband or re-marry after the death of her husband (Oguna, 2016).

The death of a service member does not only affect the spouse but also extends to the family of the military personnel as it disrupts the family setting (Oguna, 2016). Wives of soldiers killed in the Kenyan Operation Linda Nchi[4] against Somalia, for example, revealed that the sudden death of their husbands caused their forced relocation, exposure to financial vulnerability and family disintegration (Oguna, 2016). In most cases, the soldier is often seen as the sole dependent of the entire family, and he is responsible for the upkeep of several dependents other than his immediate family (NTVKenya, 2017b). Hence, the loss of the soldier-husband is felt beyond the immediate nuclear relationship to include other members of the extended family. While military widows in certain militaries relied on the monthly widows’ pensions provided by the government, it was inadequate for their survival. These impacted their adjustment to the realities of widowhood (Pannilage & Gunawardena, 2016).

For some military widows, the death of their husbands signalled the beginning of another war as they faced cultural discrimination, social integration, and preference challenges in their societies. These difficulties arose from their psychological conditions during the period of their husband’s death (such as childbirth), as well as the social stigma and performance of cultural rituals associated with remembrance of their late husbands. These rites and rituals are common features of highly patriarchal and traditional societies that impose certain behavioural and societal expectations on widows. In such cultures, military widows are socially isolated, and alienated from their families and communities (Ziemer & Shahnazarian, 2018; Pannilage & Gunawardena, 2016). Some widows have also been given preference based on their social status and class. This is the case in Israel where Jewish war widows are given more recognition than Bedouin war widows, even though their husbands died in service of

[4] Operation *Linda Nchi* (Protect the Country) was the Kenya Defense Forces military operation targeted at the Somali terrorist group, al-Shabaab. The troops were deployed between October 2011 and May 2012.

the state as members of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The Bedouin are minority Muslims in Israel and fighting for the IDF against other Muslim majority countries are seen as anathema in their community. As such, Bedouin war widows are subjected to different forms of trauma, shame and abuse when they lose their husbands, as their spouses deaths are not appreciated either by the mainstream Israeli society, or their own minority community (Ben-asher, 2019; Ben-asher &s Bokek-cohen, 2020).

These challenges notwithstanding, military widows have utilized different coping and social support strategies to mitigate the impact of their losses. These coping strategies are not in isolation, rather they emanate from the existing resources deployed when faced with long-term military deployment, separations, and other military life and combat situation/realities demands. These strategies are a combination of problem, emotion-focused and meaning-making approaches. Mccubbin *et al* (1976) developed a range of coping patterns utilized by military wives who are coping with war induced separations. These patterns are (i) seeking resolution and expressing feelings; (ii) maintaining family integrity; (iii) establishing autonomy and maintaining family ties; (iv)reducing anxiety; (v) establishing independence through self-development; and (vi) maintaining the past and dependence on religion, are also applicable in the cases of bereaved military widows.

These coping strategies, which are both problem focused and emotion focused, were observable in the lives of wives of deployed soldiers across various conflict theatres, as they had to develop strategies to deal with the new responsibilities associated with being a temporary single parent (Damousi, 2001; Chambers, 2013). An instance in this regard is the case of military spouses of soldiers held as prisoners of war (POW) or missing in action (MIA) husbands in Israel and Australia during the 1967 Six Day War and Second World War respectively. Military wives in this situation experienced anticipatory grief as they existed in a precarious state regarding the whereabouts and safety of their husbands. They were confronted with difficult existential questions relating to the possibility of eventual return or confirmation of death. The women took advantage of the waiting period, established, and joined support networks, and embarked on personal development in the absence of their husbands. They lived their lives alone, made new friends, and made independent plans for themselves and their children (Lieblich, 1997; Damousi, 2001).

The loss of a parent in combat is also not lost on children who are key members of the military family set-up, as they suffer the loss of a parent, while the surviving spouse suffers the loss of a co-parent, and a spouse (Glazer *et al.*, 2010; Holmes, Rauch & Cozza, 2013). Parenting after the death of a spouse is an impactful experience with accompanying changes, and demands on the surviving parent (Glazer *et al.*, 2010). The absence of the father within the armed forces and family relationships was reported to be among of the ‘‘most disastrous social consequences of wartime conditions’’ during the Second Word War (Damousi 2001:39). Different militaries have formal support programs for single parents, and surviving children to help them cope with the loss of a parent in combat (Dooley *et al.*, 2019).

Military widows utilized formal and informal support networks, military family support groups and associations, religious and church communities, and families to cope with wartime loss (Moelker *et al.*, 2008). Different militaries have war widows’ associations established for these purposes, and they play similar roles as the wives’ associations for serving spouses albeit to a certain degree. These associations represent the interest of the widows, advocate for the plight and concerns of the widows, and push for their continued recognition by the State. They also assist with economic empowerment programs for the widows. In the absence and/or inadequacy of military support groups, and other social networks, other military widows have relied on their families as a source of support, and others have remarried (Ya’Arit Bokek-Cohen, 2014; Tunaç & Küçükkaraca, 2020).

The decision to re-marry may be seen as an emotion focused coping support strategy, although it has its own challenges. These challenges concern the social mores of the society. In societies where the levirate system is practiced, war-widows are culturally mandated to re-marry within the deceased husband’s brother because she culturally belongs to the husband's paternal family (Parmar, 2003; Ziemer & Shahnazarian, 2018). In other instances, remarriage means risking the official benefits of military widowhood, and in other cases, remarriage means a loss of societal gratitude because the women are expected to internalize the cultural symbolism attached to being the wife of a war hero (Ya’arit Bokek-Cohen, 2014; Sagar, 2017; Shorer, Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2021). Therefore, when they do re-marry, they maintain a psychological bigamy in terms of their lived experience of being married to two husbands, and doing

so, they are able to fulfil the societal expectations of rehabilitation, and also retain their attachment to their late husbands (Ya'arit Bokek-Cohen, 2014; Shorer, Dekel & Nuttman-Shwartz, 2021).

Widows of fallen soldiers have attempted to create meanings out of their wartime losses. They do this by trying to make a favorable sense of their current realities by giving heroic value to the death (Park, 2013; Harrington, 2017). Meanings for the bereaved are constructed in terms of their spouse's sacrifice to their country, and their social identity. These memories, which were crystallized in the forms of personal and social memorials given to their husband's and partner's death shaped how the women coped, remembered their losses and value and honour to the death of their loved ones (Damousi, 2001; Shoebridge, 2010; Leichtentritt *et al*., 2013; Hamama-raz *et al*., 2019). It this sense of remembrance and nostalgic experience of their husband's death that informed the decisions of some military widows not to re-marry; rather they internalized their husband's deaths and created a social identity out of it. (Damousi, 2001; Zins, 2007). This reconstructed social identity helped them to solidly stake their claims as military widows.

This discussion has showed the various coping and social support strategies that military widows who lose their husbands in war and other military operations utilize, and the various social and cultural challenges faced by these military widows across different societies. These challenges are not further helped by the nature of wartime death, which is sudden and traumatic. Military widows have resorted to utilising different problem and emotion focused coping strategies to cope with loss. Also, military support groups for widows and orphans in different militaries have equally provided post-bereavement support to bereaved military families. In the absence of military support groups, some widows have found solace in families, and others have remarried. The remarriage of military widows has also not been without challenges, as determined by the various socio-cultural practices of the widows. Some women have also resorted to making favourable meanings out of their experiences as war widows, by accepting the patriotic sacrificial nature of the death, and coming to terms with their realities as war widows. These spectra of coping strategies show how military widows across different militaries coped and survived the loss of their husbands.

2.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the different theoretical approaches adopted in this study and the existing literature on war widowhood across global and local contexts. The bureaucracy theory was used to explain the workings of military institutions, and their challenges and the greedy/total institutions concept discussed the competing interest between militaries and families, and how the military rewards its members for their loyalty, and service. These two theories provided a conceptual background to support the rationale on state support and compensations to war widow. The coping theory, social support and capital approaches were adopted to understand the coping strategies used by war and military widows. The various sections explained how this usefulness of these approaches, and their theoretical shortcomings.

War widows across different militaries have a unifying narrative on compensations, coping and survival. Their narratives were underscored by the bureaucratic structures that upheld the total and greedy character of military institutions globally. These reflected in how state militaries that participated in the World Wars, and other nationalist wars treated their war widows and veterans. While these militaries have improved policies and programmes for military widows, the same cannot be said for African militaries where an implementation gap exists between extant policies and provisions of welfare support for fallen soldiers and their families. Nonetheless, war widows in different military geographies have utilized formal and informal coping and social support strategies to cope with the dilemmas and challenges of war widowhood. The widows have coped amidst social stigmatization, vulnerability, and a host of other harmful social and cultural practices.

The focus of the study on women's wartime experiences made it necessary to incorporate the realities of other conflict-affected women. Extensive literature has been carried out on the experiences of war widows in African societies. They share similar realities of stigmatization, vulnerability, discrimination and absence of state support or social welfare. This has made them utilize group social and cultural coping strategies to mitigate the impact of conflict in ways like those adopted by military widows. This chapter has laid the conceptual foundations for this study. It has also showed how the similarities in the experiences, narratives, and challenges of military widows across

military geographies. The next chapter addresses the structure, operations, and welfare policies of the Nigerian Army.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NIGERIAN ARMY: STRUCTURE, OPERATIONS AND WELFARE

3.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The focus of this chapter is on the Nigerian Army, its historical background, organizational structure, security operations and welfare benefits for fallen soldiers. The chapter discusses in detail, the Boko Haram conflict, and the welfare policies and schemes for soldiers who are killed in the line of active duty.

3.2 BACKGROUND ON NIGERIAN ARMY

The Nigerian Army is one of the tri-services of the Nigerian Armed Forces (NAF). The other services are the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Airforce. It began as a colonial para-military force made up of free slaves across northern Nigeria, and other detachments from the British trading companies that were established to protect and expand British political and economic interests in the early years of the colonial acquisition of Nigerian territory[5] (Kirk-Greene, 1964; Mcintyre,1963; Abdulrahman, 2017; Stapleton, 2019). A major development took place in the administrative and military setup of the British West African colonies between 1897-1900, with the creation of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF). The WAFF was mainly established to deter French expansionist interests in British-occupied areas of Northern Nigeria. The local forces of other West African colonies also contributed to the WAFF (Clarke, 1952; ; Ukpabi, ; Ukpabi, 1976; 1966; Falola & Genova, 2009; Stapleton, 2019).

The establishment of the WAFF was a major milestone in the establishment of the Nigerian Army. The local constabularies, i.e. the Lagos Constabulary, the Royal Niger Constabulary, and the Niger Coast Protectorate were collapsed into Southern and Northern Nigerian regiment (SNR, and NNR) of the WAFF (Clarke, 1952). The amalgamation of the protectorates of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914 resulted in the integration of these units to become the Nigerian Regiment (Ukpabi, 1976). This Nigerian regiment participated in the African and Asian campaigns of the First and Second World Wars (1914–1918), and (1939–1945). Within Nigeria, the regiment

[5] The occupation closest to this was the designation of Lagos as a crown colony in 1861.

suppressed rebellions in the country in the southwest during the First World War, the 1929 “Women’s War” in the southeast and widespread nationalist protest during the 1950s (Stapleton, 2019). In 1956, the Nigerian Regiment was renamed the Queens Own Nigerian Regiments (QONR), and in the same year, the WAFF witnessed unprecedented regionalization and each military force in the British colonies in West Africa became independent of the other. Accordingly, the QONR later became the Nigerian Military Force (NMF) in 1956. In June 1958, the British Army Council relinquished control of the NMF to the Nigerian Government and by October 1960, when Nigeria gained independence, the NMF became known as the Royal Nigerian Army (RNA). On the attainment of a republican status in 1963, the RNA was re-designated as the Nigerian Army (NA) but retained many of the British military traditions and policies relating to training, welfare, and compensation of personnel.

Influenced by its British legacy, the Nigerian Army like many other Western militaries functions as an institutional-professional bureaucracy that is hierarchical, comprehensive, and all-embracing (Janowitz, 1959:25). This bureaucratic apparatus is responsible for the administration of its affairs, control of its men and resources, and complete obedience to constituted authority. The Nigerian Army bureaucracy is split into divisional commands, departments, corps, and services. There are eight divisional commands in the Nigerian Army spread across the six-geo-political zones of Nigeria, and the Nigerian Army headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. The divisions which are the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), 1 ʿDivision Kaduna, 2 Division Ibadan, 3 Division Jos, 81 Division Lagos, 82 Division Enugu, 7 Division, Maiduguri, 6 Division Port-Harcourt, 8 division Sokoto, and the Guards Brigade, Abuja are armoured and mechanized infantry divisions with affiliated combat support and combat service support units, except for the TRADOC, which is the “think-tank” and policy powerhouse of the Nigerian Army. They are also mandated with the responsibility of securing their respective areas of responsibilities, and their respective borders across the geo-political zones of Nigeria.

There are other departments, corps and services that are responsible for the administrative and operations of the Nigerian Army. They include the departments of Army Administration, training and operations, logistics, policy and plans, civil-military relations, veterans’ affairs, public relations, welfare limited and guarantee, and

transformation and innovation Centre. The Corps and Services are the Artillery, armoured and infantry corps, medical corps, works and engineering corps, supply and transport corps, signal corps, finance corps, military police and intelligence corps, education corps, band corps, legal and the interdenominational services (Protestant, Catholic, and Islamic Affairs). The NA also has schemes and services for the benefits of personnel, and they are the Nigerian Army Welfare Insurance Scheme (more of this would be discussed later in this chapter), the Post Housing Welfare Scheme, Nigeria Army Cooperative Societies, and Nigerian Army Ranches etc.

The figure below represents an organizational chart of the Nigerian Army (NA). At the top is the Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), followed by the various administrative departments in the Army Headquarters (AHQ). Principal staff officers (PSOs) head these administrative departments in the AHQ. Underneath the AHQ, are the respective divisions, corps, and directorates in the NA. Though the chart does not wholly delineate the relationships between the various offices, it does exist functionally. The departments in the AHQ are under the direct supervision of the COAS, and they report to the COAS on their day-to-day activities. The divisions report to the various departments and corps (where applicable) on necessary matters. The Department of Administration (DOAA) deals with the administration, welfare, discipline, employment, and development of all human resources in the NA. The branch is divided into 2 major directorates, namely: Directorate of Manpower Planning (DMP) and the Directorate of Personnel Services (DPS ‘A’), and it is headed by the Chief of Army Administration (COA ‘A’).

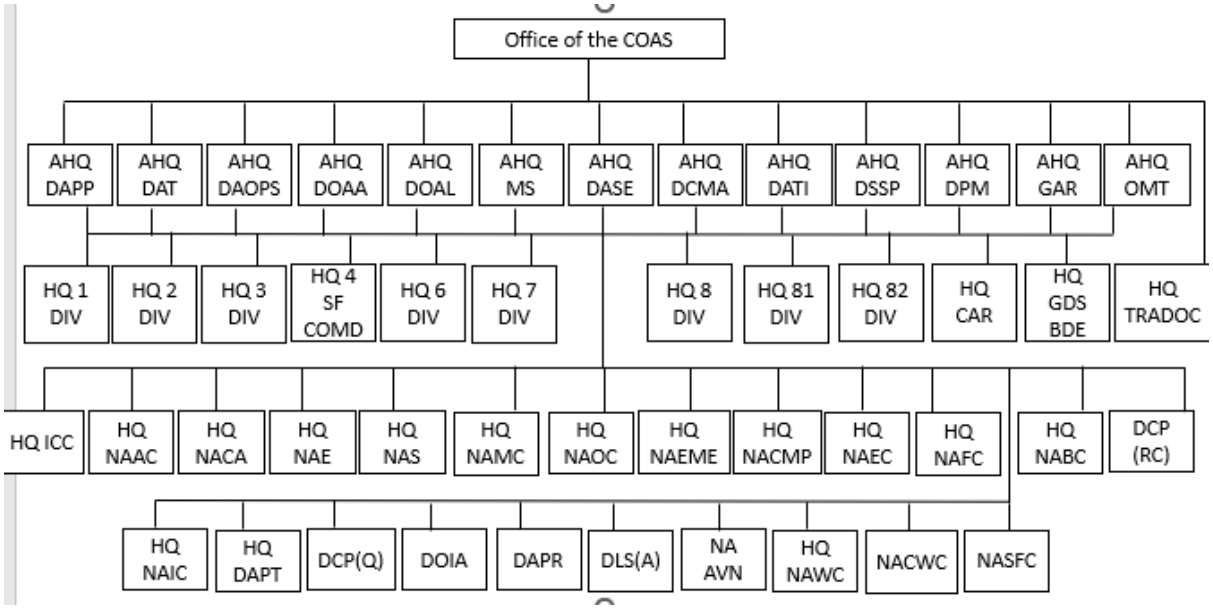

Figure 1. The Organizational Chart of the Nigerian Army

Typically, human and personnel related issues are raised from the unit (battalion) of the soldier, and in a typical bureaucratic process, is routed through to the brigade command, division, corps, and the DOAA (AHQ), and to the COAS. With regards to payments of benefits, the unit/battalion informs the respective brigade, the brigade in turn informs the military division, and the division notifies the DOAA which then takes necessary administrative action on the personnel involved. This action is forwarded to the Nigerian Army Finance Corps for needed action on the matter.

The Nigeria Army has two personnel categories, the commissioned officer corps, and the non-commissioned officers. Officers in the Nigerian Army are commissioned after five years of training at the Nigeria Defense Academy (NDA), Nigeria's premier military institution of learning and training for officers of the AFN. Commissioned officers from the NDA make up the highest echelon of the leadership of the Nigerian military. The non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) are trained for 6 months at the Nigeria Army (NA) Depot, Zaria. The two institutions are in Kaduna state, northwest Nigeria. The myriad security challenges in the country necessitated an increase in recruitment quota from the 3-600-3800 recruits in two batches annually during peacetime, to the now over 8,000 recruits in two batches annually (Omeni, 2013).

Officers in the Nigerian Army typify the duties, characteristics, and responsibilities of the professional military officer. These duties and responsibilities are majorly centred

on the planning, management of military organizations and operations, within and outside the theatres of combat. The non-commissioned officers, on the other hand, though they belong to the organizational bureaucracy, are subordinate to the professional corps, and are excluded from them (Huntington, 1957:17). They are not professionals in the sense of the military officer but are regarded as tradesmen by virtue of the specialized support and administrative roles they are equipped for, aside from training in military combat and tactics. Unlike the officer corps that are specialists in the management of violence, enlisted personnel are specialists in the application of violence. It is for this reason that the smallest unit in any military force is made up of enlisted soldiers and commanded by a senior enlisted soldier. The hierarchical dichotomy between the officer and the enlisted is further created by the differences in their professional specializations, training and education (Huntington, 1957:18). These descriptions, which are a feature of state armies, is also obtainable in the Nigerian Army. A discussion on the historical experience and organizational composition of the Nigerian Army is incomplete without a look at the enduring legacy of its influence in Nigeria's security sector and political environment.

3.3 DUTIES, FUNCTIONS, AND INTERVENTIONIST ROLES OF THE NIGERIAN ARMY

The duties, functions and responsibilities of the Nigerian military (comprising the Nigerian Army (NA), Nigerian Navy (NN), and Nigerian Airforce (NAF)) are detailed in Section 217 (1a-d) of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and Section 3 of the Armed Forces Act (LFN, 2004). As an arm of the Nigerian Armed Forces, the Nigerian Army is mandated by the provisions of these sections to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Nigerian State as directed by the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces through a resolution of the National Assembly (CFRN, 1999). Of the three services, the Nigerian Army (NA) is the oldest, largest and most experienced in the conduct of security operations and missions within and outside Nigeria (Nigeria Army, 1999). The NA also dominated the leadership of the Nigerian state during the almost four decades of military rule, from 1966-1979 and 1983 – 1999.

As a collective force, the Nigerian military has conducted several internal security operations and participated in external peacekeeping missions within and outside the

African continent. Notable among the internal security operations are the Tiv Riots – (1964 and 1965), Emergency Rule in Western Nigeria, 1962, Western Region Political Crises – 1965, Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Maitatsine Religious Disturbances— (1980 and 1984), Zango-Kataf crisis 1992, Ogoni uprising of 1993–1994, Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict in Warri 1996–1997 and 2002–2003, Tiv-Jukun crisis—1990–1993, Ife-Modakeke crisis 1996–1999 among several others (Momodu, 2019).

While the NA directly oversaw some of these operations, the Nigerian civil war was a joint effort comprising of the NA, NN and the NAF (Ojeleye, 2013). The war was fought against the Biafran separatists in Southeast Nigeria that declared secession out of the Nigerian territory in May 1967. The war was fought in a typical conventional fashion, however, there were incidents of irregular warfare perpetrated by the Biafran separatists (Omeni, 2021). Externally, the Nigerian military has participated in numerous peacekeeping operations authorized by the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Notable among these were the United Nations Peacekeeping mission in the Congo (ONUC) 1964-1965, the ECOMOG peacekeeping operations in Liberia (1990- 1998) and Sierra Leone (1998-1999) (Adebajo, 2002; Obi, 2009; Sule, 2013).

The Nigerian Army became more involved in series of internal security operations (ISOs) across the six-geo-political zones in Nigeria after the return to democratic rule in 1999. The failure of the Nigerian Police, and other civilian security agencies to effectively manage internal security crises has necessitated the involvements of the military in these operations. While the Nigerian military has been deployed to manage and prevent the escalation of violence, secure critical public infrastructure and restore law and order in affected regions of the country, the dynamics of the conflict environment, in most cases, has necessitated changes in the initial mandates, which often results in the adoption of a kinetic position. For instance, during the Petro-insurgency in the restive Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the military's response to the violent crisis was to establish a joint task force (JTF) codenamed Operation Restore Force (ORF) in 2003 (Afahakan, 2016). The ORF was mandated to secure oil installations, curb oil community agitation and neutralize armed violent groups in the region. This was the situation in the Niger Delta until the introduction of the amnesty programme in July 2009 (Ukiwo, 2011).

The Nigerian Army is currently deployed in all thirty-six states of Nigeria actively combating all forms of ethnic militancy and armed banditry, kidnappings, oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism and other acts of violence and terrorism. These operations combine routine police actions of arrests, search and patrol, minimum use of force, with military actions such as aid to civil authority, and lethal military actions against criminals, militants, and other forms of armed non-state actors operating in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria (Momodu, 2019; Musa & Heinecken, 2022a). The Nigerian Navy and Airforce have also contributed immensely in defending the territorial integrity of Nigeria in these operations in the creeks of the Niger Delta, and other operational areas in the northeast and northwest Nigeria respectively (Oluyemi, 2020; Oyewole, 2021b; 2018).

Table 1 showing the different ISOPs engaged by the Nigerian Army (2015 – 2022)

No	Name of ISOs	Mandate of ISOs	Region
1	Operation Hadin Kai Operation Deep Punch I and II	These operations lead the counterterrorism and counter-insurgency operations in the Northeast.	Northeast
2	Operation Safe Haven Operation Whirl Punch Operation Whirl Stroke	Internal security operations targeted at bandits and criminal activities in North central	Northcentral
3	Operation Sharan Daji Operation Harbin Kunama	Operations launched to combat the activities of terrorists in the Northwest	Northwest
4	Operation Delta Safe Operation Crocodile Smile I and II	Internal security operations aimed at crushing the the resurgent Niger Delta militancy, and activities of pipeline vandals, oil bunkerers, and other oil thieves in the region	South South
5	Operation Awase	A joint security operation comprising of the Nigerian Army and the Nigerian Navy to tackle the activities of pipeline vandals in Lagos and Ogun states, Southwest Nigeria	Southwest
6	Operation Iron Fence Operation Python Dance I and II	Security operations in the Southeast against the activities of secessionist agitators, armed robbers, and other human threats to peace in the region	Southeast

7	Operation MESA	A nationwide security task force against all forms of criminality in the country	Nationwide
9	Operation 777	The operation is geared towards enhancing a conducive and stable environment for socio-economic activities and the safety of Nigerians, as well as preventing bandits and outlaws from escaping to other peaceful areas.	Nationwide

The involvement of the Nigerian Army in different internal security military operations has come at exceeding costs to the military and civilian populations. Numerous soldiers, particularly of the NCO cadre, have been killed and wounded in these engagements. About 7,403 military personnel have suffered various degrees of combat injuries (Hussain *et al*., 2021; Iroanusi, 2021; Oriola, 2022a).There are no publicly available figures of military personnel that has been lost to conflict violence in post-democratic Nigeria.

Civilian control of the military institution is grossly absent in the Nigerian military. While the constitution provides for executive and legislative oversight, this supervision is weak and ineffectual owing to a plethora of reasons, that are directly traceable to the lengthy years of military rule. These reasons have reduced the influence of civilian political authorities, eroded professionalism, and created a culture of human rights violations, and poor civil-military relations (Aiyede, 2015; Musa, 2018; Siollun, 2018; Musa & Heinecken, 2022b). The poor human rights record associated with the legacy of military rule has continued in post-military Nigeria (Adeakin, 2016; Hassan, 2018). This has been more prevalent in the various ISOs it has conducted in the two decades of democratic rule as its involvement in these ISOs has impacted its professional standing, exacerbated insecurity, strained civil-military relations, and impugned the legitimacy of the military operations in communities affected by conflict (Animasawun, 2012; Joshua *et rdal*., 2020; Oyewole, 2021; Musa & Heinecken, 2022). Furthermore, the professional conduct of Nigerian Army/military personnel has become eroded by a plethora of challenges such as funding constraints, defence budgeting and accountability deficits, shortages of needed manpower, inadequate training capacity, non-adherence to laid down procedures for engagement in ISOPs (Dambazau, 2016; International, 2017; Momodu, 2019).

Beyond the impact of ISOPs on military and civilian populations, the Nigeria's Army operational performance in the ISOPs has shown how, despite its years of involvement in these operations, the Nigerian Army does not have the capacity to carry it out as they are not trained for such tasks. In terms of operational tactics, Omeni argued that the Nigerian Army has failed to progress beyond the conventional fighting method that was suited for interstate wars and peace support operations to nonconventional means that fits the nature of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism operations (Omeni, 2017).

The military victory of the civil war, and subsequent successes in regional security interventions on the African continent discouraged the necessity of encouraging and instituting a counter insurgency culture (Omeni, 2021). Evidently, this failure became apparent at the outset of the Boko Haram conflict, as it exposed the unpreparedness of the Nigerian military for this unconventional conflict. The nature of the Boko Haram conflict and the standing army/guerrilla tactics of Boko Haram has forced the NA to rethink its military fighting model to effectively counter the terrorists. This has not resulted in an easy victory considering the long drawn and unpredictable nature of unconventional warfare.

3.3.1 THE WAR AGAINST BOKO HARAM (2009 – DATE)

The Boko Haram terrorist group, officially known as J*ama'atu Ahlis Sunnar Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS),* meaning, "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad" has been engaged in a protracted conflict with the Nigerian state and military forces since 2009. The name, Boko Haram, used in reference to the group's ideological opposition to democracy and rejection of the superiority of Western education, is more associated with the group and has informed its activities, chief of which, is to impose an Islamic state in Nigeria, and other states of the Lake Chad basin[6] (Walker, 2012:3;16; Onuoha, 2012: 136; Thurston, 2016: 9, 15-16). The conflict has resulted in the displacements and deaths of 2.4 million, and 350,000 people (*Reuters*, 2021).

Founded in 2002 by the late Mohammed Yusuf, the group has expanded from a fringe Islamic sect to a global terrorist group in a decade. While it built on the foundations of

[6] The Lake Chad Basin States are Republic of Chad, Cameroon, Benin Republic, Niger Republic and Nigeria.

Islamic fundamentalism in Nigeria, its emergence and sustenance has also been midwifed by a concatenation of social, political, and religious factors that includes Islamic revivalism, high levels of poverty and social inequality, patronage politics in Nigeria, youth agency and geography. Each of these have been broadly discussed in the Boko Haram literature (Adesoji, 2010; Animasawun & Saka, 2013; Agbiboa, 2013b; Akinola, 2016).

The group has had frequent skirmishes with state forces across the various states in Northeast Nigeria, prior to the 2009 uprising that changed and redefined its trajectory (Onuoha, 2010:55-56; Human Rights Watch, 2012:30-31; Thurston, 2018:91-92). Full scale violence was triggered in June 2009 after a violent confrontation over the use of crash helmets on motorcycles with members of a State Task Force Unit in Borno State led to the shooting of 17 Boko Haram members, who incidentally, were embarking on a funeral procession (Adeniyi, n.d.; Walker, 2016: 140).

This incident and other accompanying raids on members of the sect by security forces, triggered the July 2009 uprising (Forest, 2012). From July 26 – 30 2009, Boko Haram carried out a series of coordinated attacks on security personnel infrastructure in Bauchi, Borno, Yobe, Katsina and Kano states in northern Nigeria. The Nigerian Army's response to the attack led to the deaths of an estimated 800 persons, mostly Boko Haram members. The sect's leader, Mohamed Yusuf was executed in an extrajudicial manner by officers of the Nigerian Police, after he was arrested in his hideout and taken to the Police headquarters by military authorities (Human Rights Watch, 2012: 35–36; International Crisis Group, 2014:14). The extrajudicial death of Yusuf in 2009 forced the group underground for a year, later resurrecting under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau[7], where it embarked on a more vicious crusade of terror against the Nigerian state (Bauchi Jail break, see Omeni 2015).

The group's resurgence in 2010 signalled the beginning of its terrorist trajectory, as it employed all forms of terrorist tactics namely, bombings, raids, assassinations in targeting security forces, government establishments, media and religious houses, traditional institutions, and civilians. It was proscribed and designated as a terrorist

[7] Abubakar Shekau was the leader of the Boko Haram terrorist group. He was killed by Boko Haram's splinter faction, ISWAP in May 2021. He has been reported killed at several times by Nigerian forces until his eventual death in 2021.

organization by the Nigerian and United States governments in 2013 (US Department of State, 2013; Africa, 2014). Infighting and rivalry within the group has caused Boko Haram to splinter into other factions, The Vanguard for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa better known as Ansaru, and the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP)[8]. While Ansaru dissociated from the group based on doctrinal differences circa 2011 / 2012, ISWAP, under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Barnawi[9], separated with Boko Haram in 2016 over the group's excessive use of force, suicide bombings targeting civilians, attacks on mosques, against Muslim civilians, and his use of women and girls as objects of war (Foucher, 2020). The split has meant that the Nigerian military, and its regional counterpart's forces in the Lake Chad region are combating both JAS/ISWAP, though as Albert (2021) stated the Nigerian military has benefitted from the supremacy clashes between the two groups (Albert, 2021).

As stated earlier, the Boko Haram terrorist group has been involved in clashes with the Nigerian security and military forces since its nascent stages. This phase of Boko Haram emergence and the resultant security mobilization of the Nigerian military has been extensively detailed (see Onuoha, 2010b; Oyewole, 2015; Brigaglia 2020; Ekhomu, 2020). The Nigeria Army was deployed to provide assistance to civil authorities after the July 2009 uprising (Onuoha, 2012; 2014). Between the initial quelling of the uprising in 2009, and the group's resurgence in September 2010, the joint police and military antirobbery squad, Operation Flush II, and the Department of State Services, Nigeria's state intelligence department, were the lines of defence and security against the group (Omeni, 2017).

The re-emergence of Boko Haram in late 2010 triggered several military and political changes. One, it expanded the mobilization capacity of the Nigerian military as there was an increased deployment of troops, numbering around 5,000 personnel. Also, a Nigerian Army division was established in Maiduguri, the epicenter of the conflict (Omonobi , 2013; Strategic Comments, 2013; Oyewole, 2016). The Nigerian Air Force (NAF) cemented its presence in the COIN theatre from this phase onwards as well and the military was supported by the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), a non-state security group established in 2013 and made up of civilian volunteers, and local

[8] ISWAP is a splinter faction of the Islamist terrorist group, Boko Haram. It was formed in 2016 after Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS).
[9] Abu Musab al-Barnawi is a son of the late Boko Haram founder, Mohammed Yusuf.

hunters in the affected northeast states (Oyewole, 2016; Omeni, 2017). They aided the military in the intelligence gathering, security enforcement, and in some other cases, fought along with the Military against Boko Haram (Oyewole, 2017; Agbiboa, 2018; Bamidele, 2018). On the political front, the Nigerian government equally declared a state of emergency in the three states, Borno, Adamawa, Yola, affected by the Boko Haram conflict in 2013 (Strategic Comments, 2013).

Despite these vigorous efforts, the Nigerian military appeared insufficient to match the threat posed by Boko Haram. The group embarked upon an extremely virulent campaign of terror and total war on the Nigerian territory and its security forces from mid-2013 to early January 2015. At the insurgents carried out the most daring attacks on Nigerian military bases in different locations in the northeast (Oyewole, 2016; Omeni, 2018; 2020; Ekhomu, 2020). These attacks, which were targeted on Nigerian army and air force bases by the Boko Haram insurgents from 2014 to early January 2015 rendered them as defenceless targets, and were considered ignominious embarrassments to a military that had received the highest honours and accolades in peacekeeping missions across West Africa in the 1990s (Amao & Maiangwa, 2017).

Boko Haram's adoption of a two pronged military fighting tactic that included the use of a standing army, and the easy reversal to a guerrilla warfare was advantageous against the Nigerian military that relied on conventional warfare (Omeni, 2018). This period was equally marked by Boko Haram's control of territory in the hinterlands of north-eastern Nigeria, from which the group declared an Islamic caliphate on Nigerian territory (A'udu, 2014; BBC, 2014b). Additionally, the group embarked on kidnappings of civilians and boys and girls, and using them as suicide bombers (Oyewole, 2016b; Matfess, 2017; Oriola, 2017b). A most noteworthy instance of this was the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno state, resulting in the global #Bring Back our Girls campaign#. These acts of atrocities catapulted Boko Haram to global infamy, as it was adjudged the deadliest terrorist group in the world in 2014.

The Nigerian military improved its war efforts against Boko Haram towards late December 2014 and early 2015 (Onoha & Oyewole, 2018). The improved performance of the Nigerian military is linked to the re-establishment of the Multinational joint task force (MNJTF), a regional security force comprising four countries of the Lake Chad Basin (Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, Chad and Benin

Republic) to combat the Boko Haram terrorists operating in the LCB states (Obamamoye, 2017; Olawale, 2017). Also instrumental to the renewed fight was the private military assistance sought by the Nigerian government from the Specialized Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection (STTEP International Ltd), a South African private military company in late December 2014 (Adamo & Adamo, 2020). The STEEP provided military, logistical and battlefield support aimed at degrading Boko Haram and securing a defensive position for Nigerian military forces (Varin, 2018). Its assistance, and battlefield experience was instrumental to the recovery of territories and military victories secured against Boko Haram between January and March 2015 (Adamo & Adamo, 2020, p. 6).

The change of government in May 2015 necessitated waves of military resistance against Boko Haram, Consequently, the military was equally mandated to sustain its hard-worn victories against the Boko Haram insurgents. This need necessitated increased aerial bombings and raids, troop deployment to the combat theatre, as about 40,000 troops are present in northeast Nigeria and significant battlefield changes, such as the formation of task force battalions that emphasized the resolve of the military to old territories, and deny the terrorists stationary positions (Omeni, 2017; Amoye, 2020; Oyewole, 2016, 2021b). A string of rescue operations and sustained military onslaught against the group in the early period of the OP Lafiya Dole, and spirited cooperation from Nigeria's Lake Chad neighbours led to a premature declaration of a technical defeat against the group in December 2015 (BBC, 2015; Crisis Group Africa, 2016, 32).

Boko Haram continued attacks on civilian population, and military formations, either using improvised explosive devices, suicide bombers, ambushes, and other forms of guerrilla attacks in the years after the declaration have questioned the technical defeat claims. Likewise, ISWAP, estimated to have about 4,000-5,000 fighters has also attacked military facilities, killed soldiers, and funded itself through raiding, kidnapping for ransom, and taxing local populations and commerce (Husted, 2022). Its governance and service delivery efforts has endeared it to the civilian population in its controlled territories (Crisis Group, 2019). The two groups have demonstrated their resilience and resurgence despite the government's repeated claim of a degraded or weakened Boko Haram (Onapajo, 2017; Hassan, 2021).

Arguably, the Nigerian Army has made significant progress against Boko Haram since 2015. This could be attributed to the military tactics adopted by the Nigerian Army. These tactics, which include the Supercamp Strategy (SCS)), have not shielded the Nigerian Army troops and its bases from ambushes, and confrontations with the group (Premium Times, 2016; Ogundipe, 2018a, 2018b). The Supercamp strategy, is a military plan that assembles soldiers in highly fortified military strongholds that are in or on the outskirts of major towns that are occupied by civilians. The camps are used to expedite the mobility capacity, as well as carry out patrols of surrounding areas. It was a tactical necessity that arose from the need to reduce combatant losses, expedite mobility capacity, and manage troop deployment, rotation, and fighting morale in the conflict theatre (Peckham, 2019; Wolf, 2020; Horton, 2020). While it appeared beneficial militarily, the strategy has been majorly criticized for its humanitarian and intelligence failures (Zenn, 2019; Campbell, 2020; Horton, 2020). These reasons amplify the counterproductive nature of the strategy that has further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in northeast Nigeria. It also negates the well-cited argument that a state must accept greater risks for its military forces as a way of protecting civilians during armed conflict (Felter and Shapiro, 2017).

3.4 CASUALTIES OF THE BOKO HARAM WAR

The Boko Haram war has resulted in massive displacements, and deaths across both civilian and military populations in northeast Nigeria. The conflict has recorded more than 350,000 civilian deaths, and over 2.9 million 1.8 million internally displaced persons in the north-eastern Nigeria (*UNHCR - Nigeria emergency*, no date; *Nigeria - Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect*, no date) There are no official casualty figures of killed, missing, and wounded in action combatants. However, an estimated 10,000 soldiers have been killed in the 13 year war against Boko Haram (Ajala, 2022b).

There are allegations of hidden casualty figures, private burials, underreported attacks, and cases of suicides and murder-suicides among soldiers in the war (Oriola, 2021). The reactions of military authorities to combatant's deaths have sometimes been shrouded in controversies, cover-ups and denials (Ajala, 2022a). Instances of the above actions have equally forced Nigerian troops to respond to the seeming

indifference of military authorities through mutinies, and desertion (Onuoha *et al*., 2020).

The ongoing military operations against Boko Haram has exposed the deeply neo-patrimonial nature of the Nigerian military. The Nigerian military bureaucracy exhibits neo-patrimonial characteristics as its functioning is highly mediated by informal and personal relationships (Ikpe, 2000; Njoku, 2020). The legacy of military rule, the absence of civilian control, the military rank/status dichotomy, and the religious and ethnic divisions in the military, often influenced by recruitment patterns, and appointment into selective positions, has accounted for the prevailing system in the Nigerian military (Ikpe, 2000; Siollun, 2018; Oriola, 2022). This has been exhibited through the diversion of defence budget spendings, the poor training of personnel, and provision of arms and war equipment, nepotistic deployments into the warfront, poor welfare of troops, war widows and veterans. Influential commanders have resorted to using their connections to influence the provision of weapons to their troops, due to the unavailability of weapons, or the repeated use of outdated weapons. (Oriola, 2021). These corrupt and patronage practices has prevented the Nigerian Army from responding adequately to the welfare needs of its members, and ultimately winning the war against Boko Haram (Transparency International, 2017; Njoku, 2020b; Onuoha *et al*., 2020; Oriola, 2021, 2022b). A Presidential committee investigation into defence and equipment procurement revealed that as much as US $15billion of defence budgets were stolen within 2007-2015 (Anderson & Page, 2017; Onuoha *et al*., 2020)

Oriola (2022) attributed the persistence of the Boko Haram war to an alliance amongst Nigerian civilian and military officials, and how they have sabotaged the national and organisational interests of the state and military for their private gains. These have impacted the combat experiences of Nigerian soldiers fighting in the war against Boko Haram. The soldiers have used social media platforms to express their discontent with poor feeding and welfare, logistics, deployment challenges and inadequate combat conditions (Vanguard, 2018). These have been done through social media posts, videos, photos, and letters related to their conditions in the warfront, despite these being in violation of the Nigerian defence policy on social media (Sun Newspapers, no date; Oriola, 2021, 2022). The wives and families of both serving and killed soldiers

are affected, as soldiers are hastily deployed into the battlefront, and in cases of combat related death, families of soldiers are not promptly informed and notified (Ajala, 2021b).

Now in its thirteenth year, the Boko Haram conflict has become more intractable, and the task of declaring victory or success over Boko Haram is left to successive political administrations, and leaderships from the Nigerian Army Headquarters to the Operational Theatre Commanders in Northeast Nigeria. To this end, widows and families of deceased soldiers are at the mercy of bureaucratic processes in terms of the payments of compensations and benefits. We look at the welfare policy in the Nigeria Army to understand the entitlements due to widows and NOKs of soldiers who die in active service for the State.

3.5 WELFARE SCHEME AND POLICY IN THE NIGERIAN ARMY

The frequent deployments and transfers of service members to foreign missions, and ongoing internal security operations across the country, the location of work and residence are held within the military barracks, and the normative duties expected of military wives are exemplified in the case of the Nigerian military. The military provides material and non-material rewards, such as free housing, and subsidized healthcare to compensate for the nature of demands on them and their families, as with other militaries (Brummond, 2015). The different branches of the Nigerian military have different non-statutory insurance welfare schemes for their personnel. These arrangements are in forms of welfare packages and loans for all serving soldiers. While the welfare schemes are compulsory, the loan facilities are voluntary. Each of the three services independently determine the modus operandi for the management and operation of the welfare packages, and only the welfare scheme of the Nigeria Army for its personnel are examined in this study.

There are two major welfare schemes for Nigerian Army personnel. These are the Benevolent Fund (BF) and the Nigerian Army Welfare Scheme (NAWIS). The NA Benfund was established in 1983 to provide immediate short term financial assistance to next of kin (NOKs) of deceased soldiers who die in active service, and to families of retiring officers and soldiers. Contributions to the NA Benfund are compulsory, and payment of the BenFund allowances are made within seven (7) days of the receipt of

notification by the NAWIS. Due to the complementary nature of the two Schemes, the Management of Benfund was taken over by NAWIS in September 2000.

The NAWIS was established to boost the morale and efficiency of the NA personnel, and provides a life insurance cover for occupational hazards of injuries or deaths that are associated with soldiering duties in either war or peacetime and are not covered by conventional insurance organisations (Aliyu, 1995; NAWIS, 2020). It complements the existing Benevolent Fund Scheme (Benfund). The scheme began in January 1988 and was established by the NA as a Private Limited Liability Company with its shares limited by guarantee under the Company and Allied Matters Decree 1990, now known as the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) Cap C20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004. The NAWIS has an Article and Memorandum of Association, which clearly states its objectives and how the company should be administered. It is under the management of the Nigerian Amy Welfare Limited by Guarantee (NAWL/G), supervised by the Nigeria Army Finance Corps (NAFC) (NAWIS, 2020).

The modes of contributions to the NAWIS are monthly deductions from the salaries of all serving personnel, and the rates are subject to review at different intervals. NAWIS maintains a life cover policy for all NA personnel with an approved insurance company as underwriter. Twenty five percent (25%) of total amount of contributions received from HQ NAFC is being paid every month to the underwriter as premium. The remaining Seventy five percent (75%) is managed by the NAWIS. Soldiers who have contributed to the scheme are entitled to their benefits, regardless of how they withdrew from the scheme/service, whether they were discharged, or dismissed, or retired. However, personnel who are found guilty of fraud or similar offences by any court of competent jurisdiction are at the risk of losing their contributions.

Death benefits accruable to the NOK are a refund of the total balance of 75% contribution and a 10% compound interest by NAWIS, while the death claim benefit is based on the 25% premium by the underwriter of the Life Policy. In the case of retirement or discharge, the balance of 75% contribution retained and managed by NAWIS and a 10% compound interest is paid to the personnel. The benefits can be paid in two ways; one by the identified and authorized NOK, in case of a deceased personnel, and two, by the main contributor to the fund, where he is retired or dismissed from the NA. The NAWIS is paid at the NOKs provision of the certain

documents which are the NAWIS form and BenFund claims form, two passport photographs of personnel, and NOK (in case of death), copy of death certificate, or affidavit of death, and Notification of Casualty (NOTICAS) or Condolence letter. Other statutory benefits given to NOKs of deceased Nigerian Army soldiers are burial expenses; gratuity (60 months pension); Group Life Assurance Policy claims of the Armed Forces, and an educational sponsorship given to a maximum of four deceased biological/adopted children aged 6 – 18 years up to tertiary institution level (Manual of Financial Administration for Armed Forces of Nigeria, 2017).

Added to the welfare schemes are pensions for both serving and deceased soldiers of the Nigerian military which is administered by the Nigerian Military Board. Military (war service) pensions in Nigeria emerged as an aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945), where members of the Nigerian regiment, like other African colonies under British rule, fought in the war on behalf of the British crown The law relating to pensions and other welfare benefits of the Nigeria armed forces is traced to the Pensions (War Service) ordinance of No 11 of 1941, effective retroactively in 1939. The ordinance formed part of a series of other social welfare legislation targeting members of the armed forces during the Second World War (emphasis mine).

The Law of 1941, which became effective in 1939 required that war service be considered when computing pension benefits for veterans from the Second World War. Following the 1941 law was the Pensions Ordinance No. 13 of 1943, which was retroactively effective on September 3, 1939. Other successive legislations are the Military Pensions Act (1958), War Pensions Act (1958), Military Pensions (Amendment) Act No 47, 1958, The Military Pensions (Amendment) Act No.38 1960; The Pensions and Gratuities (War Services) Act No.49, 1969, The Military Pensions (Amendment) Act No 18, 1972, The Military Pensions (Amendment) Act No 13 1975, The Military Pensions (Disability Provisions) Act No 2 of 1976. The current Armed Forces pensions act, Armed Forces Pensions Act No 103 of 1979. repealed various pensions and other welfare legislations that were previously in existence. The explanatory note to Act No 103, 1979 noted that this Law consolidated all instruments dealing with pensions, war pensions, disability benefits and gratuities for members of the armed forces of the Federation (Mwalimu, 2005).

The Nigeria Armed Forces Pensions Act of 103 1979, with commencement date, 1 April 1974 contains the provisions for gratuities and death benefits (including pensions) for soldiers and officers alike; whether discharged, retired or dismissed. The Act makes provisions for it to be paid on circumstances of death, compulsory and voluntary retirement, medical grounds, and inefficiency. All of these, except for the death reasons, are proportional to the length of years spent in service. In conditions of death, gratuities equivalent to one-year's salary of the deceased are to be paid to his or her NOK. These same conditions are attached to payment of pensions, except for the one-year payment set aside for gratuities. The 1979 pension act may have been designed and implemented, albeit specifically, for fallen heroes of the civil war or combatants who are honorably discharged on medical or other compassionate grounds.

The premise for this position is evident in the First Schedule of the Act, which states that:

2) In the computation of pensionable service and qualifying service for the purposes of this Act-

(a) Where an officer served in any of the Armed Forces of the Federation during the period between 27 May 1967 and 15 January 1970 -

(i) Each completed year of war service shall count as two years.

(ii) A period of war service exceeding four months and not included in a completed year shall count as one year; and

(iii) A period of war service not exceeding four months and not included in a completed year or in a period of the kind mentioned in sub-paragraph (ii) of this subsection shall count as six months.

(b) Any period of service (other than war service) over six months and not included in a completed year shall for the purposes of the First Schedule to this Act as relates to officers entitled to a pension, count as one year.

(3) Pensions and gratuity already awarded under the provisions of any other enactment may be recalculated to take account of subsection (2) of this section.

Despite the provisions of the 1979 Pensions Act, it is not known what the legislation or administrative policy is being used as legal basis of payment of pensions and death benefits to military widows/and or NOK of the Boko Haram insurgency. This question arises because a service manual of financial administration for the Armed Forces of Nigeria (MAFAN), a document that contains details of allowances and other financial entitlements of personnel in Service, including welfare schemes, retirement and death and signed in 2017 differs from the Armed Forces Pensions Act (1979). It would be remiss to overlook these important details as they are critical to understanding how the totalitarian nature of military institutions may override existing constitutional provisions[10]. It is however necessary to note that the document does not supersede the Armed Forces Act (2004), as its design and approval by the Armed Forces Council of Nigeria is consistent with Sections 5(1) of the Nigeria Armed Forces Act that empowers the Forces Council to be responsible, under the "general authority of the President, for the command, discipline and administration of, and for all other matters relating to the Armed Forces of Nigeria".

A comparative analysis of provisions on death benefits for NOKs in the two documents are at variance with each other. While Sections 2a-e of the Pensions Act accommodates widows, children and also mothers of the soldiers killed in action personnel (where necessary), and also provides a "life pension for the widow, provided she is unmarried and of good character", the provisions of the MAFAN document in 12.12(f) states that NOK shall be entitled to a lump sum of 10 years pension payable to the deceased rank at the date of death, without any additional criteria. The MAFAN document was also stripped of the re-marriage requirements, and other criteria of good character that was typical of pension payments to 19th and 20th war widows (see Lomas 1994; Mcclintock, 1996; Damousi, 1999). In this sense, the policy draftsmen may not to burden themselves with the surveillance of war widows. Other possible reasons for domiciling the provisions for fallen soldiers in its internal restrictive policy is the burden of legislative amendment, and the uncontested independence of military structures that gives it wide ranging powers of internal procedures, orders, and regulations. The policy in practice also contravenes those of other militaries where war

[10]Interactions with participants during the fieldwork did not provide sufficient response on the subject.

widows of killed in action servicemen are paid pensions for life, regardless of marital status (Shorer, Dekel and Nuttman-Shwartz, 2021).

The guidelines for the administration of military pensions for military personnel provides that death benefits should be paid to Next of Kins (NOKs) of deceased military personnel that died in active service. When personnel die in active service, documents such as form 9B, a death certificate; letter of introduction of their NOKs; condolence letter from their last units; sworn affidavit deposed to by the NOKs authenticating them as NOKs; the ID card of the deceased personnel; passport photographs of the NOKs; and any form of identification of the NOKs are expected to be sent to the military pension board in Abuja by their respective military units. These documents are used to process the deceased personnel's death benefits, which would be paid to the rightful NOKs after a successful interview with the NOK standing committee.

The NOK Standing committee is a committee of the MPB established to verify the genuineness of NOKs and their documents. Following the document verification, the biometric data of the NOKs are collected, and their files processed for payments. However, there is no stated period for final payments of entitlements, rather beneficiaries are often informed that the monies would be paid into the bank accounts provided by NOKs. Hence, widows and NOKs in difficult position in terms of knowing when they are due to receive payments and how to hold the authorities to account. Also, the guidelines state that the MPB pays death benefits in batches as they are processed subject to the availability of funds. It is not known how many widows or NOKs have been paid their benefits even after completing the identification processes (Adejumo, 2020).

The welfare schemes in the Nigerian Army, and by extension, the Nigerian military have not met the desired needs of serving soldiers. They have been hampered by different factors, some of which are the rapid expansion of the service, bureaucratic inefficiencies, corruption, and lack of policy continuity and implementation. While recruitment, retirement and deaths of personnel are regular occurrences in the military, the various counter-insurgency operations have seen the service expand beyond its projected expectations, and this in turn, has impacted resources allocated for personnel welfare. The payments of benefits have also been affected by bureaucratic

bottlenecks and mismanagement of welfare funds by military officials. Also, policy inconsistency among military bureaucrats, and the absence of an adaptable welfare system structure that is continually reviewed or accommodate the changing social, economic and operational realities have impacted the efficiency of the welfare system in the Nigerian Army (Dambazau, 2016; Ugbong, 2021).

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter focused on the Nigerian Army and looked at its social and organisational responsibilities to the Nigerian state, and to its soldiers. Discussed in the chapter are the historical background, functions, and interventionist roles of the Nigerian Army, and the welfare schemes available to deceased personnel and their respective NOKs in the Army. The welfare structure provides a window into understanding how the Nigerian Army has fulfilled its responsibilities to widows of its deceased soldiers who died in the Boko Haram conflict.

In terms of its interventionist roles, the Boko Haram conflict revealed the unpreparedness of the Nigerian Army in combating terrorism. It also showed the extent of official concern and attention to its human resources. These are reflected in the experiences of soldiers who fought in the conflict, in the methods of death notification, and in the processing or accessing of entitlements and compensations for deceased soldiers. While the challenges faced are common to large bureaucracies like the military, the attention given to the welfare of soldiers and their families betray or contradict the social expectations of total and greedy institutions considering the risks involved in the demands made on their families. This leads to the next chapter that looks at how war widows in the Nigerian Army have historically coped with the effects of security operations in and outside the country, in the light of their difficulties of accessing their due entitlements and benefit.

CHAPTER FOUR

WAR WIDOWS IN THE NIGERIAN MILITARY

4.2 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The chapter begins by looking at the broad topic of widowhood in Nigeria and their coping strategies. Following these, the effect of the Nigerian civil war, the ECOWAS peacekeeping operations, and the Boko Haram conflict are independently examined. These sections add to the literature on how wives and families of military personnel in Nigeria are affected by the different internal and external security operations of the Nigerian military. The chapter continues by assessing the functions and impact of the Nigeria Army Officers Wives Association (NAOWA) and the Nigerian Military Widows Association (MIWA).

4.2 WIDOWHOOD IN NIGERIA

Widowhood is a state of spousal loss or demise when a wife loses her husband. It is caused by armed conflict, diseases, and other natural and unnatural causes. While there are typically no social distinctions amongst widows, widowhood causes, and conditions necessitate some categorisations. Women who lose their husbands to wars and armed conflict, either as members of a state military or paramilitary forces, violent non-state actors (e.g., rebel, guerrilla, or terrorist groups) or as unarmed civilians, are typically regarded as war widows. Likewise, health crises or epidemics, like HIV/AIDS have also created different conditions of widowhood (Kessy, Mayumana and Msongwe, 2015; Dominique van de Walle, 2018). Regardless of their social conditions or categorizations, the narratives of widowhood are similar across African cultures and societies (Cattell, 2003; Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007; Kotzé, Els and Rajuili-Masilo, 2012; World Widows Report, 2016).

A surfeit of existing literature has examined the meanings of widowhood in a patriarchal Nigerian society. These studies have found that widowhood in Nigeria represents a form of “social death” for women, as they are robbed of their erstwhile wifehood and often become socially marginalised (Owen, 2003). Different narratives abound of how widows were forced to engage in certain cultural practices, such as being forced to drink the water used to wash their husband’s corpse, sleeping besides

his corpse, or of being made to declare their innocence before a local deity, all in a bid to declare their innocence. This was because of the prevailing social belief that a woman is to be held responsible for her husband's demise (Amogunla, 2021). The plight of widows in Nigeria are exacerbated by repressive cultural attitudes towards widows, traditional patriarchal institutions, and a pluralistic legal system, where traditional laws and customs, exists side by side with State legal systems (Iwobi, 2008). Being a widow in Nigeria means being denied human rights, subjected to harmful cultural rites and practices, dealing with difficult relatives, social stigma, discrimination, sexual, physical and mental abuse, and a barrage of socio-economic challenges (Korieh, 1996; Ewelukwa *et al*., 2002; Iwobi, 2008; Fasanmi & Ayivor, 2019).

The journey to widowhood in Nigeria begins with the cultural widowhood rites they are subjected to. These rites, which vary across ethnic groups, including shaving the widow's hair, seclusion, and confinement for the duration of mourning, levirate marriage, denial of inheritance rights, and forced evictions from her houses – in certain cases. These create various forms of social and psychological trauma for the affected women (Durojaye, 2013; Mohammed, 2018).There are laws protecting women from the trauma and violence of cultural rites arising from widowhood in Nigeria. One of such laws is the Violence against Persons Prevention Act (VAPP), which was signed in 2015 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2015). Nigeria is also a signatory to conventions on violence against women, such as the CEDAW and the Beijing Declaration 1995 (Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, 2019). Despite the prevalence of laws protecting women from cultural rites, some of the practices still endure.

These show how deeply rooted the practices are, particularly for women without low social and economic status. Studies have shown that the economic and educational status of a widow constrains the feasibility of widowhood practices and rites. Widows with low economic status experience widowhood more negatively than those of higher economic those of high economic status (Chenube & Omumu, 2011). Likewise, a widow's educational and work demands constrain the feasibility of widowhood practices and rites (Oyeniyi and Ayodeji, 2010). Nonetheless, widows in Nigeria, regardless of class and social status, suffer from the economic consequences of losing

their spouse. This is especially so considering the social and economic dependency of women on their husbands. The shocks and stress of spousal loss results into low or declined living standards, poor nutrition, and a general state of impoverishment (Van de Walle, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2006). Their conditions are worsened by the absence of social safety nets, and grants to survive their vulnerable conditions.

The everyday challenges of widowhood have meant that widows must adopt various strategies to cope, survive, and remain resilient. They resort to spirituality and belief in God, rely on support from family and friends, join various support groups for widows and bereaved, and participate in different social and economic empowerment programmes organised by mutual aid groups, charities, and faith based groups to alleviate their conditions (Nwokoro, 2016; Nwadinobi, 2014; Ude & Njoku, 2017; Mohammed, 2018; Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). Using these strategies, they have been able to negotiate the social and cultural demands individually and collectively on imposed on them by virtue of their social status. While all widows experience similar challenges, war widows face unique difficulties related to their status and dependence on the military institution when their husbands die or are killed in combat.

4.3 THE IMPACT OF THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR (1967-1970) ON NIGERIAN MILITARY WIVES.

The Nigerian Civil War was fought against the secessionist state of Biafra from 1967-1970. The people of the seceding republic were the Igbos of Eastern origin and other minority groups that were categorized as part of the Eastern region during the war[11]. It was one of the earliest civil wars fought by a newly independent African state. The causes of the Nigerian civil war has been extensively discussed (Kirk-Greene, 1975; ; Njoku, 1987; Falola and Heaton, 2008). The war recorded over one million civilian casualties and both warring parties equally suffered heavy military casualties in the war (Gutteridge 1975:109). The casualties suffered by the Nigerian army were not restricted to the civil war but included the coups and countercoups of January and July 1966 that preceded the war. By extension, wives and families of Nigerian soldiers were

[11] Sequel to the war, the Federal Military Government under Yakubu Gowon divided the country into twelve states from the previous four regions of North, West, East and Mid-West. Presently, Nigeria has six geo-political zones and the minority groups under the then seceding republic have their region known as the South-South. The seceding republic is the South East geo-political zone.

affected by the chain of events preceding the war, as well as during it (Silloun, 2009:237-239)[12].

Nigerian military wives and families were affected by the outbreak of the civil war, as their husbands were hastily deployed in a war that was initially regarded as a short "police action" to retake the secessionist territory. The wives and families of Nigerian soldiers remained in the barracks from where they coordinated to support the war efforts through the Army Wives Association (AWA). The AWA provided nursing services for the sick and wounded, and organised donations for the comfort of the troops. According to the late Maryam Babaginda, a former NAOWA President:

> During the civil war, wives were left alone with their children in the barracks. The wives joined different groups which assisted in treating the wounded and bringing them back to good health. As soon as the wives realised a wounded officer had been brought home, they did their best to nurse him back to good health, whether he was married or not and whether his wife was around or not. They all recognized the fact that it could happen to their husbands at any time. They took him fruits and food and tried to cheer him up within the limitation of the times.

The efforts of the AWA were hampered by war realities, as not all soldiers deployed to the battlefront returned safely. Some of them paid the supreme price, and some returned with battle injuries that permanently incapacitated them. These set of soldiers were discharged from the force on medical grounds in 1975, and the fortunate ones were sent to the Nigerian Armed Forces Resettlement Centre, Oshodi for pscyho-social rehabilitation and skill acquisition (Ojeleye, 2010). Nigeria military wives equally encountered the stress and dilemma of wartime deployment. They struggled with the feelings of grief and loss, and fear of the unknown. Recounting her experience, the wife of a Nigerian civil war veteran recalled that:

> The war started six months after our wedding. My husband had to go to the warfront. It was July 23, 1967 […]. But as a newlywed, I did not take him

[12] For context: Brigadier Sam Ademulegun and his wife Mrs. Latifat Ademulegun, and Brigadier Zakariya Maimalari were killed in the January 1966 coup. Gen Aguiyi Ironis and Lt-Colonel Francis Fajuyi were killed in the counter-coup of July 1966, leaving their wives and children behind. For a full list of officers and men killed during the coup and counter coup of January and July 1966 (see Silloun, 2009:237-239).

> seriously. I wondered how he could leave me alone and whom with. So, when I returned from work on July 23 and I saw him packing, I asked if he was serious about going to the war, he said 'yes' and I started crying. All the officers had been asked to gather at a particular time and place. I could not even see him off…. (Babaginda, 1988:47-52)

She continued, stating that:

> For a long time, I did not hear from him. I panicked every day, especially when they brought back dead bodies of his colleagues including those I really knew and those I saw before they left. Whenever they brought such corpses, you really could see the fear in me and there was the realisation that if this could happen to those officers, it could happen to my husband. I lived under such tension during that period (1988:47-52)

Another wife of a civil war veteran remarked that

> It was pain throughout that period. We were newly married when he [my husband] went to war. I was very young and knew nothing about the implications of war. I knew he was going to fight but I expected that he would be back home very soon.... When he came back after the war, I did not recognise him.... (1988:47-52)

The civil war also had huge impact on the economic lives of Nigerian military wives who managed the home front. Large scale economic activities undertaken by wives in the barracks were diverted to social, welfare and other wartime care work. Army wives in formal employment applied for extended work leave in order to contribute to the war effort (Nzemeka, 2015). These efforts undertaken by these military wives were important because of the premium placed on immediate care for military personnel affected by a war that was conceived in largely nationalistic narratives.

As a way of protecting military wives, and rewarding them for their war efforts, Nigerian military authorities placed some mitigation measures to cushion the economic impact and restriction faced by the wives during the war period. One of those was the provision of security and armed escorts to wives who needed to purchase essential supplies outside of the barracks vicinity. This made it compulsory for them to visit

markets in groups and purchase food items in bulk to avoid frequent movement in and out of the barracks. War time relief, such as foodstuff and other essential commodities was provided by the government. Foodstuff were distributed on a prorated basis to military families based on rank and position of spouses. There were also some other organized trade of scarce food commodities to military wives across the various commands (Nzemeka, 2015).

Likewise, payment of salaries and allowances of combatants during the war was adjusted to twice a month for convenience purposes and to meet the needs of military families. Other measures taken by the authorities to prevent injury to military families, and sabotage of war efforts included the renewal of the identity cards of military dependents, gate passes, census of military families from time to time, and imposed curfew in the barracks. Similarly, business activities that had to do with intra and inter trade activities were suspended. Markets around the barracks and its frontiers were closed down for fear of enemy attack and sabotage (Nzemeka, 2015).

Like military wives in other military geographies, wives of Nigerian soldiers were not immune from the challenges of wartime deployment and post-deployment as was seen in this section. The Army Wives Association also support troops on the frontline, through medical outreaches and humanitarian services, and the Nigerian Army, with three divisions and approximately 10,000 soldiers and officers, at the time of the war, was able to cushion the effect of the war on military families by putting in place welfare measures for their sustenance during the war.

4.3.1 IMPACT OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS ON WIDOWS OF NIGERIAN ARMY COMBATANTS

Shortly after its independence in October 1960, Nigeria joined the community of troop contributing countries to the United Nations Peacekeeping missions. The country's first UN peacekeeping deployment was in the Congo (ONUC) was from 1960 – 1964. Nigeria has successfully contributed to various peace support operations in and outside of the African continent. The most noteworthy contribution has been in the West African region, when it intervened in the civil wars that erupted in Liberia and Sierra-Leone in the early years of the post-Cold war era. These two cases are the focus of this section. Other intra-state conflicts that Nigeria intervened in were Cote d'

Ivioire and Guinea-Bissau. More recent instances of Nigerian peacekeeping efforts were in Darfur, and Mali under The African Union - United Nations Hybrid Operation in *Darfur* (UNAMID) missions, and the The African-led International Support Mission to Mali (*AFISMA*) and The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (*MINUSMA*) missions.

These peacekeeping operations has emplaced the Nigerian military as a significant contributor to global peace and security. At the domestic level however, these operations have permanently altered the configuration of many military families whose soldier-husbands/fathers deployed to these missions for long periods and are sometimes killed. In the 1990s ECOMOG intervention in Liberia and Sierra Leone where Nigeria was the biggest troop contributing country, it recorded the heaviest number of war casualties (Balogun, 2014) (Ero, Sidhu, and Toure, 2001; Adekeye, 2002). Within the African Union and United Nations peacekeeping missions, Nigeria have also suffered heavy casualties in the quest for regional and global peace (Gbor, 2007; Kusa 2007).

The accounts of Nigeria's intervention in the conflicts that engulfed West African in the 1990s have been established in the literature (Ero 2001, 2002; Yoroms, 2001; Gberie, 2003). There has not been any accurate census on the number of Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers who died in the Liberia and Sierra Leonean peacekeeping missions. Ellis, (1999:315-316) put the total number of Nigerian soldiers casualties in the Liberia war at 2,000. Nzemeka (2015:379) noted that over 15,000 soldiers were killed and a further 2,000 missing over the decade of fighting in the two wars. Nzemeka's claims are grossly exaggerated as there were no original sources for the claim, and because the mandate of the two missions were different in scope and objectives. However, a former Chief of Nigeria Army Staff and ECOMOG Commander, Late Lieutenant General Victor Malu, testifying before a judicial commission of inquiry in 2002 remarked that he brought home 800 bodies Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers killed in peacekeeping in Liberia for quiet burial at night in order to avoid ''national uproar and panic'' (Oni, 2002; Kusa, 2007).

Beyond the successes and failures of these peacekeeping operations, are their impact on military wives and families. Little attention has been paid to the effect of the intervention on this constituency. Like the Nigerian civil war, there are no available

literature on the death notification, burial and entitlements procedures for the procedures and the families were notified of their husband's death in the two peacekeeping missions and other subsequent ones, and the bureaucratic challenges they encounter to get their legitimate benefits and entitlements.

Nigerian soldiers deployed to Liberia and Sierra Leone for the ECOMOG peacekeeping missions intermingled with the civilian population, particularly women and girls. Some soldiers married and fathered children in these missions. Several of them contracted HIV/AIDS in the process. It was reported that HIV/AIDs were the second highest killer of Nigerian troops after gunshot wounds in Sierra Leone. By the time the Liberia mission, several Nigerian soldiers had unknowingly become carriers of the HIV virus. More tragically, some of them infected their wives and partners with the virus (Oyeniyi, 2010). Wives of affected soldiers were left to survive and cope with their husband's health status and the accompanying societal stigmatization in the absence of institutional support from the military. Allowances and payments of their husbands from these missions were spent on drugs and treatments for HIV/AIDS. Some wives resorted to using loans from cooperatives, family and friends to treat their ailing husbands, regardless of the uncertainty of recovery (Oyeniyi, 2010).

The initial reaction of Nigeria military authorities to the disease contracted by its personnel in the operations was denial. Added to this was the non-conduct of health tests on its soldiers after they returned from their operations. After series of denials, the Army authorities admitted that its men went beyond the rules of engagement in the peace missions and returned with HIV/AIDS. Despite this admittance, there was minimal efforts taken by the authorities to treat and cater for the affected officers and their families as the actions of the soldiers were regarded as a national disgrace. They were therefore abandoned to their fate, leaving their wives and families to bear their war-inflicted burden.

Nigerian soldiers who were deployed to Liberia and Sierra Leone spent between six months to one year in the peacekeeping missions. Some soldiers were rotated between the two missions. All of these created problems both for the deployed soldiers and for their wives at home (Human Rights Watch, 1999). These problems were compounded by the absence of proper deployment arrangements within the families, and a lack of communication between soldiers and their wives, as several wives were

not sure whether their husbands were alive or dead. The inability of some soldiers to make proper deployment arrangements, including provision of financial upkeep for their families was due to the exigency of the interventions. Several wives were unable to cope with the socio-economic burden of maintaining their households, and others could not access the salaries of their spouses as no such measures were in place before the deployment. Due to the excruciating economic situation, some wives engaged in prostitution, within the barracks to sustain their household and livelihood. Some of them were full time housewives, and had no other means of self-sustenance (Nzemeka, 2015).

In situations where the soldiers made alternative arrangements for their families, these arrangements were short-lived. Accordingly, the military authorities intervened to alleviate the concerns of the women by using the available local arrangements to meet the welfare challenges of wives and dependents of serving personnel on peacekeeping operations. These arrangements were made between the finance departments of military units and the financial institutions where bank accounts of personnel were domiciled. For women whose husbands died or became missing in action (MIA), they were also assisted to access their late husband's accounts (Nzemeka, 2015). These challenges were not only limited to wives of Nigerian soldiers. Spouses of South African National Defence Force (SANDF) experienced similar financial challenges while their husbands were away on external deployment. This was because some of them engaged in such family-related tasks for the first time, others were unemployed and struggled with the insufficient allowances, and in other instances, there was little or no plan for the family (Pitse, 2009).

Military wives affected by these operations experienced both anticipatory and disenfranchised or delegitimated grief, in the sense that their grief was not acknowledged by the State and society. In 1992, wives of 35 deployed Nigerian Soldiers from 192 Owode barracks, Ogun state whose husbands were killed by rebel troops in Sierra Leone protested at the commanding officer 's house, demanding an explanation of their deaths. The wives accused the Army authorities of insensitivity and absence of protection for their spouses. It took the intervention of the Senior officers and barrack authorities for peace to return to the barracks (Nzemeka, 2015).

Support for affected wives and families in these operations was provided by the Nigeria Army Officer's Wives Association (NAOWA). The Association rendered various forms of socio-economic and emotional support to affected wives and families. They formed small self-help groups in different parts of Nigeria, providing psychosocial aid, soft loans, and other forms of livelihood assistance. The association also helped in paying hospital costs for ailing members and their families, and offered counselling services on preventive measures, healthy living and dealing with stigmatization. In other instances, NAOWA advised affected families to relocate and begin their lives in new environment (Oyeniyi, 2010). All of these helped the affected wives to cope with their predicament. These initiatives undertaken by NAOWA were central to their objectives of acting as care and support structures to its members and their family. (NAOWA, nd).

Like the previous section on the civil war, Nigerian military widows endured the challenges of wartime deployment and post-deployment. Unlike the civil war, where there was some cushioning effect from the Nigerian Army to affected war families, there were no forms of social support for affected families from the Nigerian Army, rather the NAOWA was the frontline support groups for Army wives through their provision of various kinds of support. This was also the role played by the Association during the Nigerian Civil War. The widows of the Boko Haram conflict, presently raging in Nigeria are even more daunting.

4.3.2 IMPACT OF THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT ON WIDOWS OF THE NIGERIAN ARMY

An analysis of the effect of death on military widows in the Boko Haram war begins from an understanding of the uniqueness of the Boko Haram war. The Boko Haram conflict is the largest single deployment of soldiers in any internal security operation in post-independence Nigeria and has resulted in an extensive human loss to the Nigerian military's population. The war has recorded more widows and bereaved military families than any previous military operations, such as the Nigerian Civil war, the ECOMOG peacekeeping operations and the Niger Delta Insurgency. There are more military widows of the Boko Haram conflict who need government assistance than any other conflict. Furthermore, the war is fought alongside lesser military

operations in the northern parts of the country and nationwide, which has reduced the available manpower of the Army and, by extension, the Nigerian military.

A major uniqueness of military widowhood is its political nature and the recognition attached to it. Military widows are seen as widows of the State and representations of the supreme sacrifice. The state-sanctioned benefits/compensations attached to military death further differentiate it from non-military deaths (Enloe, 2000). In the case of Nigerian military widows, state recognition and support for the widows have been almost inexistent, despite the presence of welfare policies and legislations. For non-military widows of the Boko Haram conflict, and other forms of armed violence across Nigeria, welfare benefits, and the state recognitions due to war widows are not available to them. Nonetheless, the widows are unified by the social markers of widowhood in African society, such as poverty, discrimination, social vulnerability, and exploitation, military widows are markedly different from non-military widows by virtue of their military and social identity as "widows of the state". The experience of Nigerian military widows in Nigeria, largely defined by the lack of support and recognition from the Nigerian State, has however, prevented a visible difference in widowhood status between military and civilian widows.

The impact of the death on military wives in the Boko Haram war begins from how the women were notified of their husband's deaths. Military wives often learnt of their husband's demise through non-official communication channels, like social media and phone calls. All of these revealed how the military bureaucracy inadvertently undermined or underplayed the impact and sensitivities of wartime deaths to military families (Ajala, 2021a). While there is no official account of the numbers of soldiers who have died in the war, casualty numbers provided by conflict databases on the Boko Haram insurgency suggest that about 3,000 to 6,000 military personnel may have died in the war (SBM Intelligence, 2019)[13]. The high number of casualty impacts on wives who have become sudden widows, and caregivers for their wounded soldier husbands, but also on bereaved parents, siblings, and children affected by the interminable insurgency. This has been established in the literature on military families, wartime injuries, and deaths (Harrington-LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011;

[13] Actual Conflict Location Event Database (ACLED) and SBM, as at December 2019. In the first months of January – March 2020, about 70 soldiers have died in the insurgency

Lehman & Cozza, 2011; Hettirarachchi, 2016; Harrington, n.d., 2017; Levy, n.d.:52, 86).

Wives of soldiers who die in combat are entitled to certain benefits and privileges in the Nigerian military. The legal basis for the payment of pensions to war widows in Nigeria are in Sections 40 and 41 of the Nigeria Armed Forces Act (2004), and Section 8, subsections 1 and 2, (paragraph a - e) of the Nigeria Armed Forces Pension Act (1974) or Armed Forces Act 103 of 1979[14]spells out the payment of pensions to widows and next of kin following the death of those in active service[15]. Despite these pension provisions, war widows of the Nigeria Army in the war against Boko Haram face difficulties accessing their late husband's death benefits as they are often neglected and abandoned by Army authorities.

This neglect is often due to the inefficient and corrupt nature of the bureaucracy, and by virtue of their official categorization as appendages of the state's soldiers (Enloe, 2000). The women spend months and even years to get their due entitlements, and some of them have utilized their personal connections and influences within the Army bureaucracy to get their late husband's payments (Owolabi, 2017; Kabir, 2020). For wives whose husbands were declared missing in action (MIA), their salaries were stopped, and the family evicted from the barracks by the authorities in the absence of official confirmation of missing or dead status, and in other cases, the families of personnel are pressured into silence (Owolabi, 2017; News 24, 2018).

In the absence of due benefits, Army widows of the Boko Haram insurgency also use their once-militarized status to negotiate their social condition and everyday existence. One military widow whose husband was killed by Boko Haram was arrested by the Army authorities for impersonating a soldier. When arrested, she mentioned that she committed the offence because of her children, as she neither wanted them to starve or become prostitutes (Shittu, 2019). In a similar scenario in the DRC, an army widow involved in the illegal trade of cannabis used her social status as a military widow as a bargaining tool to prevent being arrested by the security services. In her case, she used the same drivers and cars for her trips, as it eases the burden of high transport costs because they understand their social condition. In this sense, she was able to

[14] The act was adopted on 01-04-1979. It is however known as the Armed Forces Pensions Act 103 of 1979
[15] See Chapter 4 for further explanation on the Nigerian Military Pension Scheme

play on her double identities as an army widow and civilian to negotiate her social in-betweenness or boundaries (Baaz & Verweijen, 2017).

While some military widows have, albeit illegally, utilized their 'cultural and bureaucratic distance' from military structures to 'tactically reverse' the militarization they (were once)[16] subjected to (Enloe 2000:83; Baaz and Verweijen, 2017). Others have acquiesced their social agency to the military and have become powerless to reverse their militarisation because they are dependent on the institution for their daily self-preservation. They have not been able to assert their autonomy over military structures as they fear being victimized and denied their due entitlements. According to them, "What happens in the military stops in the military" (Kabir, 2020). For others, their personal connections among ranking officers, and holding of leadership positions in the widows' association has prevented them for publicly voicing their discontent. In this sense, they have unwittingly sustained their militarisation, continually played the role of the good military wife, and preserver of the gendered status quo of military institutions (Enloe, 2000).

Their dependence or otherwise on military structures, the coping techniques of Nigeria Army war widows necessitates a critical scrutiny. A survey of media reports on war widows show that they are often without any form of social protection and are struggling to cope with their sudden economic conditions. Some of them survive by engaging in petty trade and subsistence farming (Owolabi, 2017; Adeniji, 2019; Adejumo 2020). Others find humanitarian assistance from charitable bodies through their military wives and widows' associations. The NAOWA has supported widows of the Nigerian Army through its humanitarian assistance and opportunities for skill acquisition programmes (NAOWA, n.d.-c, n.d.-b, n.d.-d; Oremule, 2020).

Like previous military operations, there are no clear methods of notifying widows of soldiers who died in combat in the Boko Haram conflict. When they eventually find out about the death of their soldier husbands, they contend with bureaucratic bottlenecks and combat realities associated with death notification, and processing of benefits. These difficulties have meant that military widows have maintained an ambiguous relationship with the military and has constrained their individual/collective

[16] Emphasis Mine

autonomies. Evident however, is the pattern of coping among the widows. Like the widows of the Nigerian civil war, and the ECOMOG operations, Nigerian Army widows have supported themselves, and relied on other complementary support provided by NGOs, and the Nigerian Army Wives Officers Associations, and the Military Widows Associations (MIWA). The next sections look at the wives and widows' associations in the Nigerian Military.

4.4 THE NIGERIA ARMY OFFICERS WIVES' ASSOCIATION (NAOWA) AND SUPPORT TO MILITARY WIDOWS

The Nigeria Army Officers Wives Association (NAOWA), a philanthropic and non – governmental organization, is the foremost association of wives of serving commissioned officers of the Nigeria Army[17]. As stated earlier, it is one of the wives' associations of the three-armed services of the Nigerian Military. The others are the Nigerian Navy Officers Wives Association (NOWA), and Nigerian Airforce Officers Wives Association (NAFOWA). Collectively, they are known as the Defense and Police Officers Wives Association[18], with an inclusion of the Police Officers Wives Association (DEPOWA). Established shortly after the Nigerian civil war, DEPOWA, initially known as Joint Officers' Wives Social Services (JOWSS), and later, Joint Armed Forces and Police Officers' Wives Consultative Committee (for purposes of fostering unity among the officers' wives of the armed forces and the police), served as a collective umbrella for officer's wives in the Nigerian military[19]. The Association provided welfare and humanitarian services to military and civilian casualties of the war.

NAOWA was established in 1959 as the Army Wives Association (AWA) when Nigeria was still under British rule and British officers commanded the colonial Nigerian Army. Since inception, and by convention, the association has been led by the wife of the Chief of the Army Staff who is called the President, and this has been sustained as a military tradition[20]. Her tenure is tied to that of the Army Chief, and she ceases to be

[17] According to information on the NAOWA website, membership of the NAOWA is open only of legally married wives of commissioned officers of the Nigeria Army. Commissioned officers are those commissioned either through the Regular Combatant Commission (RC), Short Service Commission (SSC), or Direct Short Service Commission (DSSC)

[18] The DEPOWA also includes wives of commissioned Police Officers of the Nigerian Police Force.

[19] Defence and Police Officers' Wives Association (DEPOWA) was renamed on 26th August 1996. The motto of DEPOWA is "Unity and Dedication"

[20] Beyond the accepted convention and tradition, this is also enshrined in the constitution of the NAOWA (see Babaginda 1988: 67)

President the moment her husband retires or resigns from active military service. Mrs Welby Everald the wife of, Gen Welby Everald, the last British commander of the Nigerian Army, was the first National President of the Association. The first indigenous President of the NAOWA was Mrs Victoria Aguiyi-Ironsi, the wife of the Nigeria's first military Head of State, late Major General Johnson Thomas Aguiyi-Ironsi (Babaginda, 1988). To date, NAOWA has been led by 28 national Presidents at various points in its history[21]. It can be described as a First among Equals club of the most elitist Nigerian women and wives[22].

The emergence of NAOWA is traced to a long history of organisation and association among colonial servicemen and their wives in colonial Nigeria, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s (Pearce, 1983). The need for female cooperation on matters of common interest, and bridging of the gaps of socio-political activities between men and women were the basis for the establishment of these women's groups, such as the Ladies Progressive Club, and the Women's Corona club (Nzemeka, 2015). Existing literature on the function of women's associations corroborate these reasons and make space for the positioning of women's groups within the colonial and post-colonial State in Africa (Steady, 2006, Mba, 1990).

Through their associational outlets, these wives of colonial servicemen under the auspices of the Ladies Progressive Club, and the Women's Corona club, established in the mid-1930s, involved themselves in worthy social and political causes for the colonies. One of these was raising money for the World War II War Relief Fund, and providing welfare services for women and children in the colonies (Callaway, 1987:11, 218; Pearce, 1983). Wives of colonial military personnel, and their Nigerian counterparts in the colonial Nigeria Army formed the Army Wives Association (AWA), which later became the NAOWA was modelled along the same pattern.

The NAOWA was established to ''to foster the bond of friendship, promote cordial relationship and enhance unity among Nigerian Army Officers Wives'' (Babaginda

[21] Of its past presidents, the most influential remains the late Mrs Maryam Babaginda, the wife of Nigeria's military President from 1985-1993.
[22] A similar description may also be given to wives of other military, para-military and political office holders in Nigeria. However, that of the Army is central and critical because of the roles the Nigeria Army has played and continue to play in the military and political life of the Nigerian state.

1988:63). As a military wives' association, the meanings of comradeship, and camaraderie found in the military life resonates within the organisation. It therefore warrants its description as ‘‘a forum for wives of officers to achieve a sense of social communion’’ (Babaginda 198.8:63). The association aims to encourage the participation of women in the Nigerian Army barracks in social and developmental activities, welfare measures, and the general upliftment of Nigeria army barracks. The Association also promotes the rights of women and children the reduction of poverty through education, health, economic skills, and activities. Among its objectives are the organizing of self-help projects, vocational training, maternal, and family planning clinics, and social welfare programmes for its members and their families in every way possible. (NAOWA, nd).

As an association, NAOWA is described as “the most powerful women's organisation in the country (Amadiume, 1996). Its name change from AWA, which was described as “bland and non-descript” to NAOWA was motivated by the need for a national outlook and identity as the AWA's impact was not strongly felt within the larger Nigerian society in the late colonial and early post-colonial periods, because the Nigerian Army still had its colonial Army personnel and most of the association's activities was confined to the barracks (Babaginda 1988:67). In order for the Association to achieve its other objectives, it was necessary to bridge the gap between the barracks and the town (Babaginda 1988). Consequently, it became more engaged with Nigerian society, especially during the civil war and periods of military rule, and this was a way of the military extending its power and influence (Mama, 1998; 1995). Its post-civil war President, Mrs David Ejoor (1972-1975) raised funds to support the association from both government and other charitable individuals. Above all, its early success were attributed to the generous support it received regularly from the military, as it was the first attempt at bringing together officers‘ wives as a group (Babaginda, 1988:65; Nzemeka, 2015).

The NAOWA has a functioning administrative secretariat headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria's capital. The National President is being assisted in the management of the Association by executives. The Association had branches throughout the Army divisions, brigades, and commands across the country. The hierarchy of the association is replicated at all levels of command up to battalion level in a military

organogram fashion. At the divisional level, the wife of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) of a particular Army Division was the Divisional President of the Association, and she was assisted by coordinators. As a corporate non-profit organization, NAOWA raised funds from membership dues, public good will and philanthrophy, and social enterprises operated by the association (Babaginda, 1988). The association operates different social enterprises, including primary and secondary schools, post-tertiary institutions, shopping malls, and event centres.

Membership of NAOWA is closed to only wives of commissioned Nigerian Army Officers. While this closed membership of NAOWA may have helped to solve the problem of marginalization faced by wives of indigenous officers against wives of colonial military officers in the early years of its establishment, the initial colonial arrangement that accommodated all wives of colonial Army servicemen regardless of rank or status has not been replaced (Nzemeka 2015). The colonial marginalisation was exchanged for the same stratification maintained by Army wives of commissioned officer post-independence. It was a carryover of colonial practice under a different strategy and nomenclature. Essentially, the move to (re)establishes and concretize the association was to serve the elite interest of wives of military officers over wives of non-commissioned officers.

The social image and identity of NAOWA was more pronounced during both the period of military rule in Nigeria, where Army wives were seen as an extension of their husband's offices, representing him and reproducing his "militariness'' (Babaginda 1988:35; Mama 1998:6). This militarization of military women is not only peculiar to Nigeria, and is replicated in other militaries where a military wife's husband's rank was seen as a status symbol, where military wives were expected to perform certain roles and expectations, and live up to the model of the "good military wife" (Cynthia Enloe, no date; Enloe, 2019; Oliver, 2020). Through this iterative process, they have become militarized individually and collectively through their contribution to the institution (Macmillian, 1984). The theme of their militarization resonate with global and local literature on how the military wife has been incorporated within the military institution (Enloe, 2000; Jervis, 2011; Baaz & Verweijen, 2017).

From been regarded as dispensable camp followers, military wives have proven their material usefulness to the military institutions in inestimable ways by providing them

with a vast supply of efficient and cheap labour (Enloe, 1988). At one spectrum of their usefulness there is their unpaid volunteer jobs and their adherence to militarized notions of femininty and soldiering, and at the other end is in the sense of reproducing certain social hierarchies both within and outside the military institution. The reliance of militaries on women to perform social stratification, as suggested by Enloe, is worth restating in part; [...] “Militaries have counted on military officers wives to look down on the wives of enlisted men, and on all military wives to look down on women working in the discos around a military base’’ (Enloe 2000:viii, Enloe, n.d.).

The “looking down” of military officer’s wives on the “wives of enlisted men”, is a universal trend (Hyde, 2015:101-104). In the United States Army, the class differences between Army Officers wives and Junior Enlisted Wives emanated from one, the military construction of these categories, two; the military separation of officers and enlisted men. Harell (2000; 2003) noted that this separation dates to the early years of the U.S. Army, and it has by implication impacted on the manner of relationship among these groups of wives, both at inter-personal and inter-group levels within the family readiness group system.

Similarly, these class distinctions were prominent in the self-governing of Nigeria Army wives. They were much heightened during the years of military rule in Nigeria where officers held political positions and appointments. Accordingly, wives of army officers who held these offices assumed and were equally accorded high social status within and outside the military bases. They were exposed to political opportunities that were previously uncommon to officer’s wives. These privileges set off chains of reactions that shaped the relationship between wives of officers and wives of NCOs. It created a feeling of marginalisation among the wives of other ranks living in the bases, and some wives attributed their exclusion to their husband’s social status within the military organogram (Nzemeka, 2015). Also, the creation of social stratification by officer’s wives in the Nigeria Army drastically reduced the participation of wives of other ranks insignificant in group activities in barracks. Attempts by wives of other ranks to establish the Soldiers Wives Association had not materialised at the return to democracy in 1999, unlike the Navy and the Airforce which maintained —Wives of Ratings Association and —Wives of Airmen Association for wives of non-commissioned officers (Nzemeka, 2015). It was only in 2014, during the tenure of Mrs

Cajetan Ihejerika, the National President of NAOWA, that this separate association for wives of enlisted soldiers named Nigerian Army Soldiers Wives Association (NASWA) became successful.

Despite the exclusivity of membership, NAOWA has carried out philanthropic activities that have impacted on both military and non-military members of the Nigerian public. Beginning from the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, when the association assisted in organizing fundraising for the war efforts, providing food and daily supplies to the warfront, taking care of the sick and wounded combatants during and after the war, and comforting bereaved families. This has meant that the association has achieved its vision of a "partner in progress" to the Nigeria Army. This was attributable to the support it received from the leadership of the Federal Military Government during and after the civil war (Babaginda 1988; Nzemeka 2015).

In post-civil war Nigeria, the association has continued its charitable activities to soldiers' wives by establishing different empowerment and skill acquisition programmes for soldier's wives. It has also supported widows of slain Nigerian soldiers who died in the Boko Haram insurgency. It has donated food items, enrolled widows of slain soldiers on skills acquisition programmes, and partnered the Nigeria Army on welfare of army families (NAOWA, 2016, 2019, n.d.-d). NAOWA's activities to the non-military publics is in its establishment of schools, health centres and other public projects. Through these projects, NAOWA successfully merged the barracks and the town. The foundations of these public responsibility project were, for the most part, laid during the tenure of the late Mrs Maryam Babaginda, as the NAOWA President[23] and it has continued by the successive NAOWA Presidents. The NAOWA, as an appendage of the military, is limited in its kinds of social advocacies and activities. It has also been regarded as an exclusive social club for wives of senior military officers While this claim is not be supported by the literature, it cannot be dismissed (Nzemeka, 2015). Nonetheless, NAOWA has shown the ways army wives play supportive and symbolic roles within and outside the military. They are no longer regarded as 'gossip outlets', but as groups where members can gain organizational experience, participate in group activities and contribute to national development (Babaginda, 1988).

[23]The Late Mrs Maryam Babaginda was President of NAOWA between 1984 and 1985, and First Lady of Nigeria from 1985-1993 when her Husband, Ibrahim Babaginda was the Military President of Nigeria

Borne out of a colonial necessity, the Association has played critical roles in providing social support to war widows of the Nigerian Army in different internal and external operations, as it has been explained in previous sections. Despite its challenges of membership exclusivity, limited reach and advocacy, funding, and support, the Association has remained in the frontlines of assisting Nigerian Army widows affected by various security operations.

4.5 MILITARY WIDOWS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA (MIWA)

The Military Widows Association of Nigeria (MIWA) is a non-profit and non-governmental association of the wives of fallen heroes in Nigeria that provides support and assistance for war widows in Nigeria. It was established in 2015, midway into the Boko Haram conflict. It is different from the various officer's wives Associations that caters only to wives of serving officers in the respective services in the Nigerian military. The association's slogan is Life after Our Husbands'' (MIWA, nd).

There are more than five thousand registered members of the group (Obiezu, 2020). Membership cuts across the three Army, Navy, and Airforce services of the Nigeria Military, and led by widows of middle to high-ranking officers. The association does not only include war widows of the Boko Haram insurgency, and other military operations, but also but open to non-war military widows. Membership of the association is also open to close relatives, sisters, and mothers of slain soldiers.

The Association's aims and objectives are centred on the provision of assistance to widows, scholarships, and financial grants to individuals, in other to ensure their financial independence. It also assists members who have challenges reintegrating back into civilian life, and those who have challenges processing their late husband's entitlements (Ojo, 2019). It advocates for better welfare and treatment of members who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the country. Not much is known about how the MIWA has engaged the relevant army/military authorities in these areas. While it is not an appendage of the Nigerian military, the Association does not wholly enjoy what Enloe, (1988;83) describes as "a cultural and bureaucratic distance" from the military, as the military retains some oversight over its activities, as will be explained in the findings chapter.

MIWA has supported itself and its members through gifts, donations and grants from the Army officer's wives' association, NAOWA, the Defence and Police Officers Wives Association, DEPOWA, the Ministry of Defense and other charitable organizations and individuals. These military and non-military NGOs and corporate bodies have supported wives of fallen soldiers in different empowerment and skill acquisition programmes, and during the annual Armed Forces Remembrance Day memorial held in honour of fallen soldiers (Erunke 2017; Okechi 2019; Ojo 2019; Obiezu 2020a, Oremule, 2020). The support provided by the MIWA has been hindered by its limited recognition, agency and resources across the Nigerian military and civil society communities. Chapter 7 of the study provides further information on the activities, function, and challenges of MIWA.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the broad context of widowhood in Nigeria, the impacts of war on Nigerian military widows, and the roles of the wives/widows' associations in the Nigerian Army, and military. The similar and different ways in these wars affected women were explained in the chapter. There is a similitude in the various coping and survival strategies employed by the women across the various wars. They have relied on self-sustenance activities, family, and other support groups to mitigate the impact of the loss. Likewise, the wives and widows' associations also played significant roles across time and space. The NAOWA supported war widows during the Nigerian Civil War, the Peacekeeping Operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and has done so for military wives widowed by the Boko Haram conflict. Likewise, the Military Widows Association (MIWA) has also supported military widows, however, it is faced with challenges as explained in Chapter 7. However, before moving on to the discussion of the findings, it is necessary to outline the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

METHODOLOGY

5.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter explains the methods adopted in this study. The rationale for adopting a qualitative approach using research methods such as semi-structured, in-depth interviews to understand how war-widows are coping and surviving, as opposed to quantitative questionnaires or surveys, are justified. The detail of how the research was conducted – in terms of negotiating and gaining access to the women, the details of participants, the interview processes, ethical considerations, the positionality of the researcher, and overall reflection on the data collection process are explained. The chapter is divided into five sections which include: the rationale for a qualitative approach, the research design, ethical considerations, limitations of the study and a reflection on the fieldwork process.

5.2 METHODOLOGICAL RATIONALE

This study adopts the interpretive method of qualitative inquiry that examines how people make sense and meaning of their own realities. Qualitative research, according to Berg, (2001:7) properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. They provide a means of getting unquantifiable facts about how people make sense and give meaning to their daily lives. It is within the confines of the social relatability of qualitative research and its capacity to provide rich descriptive and interpretive accounts of social realities, as opposed to the quantitative research that is statistical in nature that necessitated its use in this study.

Interpretive research, which has its history in hermeneutics, rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed by human actors, and thus there is no objective reality that can be discovered and replicated by others. Interpretivism. as a method is concerned with revealing, making meaning and sense of multiple (subjective) realities (Walsham, 1994, 1995). It is inductively driven through interaction between the researcher and the researched, which differs from positivism, which is deductive in nature and seeks to find an objective reality. The meaning made from social realities

is what becomes of interest to the researcher who is occupied with interpreting and describing the experiences of the researched subjects (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2009).

Similarities exist between the interpretive, and the social constructivism method of qualitative research, as they are both concerned with understanding how humans socially construct and make meaning of the lived experiences of their everyday. This everyday life in turn presents a reality that is subjectively meaningful as thoughts, words and action to these active participants in their own world (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The subjectivity of these meanings revolve around their diverse and complex nature, as well as the sociocultural and historical realities of the individual participants (Creswell, 2018; 2007). These two approaches are generally suitable for understanding and deriving meaning from human experiences.

The interpretivist epistemology is used in this work to describe and derive meaning from the lived experiences of widows of Nigerian Army soldiers whose husbands died in the war against Boko Haram. The method seeks to portray their strategies of social support, coping, and survival, as well as their everyday life as war widows. The information is derived from data generated from interviews with the participants s who are regarded as co-producers in the knowledge and meaning making process.

5.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

Kothari (2004:32) described research design as a “conceptual structure within which research is conducted. It constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data”. The study was designed as descriptive research because it is aimed at detailing the experience of coping and survival for war widows of fallen Nigerian Army soldiers in the Boko Haram insurgency. The descriptive research design adopted in this study is derivative of the qualitative research method that underpinned the research.

As part of the research design strategy, the study was subjected to the quality assurance techniques that are adopted in qualitative research inquiries. These techniques are either the trinity of validity, reliability, and generalizability (Kvale,1994) or trustworthiness, credibility, dependability, transferability (Lincoln & Guba 1985, in Kvale, 1996). These were required as the study is aimed at making meaning out of the

experiences of war widows of the Nigerian Army. As such, there was the need to provide a concrete and detailed description of their experiences. This was even more important as there are very few studies on African military wives and families and their experiences of deployment, post deployment and death (Mama, 1998; Nzemeka, 2015).

While there have been several studies devoted to the Nigerian military involvement in the Boko Haram insurgency, there has been no study that has examined how both wives and families of troops have coped with deployment, and post deployment stresses, or how the widows of fallen soldiers are surviving and supporting themselves after the loss of their husbands. The use of qualitative research strategies that engages the researcher and the subject and seeks to make meaning of the social reality of the participant would help to answer the questions in this study. Several scholars indicate that this is the most appropriate and suitable research method to elicit the perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of people (Berg, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

5.3.1 SITE OF THE STUDY

The main sites for the study were Lagos, Abuja, and Maiduguri in the Southern and Northern parts of Nigeria. However, data for the study was also collected from multiple sites in Jos, Bauchi, Osogbo and Ilorin in both Southern and Northern parts as well. Some of them were conducted in person or virtually through phone interviews. The Federal Capital Territory, Abuja was chosen for the administrative purposes of the research, as it housed the headquarters of the military echelon involved in the counter-insurgency operations. Also, Abuja is the headquarters of the military wives' associations of the three services (Army, Navy, and Airforce), and the Military Widows Association.

While the main research sites were initially chosen because of their primary contribution to the war efforts in terms of personnel and logistics, fieldwork realities informed the need to have diverse sites of data collection. This was because getting both official and unofficial access to the widows was a herculean task. This was expected given that the research was on the military, which is a traditionally closed institution. Also, not all the widows resided in the barracks after their husband's death,

as they had to vacate the barracks after their entitlements were paid, either in part or full, by the military authorities. The interviews conducted with most of the participants were held in safe locations outside the premises of the military bases. The reason for this was to protect myself as a civilian outsider conducting research on military members (Soeters, Shields & Rietjens, 2014) and also to protect the safety and privacy of my participants, especially those who still remained in the barracks. The other interviews that were conducted without my physical presence through phone calls. These means of conducting interviews are accepted as data collection methods.

5.3.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS

The participants for this study were mainly widows of Nigeria Army soldiers whose husbands died in the theatre of operations in north-east Nigeria. While there are also widows from other services of the Nigeria Armed Forces whose husbands died in the war, the study was restricted to the Nigeria Army because of its visibility and key role in the counter-insurgency operations. The fieldwork realities however necessitated some adjustment to the selection process, as interviews were conducted with not only non-Boko Haram widows, but also wives of serving military personnel who are familiar with the challenges faced by military widows.

Including these set of participants in the study did not only fulfil a methodological imperative that allows for other military widows to be accommodated within the study, but it also provided an avenue to understand how wives of serving personnel understand the potentiality of widowhood in the face of an ongoing counter-insurgency operation. Likewise, interviews were also conducted with widows whose husbands were killed in the battlefront but died of health complications that possibly became aggravated during deployment.

Militaries across the world are highly structured and hierarchical institutions with two broad categories of personnel (i.e., the commissioned and the non-commissioned or enlisted officers). Likewise, participants for this study are widows of these commissioned or non-commissioned officers. In addition to the criterion of being a war widow, other criteria for selecting participants for the study was the number of years in which they had been widowed. Of particular interest were women who had been

widowed for more than two years. This was because of the need to reduce the possibilities of retraumatizing them to the barest minimum (Legerski & Bunnell, 2010).

As it is with global militaries where the troop to officer ratio is structured at 4:1 (i.e., 4 enlisted soldiers to one commissioned officer), so also is the case with the Nigerian military where there are more enlisted soldiers as compared to commissioned officers. This also reflected in the participants interviewed for the fieldwork as the study had more widows of non-commissioned officers than those of commissioned officers. The dichotomy in the categorization of military spouses would contribute to the literature on social disparities among military spouses, and how these differences are either perpetuated or erased in event of spousal loss. By delineating across military status, I could explain how military rank and position facilitate and influence access to financial benefits. Studies have shown how the positions and ranks of military spouses reinforce hierarchies of power and privilege in military life and culture, even among the women (Harell, 2000).

Both snowball and purposive sampling were used to select participants (Patton, 2002). Snowballing has the advantage of engendering trust where one participant puts one into contact with another person. (Rowland Atkinson & Flint, 2001). The sensitive nature of the study necessitated the use of this technique. However, the method of selecting participants can also be purposeful and random. Through purposive snowballing, I was able to recruit participants for the study by stating that I wanted the widow of either an officer or a soldier, depending on their own social category.

While the study was about Nigerian Army war widows of the Boko Haram insurgency, the participants were not restricted to the widows alone. There was a need to capture more diverse audiences of participants that are of importance to the study. These included the Nigerian Military Pensions Board, the Nigeria Army, the Nigeria Army and Defence Officer's wives' associations, media and civil society groups. Formal requests for interviews were written to the respective headquarters of the Nigerian Army, the Nigeria Army and Defence officer's wives associations. Interviews were also conducted with security and defence correspondents, and civil society groups that work on matters relating to military veterans, families, and security sector reforms. Participants from the media and civil society sectors were also recruited through purposive and snowballing sampling methods.

5.3.3 DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The study aimed at describing the coping and social support strategies of widows of Nigerian Army whose husbands died in the theatre of operations. In-depth qualitative interviews were used for data collection. This was necessary because the study was aimed at describing and making meaning out of the broad experiences of Nigerian military war widows of the Boko Haram insurgency. The sensitive nature of the study that took into consideration the individual experiences of the women necessitated a one-on-one interpersonal interview with them. This approach provided the conversational space to comprehensively explore the experiences of participants, the meaning they attached to it, and the opportunity to investigate 'unanticipated' areas of inquiry (Musa, 2018).

In total 29 interviews with widows, and 14 interviews with members of the media, civil society and military communities were conducted for the study. I conducted focus group interviews with the widows in Maiduguri. However, this group discussion was conducted informally as all the participants were in the same space, and all the participants were widows of noncommissioned officers (NCOs). While it provided me with a space to ask questions, and triangulate responses, I also had one – on – one conversations with the women. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to a 1 hour, and they were conducted at the personal residences and market stalls of the participants, church premises within the barracks, etc. Though studies have put the minimum number of participants for a qualitative study at fifteen because it is expected that saturation of data would be achieved at this level (Guest & Johnson, 2006), interviews were conducted until saturation was reached. This study took into consideration Morse's (1995:147) comments that succinctly "saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work," even though, "there are no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size required to reach saturation."

As a study that investigates the lived experiences of two different classes of women who are united by circumstance, the study captures their narratives in ways that ensures balance and representation.

Table 2: Profile of study participants

s/n	Participants	Profile
1	Nigerian Army Widows	Wives of junior-mid ranking commissioned and non-commissioned officers (typically, Army Captains and Majors for commissioned officers, and Sergeant, Corporal, Lance-corporal, and Staff Sergeant for non-commissioned officers.
2	Members of the Military Community	Serving and Retired Officers (Staff Sergeant, Brigadier General, (Army), Flight Lieutenant, Wing Commander, and Air Commodore (Airforce)
3	Civil Society Participants	Security and Defense correspondents, and heads of civil society organisations

Table 3: Breakdown of study participants

Participants	Commissioned Officers (COs) Widows	Non-Commissioned Officers Widows
Nigerian Army Widows	10	19

In terms of gender, women were more represented in the study than men. This is obvious given the nature of the study. Male participants in this study belonged to members of the civil society, and military communities. In terms of ethnicity and religion, I was able to recruit a fair number of participants who belonged to the three main ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa) in Nigeria, and practiced either of the two main religions (Christianity and Islam). All these categories were instrumental in the collection of data for the study.

5.3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data obtained for this study was inductively coded and analysed thematically. The Atlas.ti 8 computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) was used for coding and analysing the data. Codes and Themes are important aspects of the data analysis process. Codes are the smallest unit of data analysis that help to assign "symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Braun, 2015; Saldana, 2016), and through the process of coding, the useful segments of data that helps to give answers to the research questions are highlighted.

Themes in qualitative research are the patterns of information in the data that describes and organizes the different aspects of the data collected. Thematic analysis (TA) is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning ('themes') within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). These themes are developed by the codes which are described as the building blocks for themes. Thematic Analysis is widely utilized because of its flexibility, and its usefulness in investigating "complexities of meaning within a textual data set" (Guest, Macqueen & Namey, 2012). This is because of its broad methodical framings that is tied to how ''individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings''(Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The approach fits in with the study as it examines the lived experience of the women within the broader social context of war. Thematic Analysis can be used for a range of analyses, both inductive (data-driven), such as this study, and deductive (theory-driven) studies, as well as large and small datasets – from case study research with 1-2 participants to large interview studies with 60 or more. The six phases of thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006): getting familiarized with the data; coding the dataset; generating themes; reviewing the themes collected; defining and naming the themes; and producing the report are also used in this study. The themes that emerged from this study include death benefits, entitlements, and compensations, empowerment, social support, and coping strategies. These were inductively generated and refined during the coding and transcription processes.

5.3.5 ETHICAL CLEARANCE

Ethical clearance and approval for this study was obtained from the Stellenbosch University Social Behavioural Educational Research Ethics Committee (SBE: REC). The process of securing ethical clearance began at the level of the department ethics clearance committee (DESC). The study was a medium risk and sensitive study, as it focused on Nigerian military, and members of the military community. The process of obtaining clearance involved two rounds of reviews and comments from the ethics committee given the sensitive nature of the study. I had to provide the necessary letters of support from the military NGO and the Military Widows Association I was working with. Likewise, I also had to ensure that key considerations in doing research of this nature namely, voluntary, informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and adherence to COVID-19 protocols.

Consent was obtained orally from all participants after they read, or the content of the consent form was read and explained to them, and clarifications were made. Due to the sensitive nature of the research and the need to protect participants from unforeseen risks, their names were not required or recorded. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study. There was limited need for psychological support among my participants. This did not arise during the period of interviews. On the contrary, the participants were open to sharing their experiences. However, I provided packed food stuff at the end of the interviews as an appreciation for their time, and experience shared. Furthermore, my snowball contacts assisted me in identifying participants at minimal risks of psychological support, in that, they referred to me women whose husbands died in the early periods of the conflict, rather than, recently widowed women who would have needed counselling and psychological support after the interviews.

Pseudonyms were used for each participant. Interviews conducted physically were conducted in spaces that were free for both the researcher and the participants. This helped in ensuring my safety and security. Participants were assured of their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality as the interviews were conducted on a one-on-one basis. They were assured that all audio recordings of the interviews would not be given to anyone but would be saved on an encrypted and password-protected device. These were consequently deleted after the interviews were transcribed into text. All

information capable of identifying participants, such as their names, names of their husbands, and their ranks/unit they last served, as well as other confidential information, were not reported in this study.

5.4 REFLECTIONS ON THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Reflexivity is a self-conscious evaluation of the entire research exercise from the lenses of the researcher and is considered vital to the integrity and trustworthiness of the research process (Finlay, 2002). One of the theoretical underpinnings for reflexivity is social constructionism, which is concerned with how individuals make sense of their life-world (Finlay, 2002). Additionally, reflexivity presents opportunities of thinking about the components of the research process, such as access, power, and the dynamics of the researcher- researched relationship. Reflexivity is both a process and a tool, relevant for all stages of a research project – from outlining its parameters, asking questions, and stating the curiosities about a particular issue, conducting fieldwork, and of course, in drawing conclusions, understandings, and recommendations. It is also an important part of how the researchers engage with participants, build trust, and discuss the research with those who may be involved in the research or its aftermath. Thus, in practising reflexivity, researchers may consider how their identities (gender, class, age, ethnicity, and so on) affect the research process in its entirety (Chilmeran & Hedström, 2021). This section reflects on the data collection process in this study. It evaluates the difficulties of doing research in/on military communities, navigating gatekeepers, conducting interviews with the key participants, and appraises these conversations considering the challenges faced by the widows.

5.4.1 DOING RESEARCH IN/ON MILITARY SPACES

I begin my reflection on the data collection process by embarking on a foray into the how of researching military spaces and geographies. This excursion will foreground an important aspect of this chapter, as it helps to reveal how my case study either reiterates and complements existing research or differ from what is already known. It follows the existing tradition of writing about the researcher's awareness, assessment, experiences, challenges and insights, and how this has influenced what is known and

what was contributed to the existing study (Finlay, 2002; Salzman, 2002; Chilmeran & Hedström, 2021).

What does it mean to research the military? The distinct characteristics of military organisations as closed, total and regimented institutions pose unique challenges for researchers interested in understanding their internal dynamics, life world and experiences. These characteristics notwithstanding, Soeters, Shields & Rietjens (2014) make a crucial point that researching the military is both a valuable and difficult task. Its core duty, the orchestration of sanctioned violence, has far-reaching impacts and consequences on social dynamics. Equally, dealing with its complex hierarchical culture, gatekeeper relations, access for both insiders, outsiders, and those in-between (i.e. insider-outsiders), and doing research that is in line with military organisational priorities or that furthers national security interests are some of the peculiar challenges that arise when researching the military (Higate & Cameron, 2006; Soeters *et al*., 2014; Rech *et al*., 2016; Catignani & Basham, 2021).

Studies on the military are not shorn of the methodological debates between the positivist (quantitative) and the interpretive (qualitative) methods. The genesis of these can be traced to the arguments that early studies on the military leaned toward the engineering model, which focused on producing knowledge that is of organizational priority and benefit to the military; as compared to the enlightenment model that to seeks to advance scholarly knowledge of the military (Janowitz, 1969; Higate, 2006; Catignani & Basham, 2021). Despite the advancements in military research, the quantitative methods is still regarded as favourable to military policymakers because of its seemingly definitive and predictive results (Jenkings *et al.*, 2011). Also, the uncertainty about using observational data among military officials and the constraints of access, gatekeeping and other institutional barriers has sustained the preference for quantitative approaches over qualitative methods in military researches (Rech *et al*., 2016; Catignani & Basham, 2021). Nonetheless, the qualitative method is still most preferred when researching certain aspects of the military life, particularly those that touch on its greedy and total nature, or involve its members lived experience of their military service.

Researching the Nigerian military, like other militaries, is a herculean task, regardless of the research methods adopted. This is because the Nigerian military is a closed

institution that restricts access to data, and information. This unwritten policy has accounted for a paucity of primary data research on the Nigerian military. Research themes that warrant extensive primary data research, such as mutiny of soldiers, for instance, rely heavily on secondary data sources because of their sensitive nature, and inability to interview affected soldiers (Ikem *et al.*, 2022). Studies on the civil war, for instance, were written by the active participants themselves, and this had their own shortcomings. Research on civil-military relations and human rights violations in the post-military era have also not sought to interrogate the military's perspective of these issues, from the lenses of the military echelon. Studies on Boko Haram have also followed a particular pattern, however, recent studies on the experiences of Nigerian soldiers in the Boko Haram conflict, has provided an interpretive meaning into the soldier's experiences of the war (Oriola, 2021).

Qualitative studies on the Nigerian military that has have relied on extensive first hand primary data of the participants, both soldiers and officers alike benefitted from the statuses and positionalities of the researchers in the Nigerian military. One of these is Dogo's (2017) study that examined gender integration in the Nigerian Military following the opening of the combat course for the females in the Nigerian military. Access to military participants was facilitated based on the researcher's status as a faculty member at the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA), Kaduna.

Another study, by Nzemeka, (2015) based on interviews with serving and retired military officers, military wives, civilians who lived and worked in the barracks, and military archival records obtained from Nigerian academic and military institutions, looked at the social, political, and economic history of Nigerian military wives from 1905-1999. Archival data, and other secondary sources, such as photo albums, and military magazines utilized in this study fill the methodological gap occasioned by the absence of documentary evidence on military wives in the period under study. More importantly, the researcher's privilege of working with the military facilitated his access to both primary and secondary data for the study.

The inability of researchers to gain research access into the Nigerian military has recycled research conducted on the institution. Studies on the Nigerian military, which can be divided into two main periods, the military (1966-1999), and the post-military period (1999-date) has produced two streams of studies on Nigerian military. The

military era focused on the Nigerian Civil War, Coups, countercoups, military intervention in politics and Nigeria's involvement in peace support operations, whereas the subject of research in the post-military era have focused on civil-military relations, defence budgeting human rights abuses etc (Oriola, 2021). These are the predominant areas of research into the Nigerian military. Other recent additions are gender composition of the Nigerian military (Dogo, 2017), the strategy of battlefield operations (Omeni, 2017; Oyewole, 2018; Oluyemi, 2020b; Onuoha *et al*., 2020), human resource management (Dambazau, 2016), military wives and families (Nzemeka, 2015), defence budgeting and transparency (Transparency International, 2017). Nonetheless, qualitative studies on the Nigerian military that emphasizes a sociological study of the military's has been inhibited by a lack of access into the military. The next section explains how I gained access to research sites and participants for the study.

5.4.2 GATEKEEPERS, AND GAINING ACCESS TO THE NIGERIAN MILITARY

A key component of qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory studies is getting access to gatekeepers and participants. The snowball sampling technique, used for accessing hard to reach, hidden populations and sensitive subjects, (Atkinson & Flint, 2001; Sydor, 2013) was adopted in trying to gain access to military and civil society gatekeepers, and to the study's respondents. Sydor (2013) makes a distinction between hard to reach, hidden populations and sensitive subjects. Hard to reach populations are so described because they are difficult for researchers to access. In this case, the military community is one given the difficulties of access. The study's core respondents are also hard to reach populations because of their military identity and status. This social status as military /war widows positions them as sensitive and politically awkward subjects (Enloe, 2000) While the respondents may not easily fall into the hidden population category, their social identities, and the difficulties of accessing them render such categorization inevitable.

My experience in the field was a practical experience of navigating gatekeepers and using the referral method of recruiting participants. The field research began on 6 December 2020. My first interview was with a defence journalist reporter and consultant, who I made contact, through another colleague. The questions bordered on the challenges faced by the civil society and media in reporting and advocating for

military widows, as well in engaging the military authorities on the concerns of the military veterans and widows' community. Afterwards our conversation, he referred me to a retired Nigerian Airforce veteran who heads a non-profit foundation for military veterans in Abuja, Nigeria. This was my first field contact with the military community. My previous contacts with members of the military were based on my network of friends, and professional colleagues working in the Nigerian civil society space. Through them, I was also able to meet members of the Nigerian civil society working in the Defence and security sectors. Interviews and discussions with them clarified the constraints faced by Nigerian Civil Society in responding to the challenges of Nigerian military widows and other members of the military community affected by the war against Boko Haram.

The meeting with the Airforce veteran paved way for my eventual meeting with the President of the Military Widows Association (MIWA). A context to this will be necessary here. At the point of the preparing for fieldwork, I had made concerted efforts to reach out to leadership of the MIWA. However, efforts to reach them were not successful. This was despite trying to reach them through a partner military-based NGO, who mediated between me and the MIWA. My meeting with the Airforce veteran, was instrumental in accessing the MIWA President. A fortuitous interaction with a retired Army colleague of the Airforce Veteran's resulted into a direct engagement with the Widows Association President. The point of this is to show in practical terms the social dimensions of social networks, capital and power dimensions in using the snowball technique to locate participants (Parker, Scott and Geddes, 2019).

Gaining an (in) direct access to the MIWA, through military NGOs, was not a guaranteed plan in my opinion. The reason for this was because of my perception that participants gotten through the MIWA, for instance, may not be totally open to sharing their experiences because of their relationship with the Association. Also, I did not want to write to the Nigerian Army directly for the same reasons. It is necessary to state here that I knew I had to write letters to the Army, and was advised to do so, but I delayed because I also harboured the same difficulties in getting access to the military. Enumerating the methods adopted in his 2021 article titled, "Nigerian soldiers in the War" against Boko Haram, Oriola noted that no official approval was sought to conduct the research because of concerns that one, the approval may not be granted,

there was the risk of surveillance and self-censorship by the miliary authorities and research participants (Oriola, 2021).

As my fieldwork progressed, I realized the need to reach out to the Nigerian military authorities to corroborate the narratives shared by the women. Albeit I attempted to do this both formally and informally. The informal approach was unfavourable, as I risked impugning the credibility of my research. Moreso, attempts at it had me answering rhetorical questions such as “who sent me”, “who am I working for”, “why I am doing this”, “do the widows tell me say dem get problem”, etc by a senior non-commissioned officer, who I encountered during this process. This engagement further sheds light on the challenges of adopting an enlightenment approach (qualitative) on the military, considering its exploratory, contentious nature, and how they address “soft” issues that are concealed and (in)visible (Catignani & Basham, 2021).

To this end, I contacted a senior officer who I spoke to while preparing for the fieldwork. He introduced me to a colleague, a mid-ranking officer, at the Department of Military Secretary (MS), Nigerian Army. I met his colleague, and again, explained my research, and the steps I have taken so far. He offered to help by making a few calls to the Army headquarters and suggested that I should write a letter to the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), and the Department of Civil Military Relations (DCMA). I did as request and focused on other aspects of the fieldwork.

My relationship and contact with members of the Nigerian civil society community was useful in engaging with military authorities in some ways. I was invited to a workshop on civil-military affairs and civilian protection in Northeast Nigeria by one of the CSO actors I interviewed. This workshop presented the opportunity to meet with serving and retired military officers in the areas of civil- military affairs. One of the officers I met was a senior officer in the DCMA where my letter for request was written to. I introduced myself and my research, to which he mentioned seeing my letter and promised to assist. My letter of request to them was aimed at understanding the scope of their support activities in relation to widows of deceased personnel (whether KIA or MIA). Including other requests, such as meeting with the widows, may have been counter-productive for my research. Moreso, the widows have an autonomous association of their own, named the Military Widows Association of Nigeria (MIWA),

and it was easier for me to go through the association than through the Army institution.

The letter went through the necessary bureaucratic processes. It was also stalled in part by the change of the leadership in the DHQ and NA[24]. After a long period of wait, and protocol, I was able to speak with the Department of Army Administration (DOAA) of the Nigerian Army for my research work. I had lots of expectations going into the meeting, but my expectations were met halfway. One, I expected a conversational interaction with a top officer of the DOAA[25]. Instead, I interviewed a senior NCO in the department, who was, to his credit, and to my own admittance, gave lots of information on the administrative processes that governs the responsibilities of the Nigeria Army to widows and families of deceased personnel.

On the flip side, the meeting was like a question-and-answer session in a journalistic format. At his request, I gave him the questions – and he went through them before we began the sessions. We began the interview, and each question was answered – within their scope, and there was little or no room for further digressions. In instances where I attempted to digress, I was brought back to the issues under focus. I had to do a lot of writing during the interview sessions, and this prevented me from follow-up questions that were brought up in the interviews with the widows. Likewise, I did not make it clear that I had interacted with women. This was deliberate as I did not want to jeopardize any chance of interacting with the military. To this, collaboration, and cooperation with (military)gatekeepers is essential in accessing primary and secondary data on the military became highly relevant, as the power dynamics privileges them (military gatekeepers) with influence over the data collection process (Catignani & Basham, (2021)

[24] There was a change in the leadership of the DHQ and NA. The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), General A. Olonisakin, and the Chief of Army Staff (COAS), Lt Gen T.Y Buratai, were replaced with General L.E.O Irabor (CDS), and the late Lt. Gen Ibrahim Attairu in May 2021.

[25] Prior to our conversation, he had asked me who I wanted to speak with me on my topic. I told him that he is the one who works here, and he can arrange who I can speak with.
While trying to get around the administrative bottlenecks of meeting the DOAA to schedule an interview day, a senior officer who facilitated my access with the DOAA had hinted me of the possibilities of having my interview questions collected and answered prior to my interview, especially when I am interviewing very senior military administrators. While this was not exactly the case in my interview, my questions were perused by my interviewee. a day before the interview,

My session with the Officer in Charge lasted roughly forty-five minutes, and I proceeded to meet his superior at the DPSS, a Brigadier General, who I also had some conversation with. My questions with him were on the nature of support given to families of deceased Army personnel. He also mentioned that aside from the statutory support, personnel in courses (for officers), and intakes (for NCOs) usually contribute to assist the families of their fallen members, whenever necessary. He narrated an instance which happened during the short period of my field work where the personnel in the department contributed funds for the family of a recently deceased service member. The informal nature of non-statutory support was a regular point in our conversations. I was also interested in how bodies were recovered and evacuated, and he did mention that attention was paid to that area of the combat.

Conducting research on the Nigerian military did not require any formal ethics process and approval. What worked, as evident in my case, and earlier validated by Omeni, (2015), in his doctoral study on the Nigerian Military Contribution To Counter-Insurgency (COIN), is the strength and value of personal networks. For Omeni, a fortuitous meeting with the Nigerian Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) at King's College London talk, and later at the Nigerian Defence HQ (DHQ), Abuja, resulted in referrals to senior officers in the Nigerian military hierarchy. This was instrumental to his fieldwork access to the battlefronts in the early years of the Boko Haram insurgency.

My personal network gathered within the field further assisted me in reaching out to the Military Pensions Board (MPB). The duties and responsibilities of the MPB has already been discussed in Chapter 4. I was introduced to the publicity officer of the MPB by a retired Air Commodore of the Nigerian Airforce, whom, as I mentioned earlier, manages a military NGO in Abuja, Nigeria. The publicity officer of the MPB, was, at the time of interview, a Flight Lieutenant in the Nigerian Airforce. Unlike access to the Nigerian Army, which was covered with bureaucratic protocols, access to the MPB personnel, was unfettered. Furthermore, the discussions around the constitutional and extra-constitutional[26] roles of the MPB towards families of service men was elaborated. In addition, I was given permission to use a recording device, cite the publicity officer and official documents of the MPB.

[26] I use extra-constitutional to explain the social and cultural role the board performs an of an arbiter in the sense of other social and cultural roles that the board performsundertakes to meet the members of the

The ins and outs of gaining access to two different departments within the Nigerian military has been explained in this section. From the above, we can see that the strength/ value of personal networks and connections is a reference point when conducting social research on social, political and security institutions in Africa (Marks and Stys, 2019). This personal connection was also relied upon when I met my research participants in the field.

5.4.3 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY, MEETING PARTICIPANTS AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS, AND TRIANGULATING EXPERIENCES

My engagement with the military NGO headed by the Airforce veteran facilitated my first interview with widows of two soldiers of the NCO rank whose husbands died in the war. Discussions with them helped to set the stage for how future interviews were conducted, how I chose my already prepared questions, and elicited follow-up questions in grey areas, cross-checked information, and established the different experiences of the women. For instance, I realized that questions relating to emotions of grief, memory, and remembrance laid at the margins of retraumatization, so I had to paraphrase these questions.

The first interviews gave me a glimpse into the social demographic of my participants. Majority of them were middle aged, having been married for 6 – 10 years. The younger widows had much shorter length of marriages, with some lasting for between 3 – 5 years. They were mostly educated, with some having university degrees. The least educated had a secondary school certificate. These marriages also bore children, from one to three children. There are different categories of women whose husbands died in the war. While some were killed in action, others were missing in action for months and years. In the case of a particular participant, her husband was posted to the warfront, developed health complications and died from them. Another participant's husband was killed by insurgents, and she was not sufficiently informed about the details of the incident. Instead, the Army chose to inform her brother-in-law her, who came to inform her of his death. This instance, and others I encountered during the fieldwork shed light on how the informal methods of casualty notification adopted by the Nigerian Army, and the need to improve these practices and procedures.

The next set of interviews I conducted were with war widows in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State, and epicentre of the Boko Haram conflict. Access to them was facilitated by a Christian charity group that works with widows of the Boko Haram conflict. The discussions were held in a secure location in the city's metropolis for five days. The interviews took the form of focus group discussions; however, attention was paid to each participant narratives and experiences. Though the ethnic identities of the women reflected the ethnic diversity of the Nigerian Army, majority of them spoke in Hausa, a language I am not familiar with. I used my interlocutor, who connected me with the women, for translations. For literate women, we communicated in a mix of English and Pidgin.

At this period, I had made significant progress in the field work, although, I had not obtained access to widows of commissioned officers. I relied on a mix of personal networks and snowball techniques to access widows of commissioned officers. In this regard, I got my first participant through a mutual acquaintance. The acquaintance prepared the groundwork and I only had to reintroduce myself, and the purpose of my research. Our discussions were held on both Phone and WhatsApp. My conversation with her led me to other widows of commissioned officers, who I in turn, communicated with over the phone, via Zoom Video communications and in person, as the situations warranted. The entirety of my fieldwork was conducted in this manner; relying on both military and civilian contacts, who provided access for me within and outside the barracks community. Two of my interviews were conducted in a military church premises, and the personal residence of a serving military spouse. Others were held in a market store of the participant, in which case, I had to support her business, by purchasing a textile material. Another interview was held in the residence of a widow, and I also supported her perfumery business as well. These were the nature of the conversations during the fieldwork.

As earlier mentioned, I was introduced to the President of the Military Widows Association (MIWA) by a retired senior officer in the Nigerian military. While this direct access and personal interaction with the MIWA President was important in my fieldwork experiences, the access did not result in any favourable outcome as we were unable to have a lengthy discussion on the support provided by the MIWA to military widows of the Boko Haram conflict due to her busy schedule. My access to her,

provided me with an opportunity to attend the 2021-Armed Forces Remembrance Day (AFRD) event in Abuja, Nigeria. In a bid to also triangulate my information, I wrote letters to the NAOWA and DEPOWA for assistance in my research, and to hear their perceptions, there was no response from the two Associations during and after the fieldwork.

The fieldwork discussions centered around they accessed their death benefits, and their socio-economic and coping support strategies. In other to fully understand that I asked questions first, about how they were notified about their husband's death, as this is central to how they were able to access the benefits, and their entire coping and social support strategies. Other questions of interests were their interpretation or significance of the war and its deaths; memory and remembrance, and other non-administrative difficulties of accessing their benefits. On the third question, a few women volunteered to give information on how they have experienced different forms of sexual harassment, and how they are often induced by military officials to offer sex in exchange for their benefits. The sensitive nature of this topic limited an extensive discussion around it. Nonetheless, it is a topic that warrants attention and exploration for further research.

With regards to my positionality as a Nigerian male researching on a sensitive topic of widowhood in a conservative Nigerian society, I was able to navigate it due to my social network. My snowball contacts facilitated my access, and thus, it was easy to ask questions. Questions that arose about the intents of my research during the initial stages of field work, was done albeit in good faith, as the NCO that queried me, acknowledged that I was doing it for a good cause, and that I only need to have an official permission from the Authorities. Other questions of "why military widows", that I encountered equally ended with a similar acceptance of the need for my research. Furthermore, the women were eager to share their military widowhood experiences as there was limited attention on their lives and situation. While they did not want media coverage, and attention, they were also ready to discuss under the cover of anonymity and confidentiality which I provided for through my study.

5.4.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study had several limitations. One of them was the challenges of access to the participants. Despite using the snowball technique, it was still challenging to gain access to the widows, as some declined for personal reasons, and others were unwilling to talk about their experiences. Furthermore, the officer- enlisted ratio in the Nigerian Army meant that I had interviewed more widows of non-commissioned officers that of commissioned officers. Widows of commissioned officers were also in the mid-ranking category, and their situation were only marginally different from those of the NCOs. The study would have benefitted from interviews with widows of senior officers, from the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and above for more comparison of experiences.

The study's focus on widows, rather than widowers of the Nigerian Army is another limitation of the study. This limitation, however, is a function of the overtly gendered nature of military institutions, and exclusion of women from combat roles, including in the Nigerian military. While women are represented in the organizational composition of the Nigerian Military, including the Army, their presence has been largely limited to non-combat and other support roles, like medicals, administration, and catering. It was only recently that women were commissioned into combatant roles in the Nigerian military, and the Nigerian Army has an all-female Corps (the Nigerian Army Women's Corps). Male soldiers have been predominantly deployed to the war and there was no available casualty record of military widowers of the Boko Haram conflict.

The paucity of documentary evidence on the experiences of serving wives and war widows in both Nigerian and African militaries was another challenge encountered in the study. As such, there was a heavy reliance on Euro-American and Asian literatures on military wives and widows. Nonetheless, the findings and conclusions of this study are verifiable, generalizable, and reliable as they compare with the findings of other studies and correlate with the few studies on military families in Africa.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed the methodological approach used in this study. The chapter discussed the research design, data collection methods, research sites, and selection of participants, ethical considerations, reflection of the fieldwork process and

limitations of the study. Each of these sections provided ample motivation for choosing the research sites and selecting participants. The reflection section detailed my fieldwork experiences, and how successfully snowballed my way into the lifeworld of my participants, and other members of the Nigerian military and civilian communities. The chapter justified the qualitative interpretive method adopted, as it was crucial in bringing together, and making sense of the different realities of the women. The chapter justified the qualitative interpretive method adopted, as it was crucial in bringing together, and making sense of the different realities of the women.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

6.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The section on military welfare benefits in Chapter Four provided an introductory exposition on the forms of support available for soldiers of the Nigerian Armed Forces. Equally stated were the kinds of support due to soldiers upon death or retirement. This section expands the discourse by examining the kinds of support given by the Nigerian Army to widows of its soldiers who died in combat. It begins by looking at the death benefits available in the Nigerian Army, the duties of Next of Kins (NOKs) in getting the benefits, and the various challenges faced by widows, who are, in most cases, the NOKS, in getting these benefits.

FINDING ONE: THE RESPONSIBILITY OF NIGERIAN ARMY TO WAR WIDOWS

6.1.1 DEATH BENEFITS IN THE NIGERIA ARMY

The Nigerian Army has statutory benefits given to the Next of Kin (NOKs) of its soldiers who died in combat/ active duty. The NOKs are usually relatives of the deceased (either a deceased spouse, adult children, parents, siblings) and trusteeship of the deceased estate in legal terms. Most of the participants interviewed during the fieldwork were the NOKs of their deceased husbands. Therefore, in case of death before final disengagement or retirement, the NOK is entitled to Burial Expenses; Nigeria Army Welfare Insurance Scheme (NAWIS) (a.k.a. Death Benefit); Benevolent Fund; Gratuity (60 months pension); Group Life Assurance Policy claims of the Armed Forces, and an educational sponsorship given to a maximum of four deceased biological/adopted children aged 6 – 18 years up to tertiary institution level (Military Pensions Board, 2019). These benefits are a regular feature in different militaries (Ministry of Defence 2022; The Kenya Defence Forces (KDF) Act (No.25 Of 2012).)

Burial expenses are given to provide immediate assistance and defray any burial costs incurred by the deceased's family. While soldiers killed in active service are mostly buried at the military cemeteries in the military barracks, families of deceased personnel are also entitled to a private burial, if they so wish. However, the tradition is

a military burial in the barracks cemetery or on the frontlines in cases of mass casualties.

The Nigerian Defense Headquarters supervises the Group Life Assurance payment. It is a requirement of Section 5 of the Pensions Reform Act 2014, which provides that "every employer shall maintain a Group Life Insurance Policy in favour of each employee for a minimum of three times the annual total emolument of the employee and premium shall be paid not later than the date of commencement of the cover' (*Pensions Reform Act,2014*,). Going by the provisions of this section, the Defense Headquarters [27]is the chief employer of all personnel in the Nigerian Military is bound by the provisions of the Pensions Act.

Gratuity and Pensions are two statutory payments paid by the Nigerian military to those who have served in the Nigerian Military for ten years and above. Ten years of unbreakable service is the qualifying period for pensions, as specified by the Nigerian Military Pensions Administration Guideline (Military Pensions Board 2019:18). The pension given in case of death in active service (whether killed or missing in action or any active service death) is a bulk pension of five years (60 months). Personnel who served for five years and above, but less than ten years are entitled to gratuity as specified in the Pensions Act, whereas soldiers who have served for ten years and above are paid both gratuity and pensions. These payments are made to the NOK of the deceased soldier[28]. The amounts are computed based on personnel ranks and the existing Armed Forces Pensions/Gratuity Pay Scales approved by the National Salaries, Incomes and Wages Commission (NSIWC).

The Nigerian Army also provides a yearly scholarship for children between the ages of 6 – 18 years in primary, secondary and tertiary schools/institutions. The Administrative Policy sets the age of commencement and termination on Nigerian Army Scholarship. As of the time of conducting the fieldwork, the yearly amounts for the scholarships are N75 000 (approx. $183.00) N125 000 (approx. $305.09), and N300 000 ($732.54) for primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions, respectively.

[27] Members of the Armed Forces are however exempted from making payments to the Contributory Pensions Scheme
[28] Interview with Serving Personnel at the Military Pensions Board, Abuja. February 2020.

This sub-section has explained the statutory benefits awarded to NOKs of soldiers by the Nigerian Army when they die in combat and active duty. These compensation packages are meant to assist and support the families of deceased soldiers who died on active duty. The primary purpose of compensation is to reward members of a state's military for their service and responsibility for losses incurred for and on behalf of the state. By providing these benefits, the Nigerian Army fulfils its moral and ethical obligation to families of its soldiers per global military practices (South Africa Military Pensions Act 1976; Glasson, 1900; Rashid, 2018; Asch, 2019). The next sub-section briefly explains the roles and duties of NOKs in processing the benefits due to them.

6.1.2 DUTIES OF NOKS IN PROCESSING BENEFITS AND ENTITLEMENTS

Soldiers in the Nigerian Armed Forces are required to fill out a performance evaluation form or biodata annually during their period of service. This form contains who the soldier appoints as the primary and secondary NOK. Also, before a soldier is mobilised for deployment[29], they would be required to complete documents for contacting the NOK in case of any eventuality. These documents are to ease the administration of benefits whenever it is required. In instances where the NOK is a sibling of the deceased soldier, they must come along for processing of benefits with the widow of the deceased person if such soldier was married before his death but failed to change his NOK. If the soldier was not married, and the sibling is the NOK, they must come along with either parent of the deceased. When trying to claim the scholarship benefit for a child or children, the NOK, i.e., the widow, would present the school admission letter of the child, birth certificate, etc. The Army authorities would verify carry out due diligence on the claims presented by the claimants[30].

The NOKs are also mandated to follow up with other units, such as the Command Army Records, the Pay Office, and other respective offices required. Documents such as Sworn Affidavit of NOK, Birth Certificate or Declaration of Age of NOK, Eighteen (18) Passport size passport of NOK, Part 2 Order[31], Letter of Introduction of NOK,

[29] Women are represented in the organizational structure of the Nigerian Military, including the Army, since their first recruitments in the 1960s. However, they are excluded from combat roles and deployments. Their presence has been largely limited to non-combat and other support roles, like medicals, administration, and catering.
[30] Discussions from Interviews with military officials, and widows
[31] Part (2) order of death – a gazetted document showing that the soldier has died and has been struck off strength.

Original Death Certificate, Original Letter of Condolence, and Notification of Casualty (NOTICAS) are sent by the NOK for processing the claims and benefits of the deceased personnel. The payment of the entitlements is done at different levels of the military bureaucracy. There are different procedures for claiming the benefits. The processing and payment of burial expenses, and the NAWIS, for instance, are usually done at the mother military unit of the deceased[32]. Other payments like death benefits, gratuities, and educational scholarship scholarships are done at the central headquarters of the Nigerian Army and the MPB, respectively.

In addition to these statutory benefits are other financial incentives given to widows/or families of deceased to compensate for their losses. These monies may be given by State governors and corporate philanthropists (Press Release, 2019; Haruna, 2020). The military authorities and serving course mates of soldiers give some special interventions or allowances to support families. These are non-statutory payments to support the welfare of soldiers' widows[33]. They are announced at commemoration ceremonies, like the Armed Forces Remembrance Day (AFRD), and other special events.

This subsection described the duties of NOKs in accessing their late husbands' compensations and the procedures for getting the benefits, respectively. Also stated were the charitable financial support widows and families may benefit from military and government officials and other corporate individuals and entities. Despite the apparent simplicity of the benefit claims procedure, the actual process of getting the statutory entitlements is filled with challenges for the women. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

6.1.3 CHALLENGES OF PROCESSING DEATH BENEFITS AND COMPENSATIONS

Discussions with the fieldwork participants revealed many difficulties with administering benefits for war widows of deceased soldiers in the Nigerian Army. These difficulties illustrate the peculiar challenges of large bureaucracies that do not always operate efficiently. A major finding in this regard is the centralisation of the

[32] A mother (military) unit is a soldier's first unit, and from where the soldier is paid his salary. This was confirmed in the various interviews with participants, even though the experience may differ individually.
[33] A participant interviewed during the fieldwork acknowledged being a beneficiary of this support.

benefits process. This was stated by both widows and retired military personnel who participated in the study. A military officer in charge of welfare at the Nigeria Army Headquarters, Abuja, admitted that the "over-centralization of the process has caused unnecessary bureaucracy"[34]. He mentioned that while the centralisation was for oversight purposes and the headquarters tried to decentralise the process, much needs to be done to improve the system. The complexities of military bureaucracies in managing this process have been well detailed in the literature and date back decades in various militaries (Shamgar-handelman, 1981; Thomas, 1989; Lanthier, 2004; Beale, 2018).

The women acknowledged that the difficulties in processing the benefits and navigating the military bureaucracy. Often, they do not get the appropriate information or clear guidelines on the process and must do it themselves. The women believed that they are not supposed to be involved with the stress of paperwork and that this should be done by the military unit and that their role should be to review and append signatures, where necessary. Their opinions corroborate the literature on the organisational management of death in the military in other countries (Ben-ari, 2000; Cawkill, 2010; Ministry of Defence UK, 2015). Explaining the challenges they faced, a participant noted:

> "We do all the findings. It will interest you to know that there are women who do not know the existence of some of the packages, which is even their right and for some of us, it is because we are literates. From what we know, some people do not know how to start. Ideally, the unit is supposed to take it upon itself to ensure that the next of kin is captured and to ensure that the next of kin get the entitlement, but it is not like that in practice; one has to keep calling them, keep travelling up and down and a lot of things can go wrong, when one contacts them sometimes, they will send a not completely signed document. It is insulting, but I think we are used to getting insulted in this country, so it is a normal thing[35].

The above quote reveals the intricate difficulties widows go through in getting their husbands' benefits and how they are deprived of organisational support. To mitigate the difficult process, the women used their social networks that involve senior officers to intervene in the processing of benefits. The use of senior officers and other military

[34] Interview with Male Participant in Abuja, February 2021.
[35] Interview with Female Participant in Jos, January 2020.

colleagues of their late husbands to bypass the bureaucratic gridlocks was common strategy used by widows of commissioned officers interviewed. The quote below explains this clearly:

> "I already had my death certificate, but I needed the condolence letter to start processing the benefits, but there was nothing. I called the Chief Clerk and a Colonel who served in my husband's Unit for assistance. I called him and told him I had not collected my condolence letter. He said no. So when he called the persons in charge, he found out that they typed it but did not send it for over three (3) months. He was apologetic and asked me to come down to Lagos to collect it.[36]

The above quote shows other associated challenges with the process, how officials either conveniently neglect their duties or deliberately cause delays that thwart their efforts in getting their entitlements. These are done in covert, systematic and non-threatening ways that require eagle-eyed vigilance on the part of the women.

Payments of benefits and other entitlements rest with the administration and finance departments. The process begins from the last unit of the deceased soldier, which must initiate the entitlements process, and forward the documentation to the different levels of the headquarters of the deceased personnel. For instance, if the deceased belonged to the Infantry Corps, the processing would begin from his last unit, where he was posted to or where his paycheck is being processed from, then to the supervising headquarters, and onwards to the command headquarters for final processing and eventual payment.

Several factors can impact on the payment of benefits and when due. One of these is the severity of the war situation. The reason given could be plausible because, in 2013 – 2014, the massive onslaught of Boko Haram terrorists crippled telecommunication activities in major parts of Northeast Nigeria. Other concerns, such as the recovery of troops' notification of combat deaths to affected families, were also affected by the heightened war period (Oriola, 2021). This was the reason given by one of the participants as the reason for her delayed payments. According to her:

> "In my case, the gratuity was paid after two years and two months. It was that long because it happened in 2013, and then, the Boko Haram issue

[36] Interview with Female Participant in Ogun State, February 2021

> was so hot, and they had to turn off cellular networks in Northeast Yobe. So, as it is, you will deal with the last unit your husband worked with before he died. And even if one had gone to the Army Headquarters (i.e., Abuja), they would tell you that the last Unit had to initiate. It was paid after two years and two months. The group life was paid in December 2017, four years later[37].

In this regard, actions on a soldier's dossier are minuted from the unit level. Work issues such as a soldier's promotion, nomination, demotion, a notice of death, etc., commence from the unit. As such, the effectiveness or otherwise of the unit has impacted how widows have been able to access their benefits. This participant's experience corroborates the initial reference to inefficiency from officials charged with these administrative responsibilities.

> I think why it took long for me to get my benefits was because the Unit (my husband's last unit) did not send any document. A course mate[38] that lost her brother about the same time called me and asked me, "Madam, how far you done come Abuja? (Meaning: have you come to Abuja) I said no. She said that somebody called her that she had to go to Nigerian Army Records in Lokoja and update her late brother's records. and she is just coming from there. She gave me the Chief clerk's number. I called him, and he asked what my husband's name was. I told him. He checked, and he was like, there is no document from his unit- not even death certificate or NOTICAS (Notification of Casualty) that he is dead. So automatically, it is assumed that my husband is still alive and serving. So, there was nothing to record anything. So, during the COVID-19 lockdown, I had to travel to Lokoja and took some of my documents –the NOTICAS, death certificate, condolence letter, birth certificate of next of kin, letter of introduction, affidavit. We needed four copies and seven passports of me, my children, and my late husband. I had to later pay for the documents to be posted to the pay office in Lagos. If I had not gone to update those documents, I would still be thinking that everything is okay. So, the fault is from his unit. They did not send anything[39].

[37] Zoom Interview with Female Participant, February 2021
[38] Wives of personnel whose husbands are of the same course or intake refer to themselves are course mates, in the same way their husbands do.
[39] Interview with Female Participant in Ogun State, February 2021

The experience of the above participant shows how widows are affected by negligence and dereliction of duties within the military hierarchy. In some other instances where the military unit is not complicit, other departments within the military bureaucracy are also implicated. There was the case of a participant who got her burial allowance five years after her husband's death, even though other benefits, like the life group insurance, had been paid. The woman began the process all over again, as the different offices involved could not provide any justifiable reason for the non-payment of the burial allowance, which ordinarily ought to have been paid before the rest.[40]

A serving official at the Military Pensions Board (MPB) pinned these shortcomings on administrative delays from the respective services, as they only work when they get the needed information. The information required to process the benefits are contained in a titled document named "Form Nine". This form contains the details about who has either been retired, discharged, or died in active service. In the case of active-duty death, the NOK is contacted within 48 hours, and the payment process is initiated. Delays may also arise from the need to settle outstanding payments; ascertain assets and liabilities of deceased personnel (where necessary); and other (un)avoidable reasons, such as routine work transfer of clerical personnel etc.

Hence, as pointed out in this section, the first challenge Nigerian Army widows face in getting their benefits when their husbands die in combat. As stated, the women are deprived of and denied the information needed to access the compensations due to them. Additionally, administrative inefficiency contributes to the late payments of these benefits, which can take months, or even years to obtain. The routine nature of military administrative work and the unpredictable realities of the war front play a significant part. However, even where they eventually obtain payments, there are problems.

6.1.4 INCOMPLETE AND NON-SEQUENTIAL PAYMENTS OF BENEFITS

Another challenge faced by the women is the incomplete and non-sequential payments of benefits. These payments are not paid sequentially, as it depends on how fast they are processed, i.e., there is no exact format nor a duration in which the money paid[41]. Almost all the widows interviewed during the fieldwork had payments

[40] Interview with Female Participant in Borno State, December 2020
[41] Interview with Army Personnel at Department of Army Administration, Nigerian Army Headquarters, Abuja, AHQ, February 2021

outstanding, where short-changed, or paid late. When this happens, they often wait for several years to get their remaining payments. One participant explained how she waited for four years to have her father's death benefit paid out. She linked the non-payment of the benefits to corruption within the system[42].

Most women interviewed were waiting for one benefit or the other. For some, it is life insurance; others are waiting for gratuity payments or both. As there are no clear processes to their payments, a widow can be paid the life insurance – usually the largest in sum, without getting the rest. The payments of some entitlements, leaving out others, do not necessarily signify their entitlements have been settled. A participant mentioned that she presented her recent bank statement of account as proof of non-payment when she had issues with the finance unit of her late husband's office over the payment of the burial allowance. Another participant who received the life insurance payout without getting the gratuity was told to "regard herself lucky to have gotten the group life insurance first[43].

The difficulties of getting the group life insurance payout, which is the largest payment, are compounded by three things; the problem between the Nigerian Army and the Insurance Company; the absence of an exact time frame for its payment; and the lack of communication. For example, when asked by journalists, at a media briefing when the insurance payment would be made, the Nigerian Army spokesperson was vague, saying that, "Our (the military) own is to process the payment and once this is done, they (beneficiaries) would be invited to pick up the cheques". Although the identity of this insurance co and media reports have highlighted the unpaid insurance claims (Adeniji and Adepegba, 2021; Taiwo-Obalonye, 2021). The Nigerian Army has also been blamed by () for failing to pay the insurance premium, as one reason why their payments are delayed. However, this is disputed by the widows

One of the participants in this study stated that if that (i.e., the non-payment of premiums) was the case, why would they skip previous years from 2014-2017 and pay other women whose husbands died in 2019 and 2020[44]. The participant also noted that the process of life insurance is a statutory obligation for employers, and the

[42] Phone Interview with Female Participant, February 2021.
[43] Interview with Female Participant in Borno State, December 2020
[44] The exclusion of some women in the insurance payment between 2019 and 2020 was identified in the study.

Nigerian Army as the insurer is obligated to pay it. She narrated her experience to provide context to the insurance claim dilemma. According to her:

> "My husband died in October 2017, then somebody who lost her husband in January 2018 has paid been paid the same insurance — so giving excuses that the Nigerian Army did not pay the premium, from when to when did they stop paying the premium and from when to when did they start paying the premium back. If it was like that, why would they pay out in 2018? That is a fallacy, and I would not want to believe that".

The above quote aptly captures the pain and anger of women who have not been paid their insurance claims. However, there was confusion around the payment of the insurance and whether this is paid by government, rather than the Army, but the Army has to make sure that this is paid on behalf of the entire Armed Forces steered by the Defense Headquarters (DHQ). A participant mentioned it is the Army's responsibility to advocate on their behalf and ensure the insurance payment is processed by the appropriate government department.[45].

The difficulty of accessing benefits is complicated as the women must move off the barracks. They find it more convenient to remain in the barracks, as they can get the right information and pursue their benefits. These difficulties corroborate with existing studies, that identified loss of military housing and connection to the wider military community as part of the dilemmas faced by military widows (Harrington-LaMorie & McDevitt-Murphy, 2011; Steen and Asaro, 2006). Widows who remain in the barracks due to the non-payment of these benefits are often threatened with eviction. When they resist, they are reminded that the Army does not owe them, but the insurance company or the Defence Headquarters (DHQ). Different women echoed this during the fieldwork. A participant who was told to leave the barracks in this manner stated that she was asked to leave even though she is still owed her insurance benefits. According to her:

> "I managed inside the Barracks, but some situation occurred in January 2020. The commanding officer said all the widows must leave the barracks. And I told him that we can't just leave without paying our money because they still owe us some of our money. If they are to pay us, that money is roughly N3 million naira (approx. $7,265.85). At least that money will purchase a house as the previous

[45] Interview with female participant, Abuja, December 2021.

> payment was N2m plus ($4,844.4), I bought a plot of land, but the balance is not enough to complete the building. I explained that if the insurance comes, I will use it and finish it. He said he doesn't know anything about the insurance so long we (the Army) have paid you the benefit, you must leave the Barracks[46].

These responses demonstrate the enormous difficulties military widows face in dealing with the Army bureaucracy and receiving their benefits. It highlights the lack of support for family welfare, and war casualties in the Nigerian Army. These challenges extend to how the women can access the sponsorship payments for their children, as explained below.

6.1.5 CHALLENGES OF GETTING SPONSORSHIPS

As stated earlier, the Nigerian Army provides educational sponsorships to families of deceased personnel. Like the death benefits, these payments are also hamstrung by administrative bottlenecks. The widows embark on long journeys to obtain and renew the scholarships yearly in different batches. According to a participant interviewed, there was no tangible reason given by the Army Authorities for the difficulties, other than an unbacked claim that some women may not use the funds judiciously (i.e. not send or pay her child or children's fees). This argument was countered based on the meagre tuition fees being given, as some women resort to taking their children to less expensive schools as a way of managing other tuition expenses.[47]

Most of the widows, especially those who live in urban centres, noted that the scholarship costs are not commensurate with the rising country's rising inflation and high cost of education in perspective, the sponsorship payment of N75 000 ($182) is given for an academic session of three times at N25 000 per term (60.66 dollars). To manage the amounts, they resort to taking their children to less expensive schools that fit the range given by the Army.

Besides this is the commencement and termination period for the scholarships. The period of six years is unfavourable to the women, as it does not consider the current economic realities of caring for children from nursery or pre-school. It also robs the

[46] Telephone Interview with Female participant, February 2021.
[47] Interview with female participant, Lagos state. March 2021

child of whatever privilege they might have enjoyed from the deceased parent, if he or she was alive. Explaining this, a participant noted that:

> "When it came to sponsorship, they kept saying the child must be six years before they take up sponsorship, but my argument is why six years? You do not expect my child to reach five years or six years before taking responsibility for what the father would have done gladly. And then the privilege they are supposed to enjoy from the father, they did not enjoy it. So, I think the first thing is that you should pay his school fees once a child is ready to go to school; so, they need to start from nursery school, which is averagely like three years. When you talk, they keep telling you it is the policy. Well, I am like things change. It is people that make these policies[48]…

The quote explains the challenges of onboarding children on the sponsorship program and how it is unrealistic to delay a child's early education until five or six years of age. The origins of the six-year primary school enrolment age dated back to 1976 under the 6-3-3-4 system. Though the policy has been reviewed to include a more comprehensive 9-3-4[49], the old practice is adopted by the military (Kazeem *et al*., 2010:3; Uwaifo & Uddin, 2017:82). Likewise, the termination age of 18 or 21 does not consider the difficulties of getting admitted into Nigerian tertiary institutions. The respondents corroborated the claims made on the termination ages, adding that the policy implementers expect the beneficiaries to have attained certain educational milestones at certain periods. For instance, a child should expectedly be in a tertiary institution on or before 18 and graduate by age 21. Other reasons such as "a change in the school" or the child having gone past the class age may prevent them from receiving their payments. These factors contribute to the difficulties the women experienced with the benefit and compensation processes.

The participants explained that they must go through scholarship screening yearly and present documented evidence in terms of how they utilise the scholarship funds. The evidence includes the academic result of the child, admission letters, etc. While this may ensure they use the funds appropriately, the length of time used to verify their authenticities affects the children's education, as these payments come later than expected. In other cases, the women do not get the complete payments of their

[48] Zoom Interview with female participant, February 2021.
[49] Under the 6-3-3-4 system, a child is expected to spend 6 years in primary school, 3 years in junior high school, 3 years in senior high school, and 4 years in a tertiary institutuion. Under the revised 9-3-4, a child is expected to spend 9 years in primary and junior high school, 3 years in senior high school and 4 years in a tertiary institution.

children's sponsorship fees, or they may not get any payment at all. Participants who have the maximum number of kids (4) on the sponsorship scheme lamented the difficulties in getting the payments of all children, even when they are eligible and meet the sponsorship requirements. Discussions with the women suggest that the process is fraught with unexplainable practices that serve to frustrate them into relinquishing the benefits.

Another major challenge faced was the long trips they embarked on (for documentation and verification) when traveling to the Army headquarters, Abuja. These risky journeys do not guarantee the payments and expose the women to dangers when traveling by road. Participants narrated the stressful and pitiable conditions they go through in the name of getting these sponsorships, as the lives of women have been lost to accidents on these journeys. One participant recalled a kidnapping incident that involved a widow who travelled for one of the documentation and verification exercises.[50]

Participants compared their experiences of getting benefits with war widows in the other services and found that the processes, particularly of getting the sponsorships, were very different from theirs. Explaining the difference between the Army and the Airforce, an Airforce participant remarked that the process was seamless for the latter and that the documents could either be couriered or done by proxy. An Army widow who participated in the study noted that compared to the Air Force, the Nigerian Army was inefficient in dealing with the benefits claim did not prioritise the needs and welfare of its soldiers' widows.

From the discussions above, we can see that not only has the Nigerian Army failed in its responsibilities, but the women face many different challenges in accessing their various benefits and having limited agency to hold the military accountable. To alleviate their plight and address these concerns the Military Widow Association has stepped in to support widows, especially those who have died in the Boko Haram conflict.

[50] Interview with Female Participant in Lagos State, February 2021

FINDINGS TWO: THE KINDS OF SUPPORT THE NIGERIA MILITARY WIDOWS ASSOCIATION OFFER TO ARMY WIDOWS OF THE BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This section looks at ways the military widows' association has supported military widows of the Boko Haram insurgency, as well as the support received from officer's wives, veterans, and civil society organisation, who have taken up the cause of military widows.

6.2.1 INFLUENCE OF THE MILITARY WIDOWS ASSOCIATION

The Military Widows Association was established at the peak of Nigeria's war against Boko Haram around 2013/2014. Its formation was a welcome development, as no formal military association was formed for Nigerian military widows whose husbands either died in active service, or in other domestic and external military duties. Support for the association, at this time, was routed through the military wives and veterans' associations, as discussed later in this section. This differed from other countries, where there are associations devoted to catering for widows of fallen soldiers as a distinct category, separate from wounded soldiers, veterans, etc. Despite its late emergence, there is an awareness among military widows about the existence and purpose of the Association.

Membership of the Association cuts across all military widows, and participation is voluntary. Participants alluded to being aware of the association, although the extent of the association's effectiveness is not known. A participant who joined in 2018 remarked that the Association has not lived up to its expectations. Some participants stated that one way of assessing the collective impact of the Association is to look at how the leadership has assisted in fighting for their delayed benefits and compensations.

In this regard, some women do not feel the impact of the Association on their lives, as the body has not dealt with their concerns in any significant way. Hence, some widows have attempted to denounce the military on the non-payment of pensions through press conferences and interviews. These public protest actions defy the social

conditioning of discipline and order expected of military wives (now widows in this context), who have been incorporated into the military (Enloe, 2000; Harrell, 2001; Finch, 2013; Wehrman, 2021). To manage the grievances, the Association has shown demonstrable impact by engaging in with military authorities. This has resulted in some women being duly compensated. However, these efforts are infrequent and may not be wholly sustained because of the bureaucratic challenges of dealing with the military institution.

As a way of supporting themselves in the absence of any financial assistance from the Association at the state or national level, military widows across states have contributed funds to assist one another whenever needed. This has been used to offset emergency needs, e.g., school fees of orphaned military children of members who cannot get sponsorship payments from the Army. Typically, these kinds of bonding support networks amongst widows are valuable and women have regular association meetings in their different branches. There are no fixed amounts, as these donations are voluntary. These actions allude to the utility of self-help among members of the Association. The place of self-help, voluntary donations and social philanthropy cannot be erased in a self-help organisation reliant on public charity and goodwill.

Hence, the association's impact can perhaps be assessed at the interpersonal relationships among its members. With reference to this a participant stated that: "if you have one or two that you relate very well with, that is all. And the best person to have as a friend at this point is somebody that is in your shoes"[51]. This instance shows how the source of social support is central to the coping and adaptation process (Bankoff, 1983). Scaling this kind of inter-personal assistance to a group level depends on the association's leaders' agency and resources, either at the state or the local military base where some of them reside. In this way, older widows support, encourage and give counsel to younger widows, advising them to be strong for themselves and their children and extolling them with the virtues of manliness required of a soldier's wife (Dooley, Carroll, *et al.*, 2019).

Some association leaders manifest the image of a "mother figure" by their late husband's rank and status. They equally carried a duty of motherly care and

[51]Telephone Interview with Female Participant, January 2021

responsibility to other women who were widowed in their prime ages. This shows how using “rank and status” among officers’ wives can significantly impact a section of military spouses. Rank and status among military wives have been used to order social expectations and behaviours among military spouses (Harrell, 2003; Jervis, 2011; Ziff & Garland-jackson, 2020). A participant leader who embodies these motherly values and constantly reaches out to the younger widows in their midst noted that she advises them to invest their benefits in profitable ventures, such as real estate. She narrated the case of a 27-year-old widow who she assisted in getting a plot of land from her death benefits funds.

As an association that was borne out of the sacrificial actions of their husbands, the place of personal sacrifice is not lost on both leaders and members of the Association. Widows’ leaders narrated how they have sacrificed for the Association and their fellow widows in different barracks. Providing a context to the sacrifice they make, a participant stated that:

> “In the Association, it is personal sacrifice. Sometimes, I will bring something from my purse to boost their morale. And you know women, if they do not see where something is coming out from, they do not go. They will tell you, what am I even benefitting there? Some of the women, that is what they say. Why must I be there? Whenever there is an empowerment project, I specifically put those that I know come for meetings and participate in the things we do to be a yardstick for those that do not come around. When they see what those people benefitted from, they will come to meetings’’[52].

The above quote gives an insight into how the Association’s leaders have contributed and sacrificed for the collective benefit of members. It also showed the strategies leaders adopted to get women to participate in the Association’s activities. Also revealed is how the Association’s capital is heavily dependent on its members and their support for the Association. We then turn to how the Association has turned to other military wives and veterans’ groups for support, and the challenges encountered.

6.2.2 OFFICER’S WIVES AND VETERANS’ ASSOCIATIONS SUPPORT TO MILITARY WIDOWS AND ITS CHALLENGES

Irrespective of how different members may feel about the impact of the association, the MIWA has embarked on empowerment programmes for its members through the

[52] Interview with female participant, Lagos state, February 2021

support of the association of serving officer's wives, CSOs groups, and state governments (The Nation, 2019; Osayande 2020; Lashem, 2020, 2021). MIWA has organised skill acquisition and other empowerment training on tailoring, soap making, and bead-making for its members. The military wives' associations like NAOWA, NAFOWA, NOWA, and DEPOWA has also supported by training widows in empowerment programmes (Okpuzor 2020; Oguntola 2020; Oladipo, 2021; Olatunji 2021). There is a plethora of literature on empowerment and support for conflict-affected women (Kabeer, 1999; Callaghan, 2015; Poudel and Studies, 2015; Atinga, 2016; Cornwall, 2016; Yadav, 2021).

In other instances, wives of senior military officers heading commands, training institutes and other well–spirited officer's wives render periodic assurance to military widows through these empowerment programmes. One of the beneficiaries of the empowerment programmes mentioned how she was trained in the makeup and cosmetics business for two months and was given a start-up capital of N50 000 (approx. $121), alongside other training materials[53]. The benevolent and interventionist roles played by officer's wives associations to the MIWA can be explained by the non-availability of a military widows' association to cater for military widows' needs in the country. These associations then took to supporting military widows in the barracks as a form of social responsibility.

The empowerment programmes embarked upon by the Officer's Wives Associations are not without their challenges. These challenges cut across different areas, like funding, needs assessment, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, impact, and most importantly, trust. Members of the association have alleged that NGOs and other independent consultants have collected biodata, photos, and videos of the widows to source funds without the knowledge of the association[54]. In instances like this, the women feel their vulnerability is being taken advantage of. According to a participant: "I think one of the greatest challenges is people coming to say we want to do this and that and they try to use the data, giving empty promises. This makes the organisation sceptical about trusting them"[55].

[53] Interview with Female participant, Abuja, December 2020
[54] This allegation was raised at the 2020 Armed Forces Remembrance Day when I was in the company of some widows at the event.
[55] Zoom Interview with Female participant, January 2021

Sometimes the challenges to these empowerment programmes may be within the organisation or its partner associations and how the assistance is conceived and presented (Abu 2018; Edubi 2018; Ojo 2019; Oremule, 2020; Awofadeji 2021). An instance of this was the case with the Nigerian Legion. The Nigerian Legion in October 2020 allegedly supported the Military Widows Association with buses, motorcycles, and bags of rice, as part of events to mark the 2021-Armed Forces Remembrance Day. However, the Military Widows Association did not receive any of the items allegedly donated as it was not delivered to them. Instances and incidents of this nature may prevent other good-willed individuals from assisting the association[56].

In some cases, the empowerment programmes are synonymous with palliatives where foodstuff and money are shared for participants. A participant (a military widow leader) recalled how an empowerment program she was supposed to attend, was in actual effect, a foodstuff distributing event. These raise questions about the kinds of empowerment initiatives these women should receive, or what specifically would be beneficial and sustainable for them. This is worth weighing upon when we consider that empowerment is a developmental buzzword with multiple meanings (Kabeer, 1999; Mosedale, 2005; Cornwall, 2016). Reflecting on what can be done, a participant noted that widows should be trained in businesses that are capital intensive, profitable and sustainable for women. According to her:

> "If they want to empower women, it is not to come and collect rice and beans. That is not empowerment. We have some women that are farmers and are planting vegetables. Let the government dig boreholes for them, give them seedlings, fertilisers etc. We have people that are into fishing and poultry. Those are empowerment that I know of and will always yield. Not liquid wash and soap. The person who made liquid wash would not sell immediately, and it is until she sells all before, she gains profit, whereas daily needs are to be met"[57].

The above quote by a participant gives a pointer into what some of the widows think about the empowerment programmes and projects. The participant strongly believes that assistance to the women should be designed in impactful and sustainable ways, in contrast to the current short-term and tokenistic practice.

[56] Interview with Military Widows Association Leader. January 2021.
[57] Interview with Military Widows Association Leader. January 2021

Closely related to the empowerment challenge is the lack of finance to administer and manage the daily affairs of the Association and the way it can support and impact its members. The organisation does not have a secretariat of its own[58]. It depends on corporate and public goodwill and philanthropy, pledges and funds from state governors, legislators etc., during events such as the Armed Forces Remembrance Day and other national celebrations (Vanguard 2018; Lagos State Government, 2021; Adonu 2021). The lack of financial independence has also created challenges for the association. For instance, the Association has clashed with the Nigerian Legion concerning donations for veterans and widows, and the sales of stickers and emblems to generate funds during the 2021-Armed Forces Remembrance Day Celebrations (Okah, 2021; Izuegbunem, 2021). The actions of the Nigerian Legion not only crippled its capacity to generate income and become financially independent but deprived it of potential goodwill from well-meaning individuals and corporate entities.[59]

Discussed in this section are how various military family associations, particularly NAOWA, have been at the forefront of support for Army widows before the establishment of MIWA. Also identified are the forms of material support given to Army widows and their shortcomings. We then look at how the Association has attempted to use its bridging capital, by seeking support from the Nigerian civil society community.

6.2.3 THE ROLE AND SUPPORT PROVIDED BY CIVIL SOCIETY TO THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

The discussions on the kinds of support the MIWA provided for its members are incomplete without understanding what roles other civil society organisations (CSOs) play in trying to support military families, or the military community. The MIWA faced challenges partnering with other civil society groups, due to a lack of trust and commitment. Likewise, Nigerian CSOs have been limited in their assistance due to issues of trust and access in working with military institutions and donor demands. The challenges faced by NGOs and independent scholars researching the military has

[58] The MIWA has an undeveloped plot of land in Asokoro, Abuja where other military wives' associations have their headquarters. This was revealed to me during my fieldwork discussions with top members of the association.
[59] Interview with female participant, Lagos, February 2021.

been acknowledged in extant literature (Soeters, Shields & Rietjens, 2014; Heinecken, 2016; Catignani and Basham, 2021)

Donor demands and requirement forms an important aspect of Nigerian CSOs engagement. International donors fund many Nigerian CSOs, and the donors' interests drive their projects. Projects such as advocacy and support for military widows and veterans, which one participant refers to as "soft areas", do not fall within their scope of donor demands and operations. Tellingly, this affects civil society because it may be difficult for NGOs to support the project if the funders are not looking at it. Moreso, most civil society organisations in the security sector are interested in weapons procurement, defence funding and budgeting, civil protection in armed conflict, etc.[60] This aspect of advocacy is parallel to support and advocacy for the military widows.[61]

Another hindrance highlighted by civil society participants is the lack of access in and around the Nigerian security sector. Mutual suspicion exists between the Nigerian civil society and the military. There is also heightened sensitivity for CSO's working in the security and human rights sector, as this area is considered high risk, and NGOs are cautious about getting into confrontations with the military. A larger part of the Nigerian civil society's cautiousness concerns how the ongoing war against terrorism is prosecuted (Njoku, 2020a). This, in turn, limits the extent of advocacy, support, and intervention on military families by mainstream NGOs.

As such, there are only a few NGOs[62] actively working and supporting in the areas of military veterans and families; other NGOs work within a much broader area of defence and security sector reforms – that ironically leaves out military families –, others whose those who have their work within the areas of gender, child rights, widows and women's empowerment extend their networks to the barracks and other NGOs intervene as a form of the public good. An example of such was a petition by an NGO named Accountable Leadership for Better Nigeria Initiative (ALBNI) written to the lower house of the Nigerian parliament over unpaid entitlements of fallen soldiers (Salem, 2021). Instances of how the voluntary sector has supported bereaved military

[60] Interview with female participant, Abuja, January 2021.z
[61] Interview with male participant, January 2021.
[62] I met only three Independent and military focused NGOs during the period of the fieldwork. These are separate from the statutory associations like the MIWA, and the Nigerian Legion.

families are also replicated in other militaries, e.g. the United Kingdom Military (Green *et al.*, 2012).

The challenges of suspicion and access with MIWA discussed above feature prominently in the engagements of NGOs – including those focused on military families and veterans and those focused on the wider security sector. NGOs have expressed suspicion sentiment, a participant remarked that:

> "First off, when we started with MIWA, there was suspicion. They had had the experience of people coming to use their platform to make money, collecting money from people on their behalf to talk and say, okay, we are working with these people. They get money here and there, and they take off, so it was a bit of a struggle between us and MIWA to gain that trust. So, we got into an MOU, and it was basically to say, we are going to help with this and this and that, and we must be very transparent and open. We are going to you fully in the picture for whatever we are writing or doing or saying on your behalf".

There are other difficulties aside from lack of trust and suspicion, as the quote above shows. Other military-focused NGO stakeholders interviewed also mentioned the absence of support, both in terms of raising funds, getting access, getting the support of the military hierarchy, and the Nigerian Legion in pursuing their objectives of assisting military veterans. A military NGO stakeholder who developed an idea of giving discount cards for shopping and leisure to help support members of military widows, veterans and wider members of the Nigerian defence and military community remarked that the biggest opposition his organisation has faced is within the military, as some military officials are interested in getting kickbacks.

Despite the difficulties faced by the NGOs, there are some NGOs who have supported the women through the officer's wives' associations. The support has been through small business grants to empower vulnerable widows. This support was not only limited to military widows but included civilian widows of the conflict as well. In one of such empowerment projects, 200 widows were trained in pastry, food processing, local drinks, shoes, slippers, and bag production with Ankara[63]. They were also trained in the making of local drinks. The organisers also provided them with start-up kits to support the businesses. Likewise, during the early outbreak of the COVID-19 virus,

[63] Ankara – An African cloth fabric

widows were empowered in a scheme described as “cash for work”. Under this project, the organisation trained women on face-masks production according to the UNICEF guidelines. It empowered them with materials (including the thread, needles, and plastic) to package the masks and subsequently remunerated them for producing the face masks. According to the NGO stakeholder, the cash for work project not only created an opportunity for women to perfect their skills in sewing but served as an archetype of a sustainable empowerment programme for women affected by conflict[64].

What the above section has showed is that as an Association without significant financial capital, MIWA has minimal impact on improving the lives of its members not only in terms of its actual capacity to provide material benefits, but also because of its legitimacy. The association is run by widows of mid-high-ranking officers who use their influence to support less privileged military widows. However, a lack of trust and its identity, status and affiliation with the Nigerian military has affected the extent of its collaborations with other civil society organizations’, limiting the linking capital of the association in obtaining external assistance and on impact-driven advocacy. This has also limited its social reach among the Nigerian civil society community. The question then is, with the lack of support provided by the Nigerian Army, the Military widows Association and civil society, how do these women cope?

FINDINGS THREE: WHAT COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES DO THEY ADOPT TO SURVIVE?

6.3.1 ECONOMIC COPING STRATEGY

Most of the participants engaged in different economic activities to cope financially with the loss of their husbands. The kinds of economic activities they embark upon after their husbands’ deaths are somewhat proportional to the rank/status of their husbands. Some of the widows of officers who are educated and socially empowered, have viable businesses like textile and clothing agro-allied enterprises, or have found formal employed in government ministries and agencies. These economic undertakings provide some buffer against sudden impoverishment as they respond to the double loss of their husbands and significant household income (Golan, 1975:372; Morgan, 1981; Chenube, & Omumu, 2011: 3614-3615). Hence, it is not unusual to see

[64] Interview with NGO stakeholder, January 2021

widows of officers engage in multiple small-scale businesses. As one participant stated: “I do mobile business, I sell jewellery, clothes, perfume, and I go to banks and offices that I sell”[65].

In comparison, widows of non-commissioned are not as upwardly mobile as widows of commissioned officers[66]. They tend to be more involved in in small scale restaurant and farming businesses and make a living in the informal sector selling petty goods within the barracks. These ventures often yield little or no profit, as the capital and expenses are ploughed into daily survival without solid financial support.

The non-viability of the businesses, particularly for those who live on military bases, has made some of them abandon it temporarily. Participants who invested part of the benefits into a clothing business within the barracks, noted how the business climate and accumulated debts from buyers crippled or forced them to shut down the business. Added to this is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their businesses. Respondents noted that the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted their economic survival.

Women who live outside the barracks and engage in business ventures have fared a little better concerning their economic survival. However, they are not immune from the usual shocks and stresses of doing business. One participant mentioned how she began a poultry business with a part of her benefits and intended to diversify into other side-businesses. Another participant who relocated from the barracks and moved to her hometown works full-time as a missionary and a honey trader. She narrated how she shuffles between Lagos and her rural hometown in Southwest Nigeria and Lagos, where she distributes honey to her customers.

The economic plight of some women has also been compounded by their spousal status as “sit at home mums”, commonly referred to as “dependapotamus” in the literature on military wives and families (Ziff & Garland-Jackson, 2020). While this is a common occurrence across military wives in different military geographies (Baaz &

[65] Interview with female participant, Ogun state. February 2021

[66] A general public perception of wives of NCOs is that they come from poor economic background, with limited education. However, there are spouses of NCOs who are educated and are

Verweijen, 2016; Spanner, 2020; Ziff & Garland-jackson, 2020)[67], it is, in other cases, propped up by socio-cultural attitudes and fixation of traditional gender roles (Akanle & Adesina, 2016:7835; Akanle and Ejiade, 2012).

The fixation on gender roles has affected the economic coping of some women after their husband's death, as the demise has upturned their erstwhile economic stability. Several studies have established the correlation between economic deprivation, poverty and widowhood (Chen & Drèze, 1992; Young, 2006; Loomba Foundation, 2015; Nwokoro & Ogba, 2019). Two sit-at-home mothers narrated how challenging it has been trying to adjust to the business they began after their husbands' death, as their husbands denied them opportunities for employment or business while alive. Sharing her experience, a participant remarked that:

> "I am selling textiles, and shoes This is the only thing I have. It was after he died that I began the business. He did not want me to work. He said that since he is not there for the children, they should see their mother. And for me, I wanted to work; he said no. I said, let me do business. He said no. I said, why? He said that since he is not there for them, and I start the business, I will not have time for the children, and they may become wayward[68].

In the above quote, a major demand of the military institution, periodic deployment, impacts the stability and functioning of the family. The soldier husband who relocates without the family or on who is on periodic deployment may prevent his spouse from taking gainful employment because of a potential parental absence in the children's lives. This is a challenge faced by military families globally, including the Nigerian military. (Burrell, 2006; Castaneda & Harrell, 2008; Aina *et al*., 2020).

As a way of responding to the widows' plight, the Nigerian Army has supported the women outside of the statutory benefits they are entitled to. For instance, the Nigerian Army formation in Maiduguri – the epicentre of the insurgency – has employed widows of its fallen soldiers on an ad-hoc basis to provide local intelligence reports to the Army authorities. One participant who works with the Intelligence Corps mentioned she previously sold thrift clothes before getting the job. Other women work in the Army-owned guesthouses. This is a way of empowering them economically. One participant

[67] The status of wives in the FARDC (Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo) is complicated by the social conditions of military service in the country. Hence, some wives are forced to move with their husbands in order to keep the homefront intact.
[68] Interview with female participant, Abuja. February 2021.

who had encountered difficulties managing a business within the barracks community explained how the Army has supported widows of fallen soldiers in this barracks. According to her:

> "There was no market (sales) when I was previously selling in the barracks. It is only when soldiers leave the bushes, but they do not come every day. I will cook soups of N6,000 naira ($14.47), I will sell only N3,000 naira ($7.23). Sometimes, they will eat without paying, saying that when salaries are paid, they will pay you. But in most cases, they (the soldiers) will not come to your shop again; they will go to another shop and buy. After my money finished, I stayed at home. So, when they built this hotel, authorities of the theatre command asked widows to come and work here. If they don't carry widows, they should not carry anybody because they (widows) are suffering too much".

The participant in this quote was leased a shop for her private restaurant businesses by the management of the Army guesthouse where she initially worked. Explaining further, she notes that:

> "It was a big relief when I leased this shop because working in the guest house was not easy. But here I have workers, they work for me, I will pay the hotel management for the rent, and I will pay my workers. The little profit that remains, I will take care of myself. Though the rent is high, my happiness is that I have relief. Anytime I like, I come to my work. It is my own now. I am the one that knows how I would pay. They won't ask you, Madam, why didn't you come to work. So, I feel very relieved"[69].

In the above quote, the participant narrates how Nigerian Army authorities in 7 Division Maiduguri employed widows of fallen soldiers in the Army owned guesthouses. The participant was not only glad for the opportunity to work, but she also managed her restaurant within the premises of the guest house after a short period of employment. This instance shows individuals can move from vulnerability to empowerment with the right social initiatives and policies.

However, the experience of the above participant is not uniform across the broad category of war widows. Some widows rued the inability of the Nigerian Army to provide them with jobs in the event of their husbands' death. In instances where they have jobs with schools run by the Nigerian Army or their wives' associations, the security of their job becomes uncertain, especially if they need to perform cultural rites of mourning that will take them away from the job for a while. Mourning rites and

[69] Interview with female participant, Borno state. December 2020

ceremonies are prevalent in most African cultures and are usually not exempted or erased by circumstance or conditions of demise (Ewelukwa, 2002; Durojaye, 2013; Owino, 2017; Ajayi *et al*., 2019). Narrating her experience, a participant who taught in a school managed by the NAOWA noted that she was replaced after she left to visit her parents after her husband's demise. According to her: I was teaching in NAOWA, but I travelled to stay with my parents in Abuja after my husband died. Before I came back, they had already replaced me. So, I am a hairdresser; I used to plait at home for people that want to make hair[70].

A participant who was temporarily employed as a teacher in one of the secondary schools managed by the Nigerian Army revealed that the Army authorities had failed to fulfil the promise of making her a permanent staff when her husband died. Her husband died in 2013, yet the promise is yet to be fulfilled. Another participant who lamented the inability of the Nigerian Army to provide widows of its fallen soldiers with employment portrayed the situation within another narrative context as her experience differs from these earlier two. Her late husband was attached to one of the military training institutions – the Nigerian Defense College as an Army personnel and based on what she was told, widows of personnel from the college were being given jobs within the college, but that was stopped as there were allegations of sexual misconduct were levelled against the beneficiaries by the Nigerian Army. The participant explained thus:

> "I want a job at the National Defense College (NDC). I have been on that since he died. I was told they used to give widows jobs before, but they said they (widows) used to go and chase men there in the College. I don't know whether it is the women chasing (enticing) the men or the men are chasing the widows because it is funny that you will now deny a widow a job because somebody committed an offence"[71].

It is difficult to verify the claim of the above participant regarding the allegations raised above. This is because the Nigerian Army does not have any other codified welfare allowance or scheme for widows and families of personnel killed in the line of duty aside from the statutory benefits and allowances it shares with its sister services. Other forms of support provided are often at the discretion of base commanders and other members of the military hierarchy to boost morale and meet personnel needs. This

[70] Interview with female participant, Borno state. December 2020
[71] Interview with female participant, Abuja. December 2020.

differs remarkably from the Nigerian Air Force, a sister service equally involved in the war. Compared to the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air force employs widows of its personnel and prompt and timely payment of full benefits and other welfare programmes. According to an Air force widow who participated in the study:

> "My husband died while I was twenty-nine years. I had a son, and I was also pregnant. Now I have two children. It was not easy, and it is still not easy. My husband was a fighter pilot, so I was lacking nothing but with his demise, things will not be the way they should be, but the Nigerian Air Force paid me every kobo that I was entitled to. I did not fight or write to them. They call me for the benefits as and when due. They gave me a house in Abuja. Also, the Nigerian Airforce gave me the job I currently have".

The extent to which the rank and social status of the late husbands played a key role in the widows' economic survival is limited. While these differences existed, they differed from person to person. One reason for this is that many officers who have died in the war are junior to mid-ranking officers, with most soldiers being non-commissioned officers[72]. Hence, their wives are likely to be submerged in similar economic survival struggles after their husbands' demise. However, the social and educational status of widows of Army officers counts as social leverage. The ranks of their late husbands are rather portrayed as forms of social identifiers within the military community.

Alluding to the point, a participant noted that the perceived gaps among widows of commissioned and non-commissioned officers are not entirely non-existent. While the increased educational and social opportunities available to non-commissioned officers might have bridged the gaps, some differences still exist. According to her:

> "Before, you would see other ranks (non-commissioned officers) marry uneducated women. But if you look at the other ranks now, they are married to educated women, more than before. You try to see that they are looking for a job, submerging themselves in businesses, and all that. But you would still notice that difference because many women had not gone to school; they were not involved in any skill or trade. So, it was purely to sit down and depend on the man and all that, but that has changed now". 'For most officers, you will find out that their women are educated and willing to do other stuff. Then, of course, you would not compare the support from friends and sometimes, the friends or

[72] In 2020 and 2021, two senior officers, a Colonel and a Brigadier General died from battlefield injuries, and ambushes (Kayode, 2020; Nwachukwu, 2021). They are the most senior rank of officers to have paid the supreme price in the decade-long war.

> colleagues who try to support you financially. You would not even compare the support of a soldier and an officer. There is a whole lot of difference. So, honestly, I look at other ranks' wives and then, I feel sorry for them[73].

The narrative explained above attempts to uncover the differences between wives of officers and non-commissioned officers in the military and how affects how they survive economically in the aftermath of their husband's demise. Widows of officers also have more social capital, as they are more connected as a group due to the ratio of officers to non-commissioned officers and the bonds established through long training periods and comradeship. This also impacts on how they can tap into social support within the military.

6.3.2 SOCIAL SUPPORT: COPING AND SUPPORT WITHIN THE MILITARY COMMUNITY

As a community of families, members of the military community support bereaved friends and families. This assistance complements statutory and group support (e.g., the widows association or wives' associations) because of its inter-personal nature. Also, the rank, status and hierarchy of the late husband's plays a key role at this level, as these forms of assistance are majorly dependent on existing relationships (da Silva, 2017; Black, 2021). Explaining the support from members of the military community, a respondent stated:

> I got support from other fellow officers that were colleagues to my husband. Some of them are in better places, and they constantly support. I don't buy rice and vegetable oil; they bring it for me. I get a lot of gifts from them. But I have always been somebody who doesn't wait for people to do things for me. I live within my limit. I learn to manage what I have[74].

The above quote explains the forms of material support provided by the members of the military community. The participant equally understood the management of expectations regarding these kinds of support, because of their temporal nature (Powers *et al*., 2014:506). In some cases, the support provided transcends material forms of assistance. The women rely on their social networks to navigate the bureaucratic processes to obtain their entitlements. The support system and access to high levels of the military bureaucracy proved useful in this aspect and explains why

[73] Zoom Interview with participant. January 2021.
[74] Interview with female participant, Ogun state. March, 2021

officers' widows appear have more agency than non-commissioned officers' widows. A participant explains, "the only thing that is making an officer's widow better than that of an NCO widow is influence". In the quote below, the participant narrates how her influence was useful in ensuring her children's scholarships were paid. According to her:

> "My influence was useful in helping me with my children's sponsorship. I know a major general, and I told myself that before I take any step, let me inform this person because I respect him. I called him and said, sir, Army dey find me o because so that you will not come and hear my voice o and you will say is this you?". He asked, what happened? I explained that it was back and forth on the Army scholarship for my children. The officers said I had been paid, whereas I did not receive any money. I threatened to write a news report on fraud within the Department of Army Administration (DOAA) office. He prevailed on me not to do it. Rather, he asked me to send my husband's particulars, and he will act on it, which he eventually did after making the necessary calls with his colleagues in the DOAA. So, If I raise an eyebrow, they will say, why didn't I talk? So those are the people that can curb me a bit because they know what I can do"[75].

Based on the above we can see how military widows benefit from their relationships within the military. While instances as this show how they unwittingly perpetuate their dependence on the military, it also shows the shortcomings of large organisational bureaucracies (Shamgar-handelman, 1981; Baaz & Verweijen, 2016). The participant shared other instances in which her influence has assisted her in bypassing the bureaucracy, and helped other affected women obtain their benefits. This showed the utility of such resources. In another instance, the same participant recalled how her influence and previous positions in the NAOWA were useful in facilitating her late husband's burial arrangements amid personalised procedural rules and hierarchical power-play. Narrating her experience, the participant noted:

> "One senior officer asked me to introduce myself to the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) when my husband died. Since they want to bury him here (in the barracks cemetery), they will know how to go about it. I looked at the person, and I felt maybe this man does not know me. I was the personal secretary for 81 DIV's wife for three years. I was also assistant secretary in NAOWA. So, there is no office I cannot enter. I just called the Commanding Officer in this

[75] Interview with female participant, Lagos state. February 2021

> Cantonment, and I reported the incident to him. He said, madam, don't worry, I will be on my way. He said, who asked you to go and see the RSM? Does that person know who you are at all? He said, give me his number, I gave him, and he called saying, do you know who this woman is? Oh! Because you know the husband as your junior? Important dignitaries in the Nigerian Army came for my husband's burial. These are people that I have met with a good reputation. I don't like clinching, but I will fight for it if I deserve it. That is why I often don't call to express my problem because they (my network) will tackle mine, but what of others?"[76].

As a widow of an officer, she explained how she was asked to introduce herself to a senior non-commissioned officer to process the burial arrangement as her late husband was to be buried in the barracks cemetery. The quote above highlights two key points: the utility of social capital, its limitations, and the provision of post-bereavement support for military widows. For the first, the participant's experience showed how her social status assisted her in hastening the lengthy administrative process. The privilege enjoyed by this participant may not be available for widows of other junior officers in the military. This counts as a limitation of personalised social capital in a hierarchical and rule-bound organisation, like the military. Secondly, formal and organised support that focuses on the non-material aspect of burials and internment is limited and informal, compared to other militaries (Steen and Asaro, 2006; Lester, 2015;250; Ministry of Defence UK, 2015). While the self-introduction may be deemed acceptable, it can be regarded as insensitivity towards grieving widows. A more practicable solution is for the unit and its casualty officers to undertake such arrangements and notify the widow where and when necessary (Harrington, 2011).

Non-statutory support from the military community members is not without challenges. While these can be generally subsumed under the broad challenges of widowhood, the peculiar case of military widowhood in its complexities and dilemmas sets them apart from civilian widowhood. In several instances, discussions with the respondents reveal the absence of any formal support/post-bereavement structures to support them. As several respondents mentioned, "Once they pay you, they feel they are done with you". For some, the husband's death cuts the ties not only with the military institution, but military 'family'. Some indicated how they feel stigmatised and cut off

[76] Interview with female participant, Lagos state. February, 2021/

from existing friendships and relationships they had earlier cultivated. This highlights the different dilemmas and complexities associated with military bereavement (Bokek-Cohen & Ben-Asher, 2018; Tunaç & Küçükkaraca, 2020; Wehrman, 2021). Sharing her experience in this regard, a participant noted:

> "Another challenge I think we are facing is that you will sometimes look for people to talk to, even a shoulder to lean on, you don't get. This stigma has been attached to widows, especially military widows because that is the bone of contention here. Most of the officers' wives will cease to have a genuine friendship; you don't get that. Some colleagues might not even call you to ask about your welfare. Emotional support is zero. Some of his colleagues are very close, but from the day we lost him to this point, none of them has even called me to say, 'sorry, I heard about your husband's death. Some have not even called to say, 'how are you faring? How are the kids?' nothing. Okay, don't call me, I don't have any business to do with you, but if you value the person who is no longer alive, you'll ask after his children. Don't give me money, ask me how I'm doing, nothing[77].

The closure of these existing relationships is not limited to interpersonal relationships alone, but also extends to the officer's wives associations. One participant mentioned how she experienced social closure from officers' wives' association upon her husband's death. Incidents of this nature reify the social difficulties of military social groups (Parcell & Maguire, 2014). It is necessary to acknowledge that the participant's experience, however valid and striking it may seem, may not reflect the disposition of the officer's wives' association to their erstwhile members. Furthermore, while the NAOWA constitution in Section 13(b) states that retirement, dismissal, divorce, and death of the husband are grounds for the automatic loss of membership, the performance or conduct of the termination process is not known. It is unclear whether there is an official letter of exit given to the member, or it is an informal process whereby the member quietly exits the association if the spouse is affected by any of the reasons given for loss of membership.

A serving spouse who is a member of NAOWA mentioned how wives of fallen soldiers are adequately supported and given ample time to exit the Association. Another respondent who was also a member of NAOWA mentioned that the NAOWA supported her after her husband's demise. According to her:

[77] Telephone Interview with female participant, February 2021

> "NAOWA treated me very well. They supported me financially and gave me N50 000 naira. Afterwards, I am welcome to join any program or activity. It is just that I am the one that decided not to. They did not delete me from the group; I am still there. Anytime they come here (the barracks) for an occasion, they will even call me[78].

In the above quote, the participant explained the form of material and social support given to her by the wives' association and how she chose to recuse herself from the group's activities, despite the warm reception. Other widows, particularly those of lesser ranked soldiers, may not enjoy these privileges. These experiences help bolster the findings of studies on military spouses' associations and how different military spouses encounter spousal support in divergent ways. While it can be a great avenue for some to help cope with the stress of military life, for others, it may be seen as a site of alienation and exclusion (Gassmann, 2011; Gribble and Rachael, 2017).

The forms of social support provided by members of the military community to bereaved military widows are explained in this section. The discussions showed how women encountered different forms of support at inter-personal and inter-group levels. Crucial to the kinds of support received is the extent of their personal influence, rank, and status of their late husbands. This also stretches out to the officer's wives' associations, where informal support to widows, is conditioned upon the level of participation in group activities. In the absence or lack of inter-personal and group support, military widows turned to their family and kindred for support.

6.3.3 FAMILY SUPPORT: COPING AND SUPPORT FROM FAMILY MEMBERS

A few respondents acknowledged the roles played by their family members, i.e., in-laws, siblings, parents etc., in their journey of coping with their loss. Likewise, other studies have shown that close-knit families are a strong source of support for bereaved family members (De Vries *et al*., 2014; Miriyagalla, 2015; Sharma, 2018; Sekgobela et al., 2021). In this regard, families provide natural bonding social capital for bereaved members, as they are the first responders in the event of loss and trauma. They provide the necessary emotional and material support. Moreover, the absence of

[78] Interview with female participant, Ogun state. March 2021.

bereavement programs for widows fostered the reliance on family members who may also be affected by the loss.

In the case of other respondents, the death of the soldier, who is the family's main breadwinner, precludes the possibilities of family support. Explaining her predicament, a respondent noted: "Although it (the death) was hard, God saw us through. Things are hard unlike before. Since he died, the family people don't use to support me. Highest, they will just call me occasionally"[79]. The experience of this and another participant with similar narratives show how wives lose existing support of their late husband's family. This is the case in most African societies, regardless of the nature of their spouse's death, and it reveals how the social bonds that ties families can be eroded by cultural practices. As a tenuous social resource, bonding social capital is challenged and can be lost in the face of social shocks and stresses, such as death. The widowhood status of the women is a reiteration or replay of existing cultural tropes and practices prevalent in African societies (Sossou, 2002; Oguna, 2016; Fasanmi & Ayivor, 2019a; Sekgobela, Peu and van der Wath, 2019). A participant explained:

> "You will rarely see a family that, after the death of their son, they will take care of the daughter-in-law. My father-in-law is not rich, but at least he is doing well. They are five in the family; my husband is the only soldier. The others are graduates. So, they are doing well, but no one has ever asked how much your daughter's school fees is. They will only say, ah, your daughter is trying, at this age, she can read and write? They have forgotten that I must take care of her, pay her school fees, and take her to a good school"[80].

The narrative above explains the non-availability of support from her late in-laws and explains the situation for most widows in Nigerian and African societies. Widows are left to bear the burdens of raising and maintaining the family without real or perceived social support (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Glazer *et al.*, 2010; Dominique van de Walle, 2018).

For other widows the Boko Haram conflict also hindered the possibilities of support, as their natal families were equally affected by the insurgency. A participant mentioned that her family and in-laws refused to support her because she refused to marry her late husband's sibling. The practice of marrying a family member of the late husband

[79] Interview with Female participant, Abuja. December 2020
[80] Telephone interview with female participant, January 2021

is regarded as a levirate system. It is an age-long practice among certain ethnic communities in Nigerian, African and Asian societies (Korieh, 1996; Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2006; Ziemer & Shahnazarian, 2018).

What these findings show is that participants differed on the support received, as some acknowledged receiving positive support, while others encountered negative social support. The negative social support given to some widows was because they refused to participate in traditional remarriage practices and the widespread impact of the conflict on other members of their kith and kin. However, there seems to be more awareness and willingness to support military widows, especially those affected by the Boko Haram insurgency by civil society, which provides these widows with some sort of bridging capital.

6.3.4 SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM CHARITIES AND RELIGIOUS BODIES

For the widows an important source of social support was the bridging capital provided by religious bodies and social charities after their husband's demise. The context of this support is within the provision of palliatives, relief items and household support. Military based NGOs in Nigeria have adopted needy families of fallen soldiers through foodbanks, tuition fees and medical emergencies and carried out other forms of empowerment for widows.

Widows mentioned the different roles in which the religious denominations (churches and mosques) support them. The churches and mosques provide foodstuff, clothing items, and cash gifts during festive periods. Some of this assistance may be specific to denominations based in the military bases, as some churches within the barracks hold special services through which they contribute to supporting widows, and others are outside of the barracks. Different participants mentioned that some of the soldiers in the frontline contribute funds for special prayers through the base churches, and the monies are being given to the widows. Explaining the above scenario, a participant remarked that:

The Army Headquarters (AHQ) strike group gave some 20 widows in the church twelve thousand each (N240, 000). One General said he would add N10 000 each (N200 000). Sometimes like Christmas, they share food and clothing materials for us.

Some persons may say they are doing thanksgiving for widows. They would then put all the monies gotten together and share it with us[81].

Another participant also noted that:

> "Our military church used to help us, especially soldiers in the bush. Those soldiers in the bush used to send some things for us - all widows in the church. We do not know the soldiers. They will tell us that it is from the bush. The last time they sent us wrapper, groundnut oil, and rice. They gave us money and asked us to pray for them, and we have been doing that for them"[82].

The above quote shows how charitable activities perform dual functions; one mobilised to perform certain practical ends, and the other supported widows of fellow fallen soldiers. However, support from the barracks churches is limited and somewhat closed to other widows who do not attend church within the barracks or have left the barracks. A participant in this situation thinks that the barrack church can help military widows, regardless of their present location within the barracks environs. However, other women feel that the church has its challenges, and they cannot always depend on the church outside the barracks. Women in this situation feel excluded as they think they are not fully recognised or supported outside of the military community they belong to. These experiences highlight the identity challenges of military widows as they are faced with losing or reconstructing their military identity (Wehrman, 2021).

Social charities, military NGOs and religious denominations within the military community play important role in supporting military widows as this section has shown. However, this support is constrained by the limit of these social charities in terms of resources. Additionally, the women also face challenges in seeking for support from social charities, as it makes stressful demands on their vulnerable and precarious lives. For these reasons, the women turn to other forms of psycho-social and emotion based coping strategies. The corollary of this is that, bridging social capital is ineffective when it disenfranchises or excludes the needs of bonding capital members as shown above.

[81] Interview with female participant, Borno state. December 2020.
[82] Interview with female participant, Borno state. December 2020.

6.3.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL COPING STRATEGIES

The military widows have resorted to using spirituality and psychological capital as coping and support strategies. These resources complement existing support structures and fill the gaps created by the absence of any formal or informal support structures. The exercise of spirituality and psychological capital as a coping resource in grief and loss show how spirituality provides refuge and comfort, manage the bereavement conditions, and give meaning to the loss (Carver, Scheier & Weintraub, 1989; Wortmann & Park, 2008; Shih *et al.*, 2010; Kokou-Kpolou *et al.*, 2017). Findings from respondents also support the claim.

Reliance on God amid the grief boosted their inbuilt capacities for hope and resilience. As a participant remarked, *"We give God the glory because, with God, all things are possible. I was thinking that all is gone, but I just know that God is by my side"*[83]. Another respondent also mentioned how she switched churches and prayed more, as that was her only hope of getting a job from the Nigerian Army. She said: "*Actually I am from a Catholic background, but I now go to Pentecostal for more prayers because that is how we are going to penetrate this Nigerian Army that doesn't want to give me a job"*[84].

A participant who works as a missionary remarked that the mission work has acted as a buffer to help cope with the loss of her husband. Her relationship with God was instrumental to the life choices she made after her husband's demise. The job keeps her grounded and occupies her mind, albeit momentarily. Narrating how spirituality helped in the absence of support from family and friends, another participant remarked that:

> "No support from family and friends, nobody cares, but thank God for grace. God is keeping us. It's a good thing to hold onto God because the truth is, at times when you feel down and don't have anyone to talk to, you're heartbroken and cry all through the day, there are some nights that you can't even sleep because you were crying all through, but when you remember that God is involved in all what you're passing through then, you'll fall back to your faith. The next option is to be strong[85].

[83] Interview with female participant, Borno state. December 2020.
[84] Interview with female participant, Abuja. December 2020.
[85] Telephone Interview with female participant. January 2021.

The above quote explains how her relationship with God assisted her in coping and managing the loss. She mentioned faith and spirituality as a major source of strength and support. In addition to spirituality, women relied on their own psychological strength to cope and survive. Their resilience and psychological strength have aided their positive adjustment and wellbeing (Mohammed, 2018; Qureshi, 2020; West, Dreeben & Busing, 2021). Narrating her experience, she said:

> "You never really get used to it because you remember, you must pick up again occasionally. You think of where you will start from, where you want to get to and how far you want to get. You understand your passion and dream to achieve those things. It is not the end of the world"[86].

This willingness to move on with life and their relationship with other widows assisted them in adjusting and adapting. The earlier participant, a former executive of the officer's wives association, attributed her ability to adapt to her previous experience of helping other military widows as a member of NAOWA. She explained:

> "My association with widows as a member of NAOWA helped me adjust to my own. I have been with other widows, and most times, we go out to them, and I particularly follow them to break the news to the widows; we stay with them and try to counsel them. We keep telling them to be strong, among all those things – for me now, not to practice what I tell them doesn't make sense. I try as much as possible to be strong among people, and at night when I am alone, I cry. All in all, I keep praying to God to give me much strength"[87]

Similarly, another executive member of NAOWA mentioned how she had been at the forefront of the campaign for military widows before her husband's demise and that this now served as a source of strength to cope with her loss when it happened.

> "I had been standing for widows before I lost my husband. Even when I went for NAOWA functions, I do stand for them. It is just my nature because I feel for them. I imagine what they go through; I did not know then; I could only imagine. That has always been me. I fight for them everywhere I go, and some of them were saying they do not know why God allowed it to happen, but maybe it is because of some of them. It helped me because it was easy for me when I joined them. I didn't even want to join them initially because I wanted to continue with my life. And before you know it, I was already a major part of them"[88].

[86] Interview with female participant, Ogun state. March 2021.
[87] Interview with female participant, Ogun state. March 2021.
[88] Interview with female participant, Lagos state. March 2021.

The two quotes above explain how wives, who were active participants in the Officer's Wives Associations before they became widows, reached out to newly bereaved women as part of their social responsibility. The interaction and relationship developed with them were useful when they lost their husbands.

Based on this we can see how women used different coping and social support strategies to cope with life. These included various economic, social (family, military community, religious bodies), and psychological/spiritual means, neither of which had greater or lesser value – each were important on their own grounds. Key is how social status, network and capital proved useful in helping some widows cope with the loss, better than others. These coping strategies are particularly important, as the death of their husbands has a profound effect on their livelihoods and that of their families

FINDINGS FOUR: THE IMPACT OF DEATH ON THEIR LIVELIHOODS AND THAT OF THEIR FAMILIES

The impact of the loss is explored through various lenses, such as the use of the financial benefits/compensations; the challenges of dealing with relatives; raising the family; and how the deaths of their husbands left them vulnerable.

6.4 THE MANAGEMENT AND USE OF DEATH COMPENSATIONS

How they managed their entitlements provides a glimpse of how, or whether they could mitigate the economic impact of their losses. Discussions with the participants showed that some women channelled their entitlements towards useful endeavours, such as financing or completing a house building/purchase or starting a business.

As mentioned, the sudden deaths of their husband meant that they had to relocate from the barracks after a certain period (within a year), regardless of whether they received all their benefits or not. For some affected widows, the nature of the military job and its frequent deployments and postings did not permit their families to have permanent housing outside the barracks. As a result, they relocated back to their states/hometowns, as this was the only viable option. A participant who returned to her hometown in Osun State, Southwest Nigeria, mentioned that the entire gratuity was spent buying a plot of land and developing it. According to her, "when they paid gratuity around August/September 2019, I did not use it to buy clothes, it was the only

one I used to finance this house project. The gratuity was N2million plus"[89]. Part of the other monies was shared with her late husband's family.

The payment or sharing among in-laws was a recurring subject in the different interactions with the widows. It is a practice influenced by the Judaic religions and African culture. These payments, though usually shared with the deceased family, often created tension between the families. One participant noted that she voluntarily paid part of the benefits to her late husband's father. She did this as a way of ensuring that he got a part of his late son's entitlements. A participant who received other compensations, aside from the statutory benefits given to NOKs of the deceased soldier, mentioned that she spent some money on a house project, gave some to her late husband's father, and deposited the rest in her children's bank account for safekeeping. Another participant devoted the entitlements to a house project. She was paid the burial and gratuity allowances, with only the life insurance remaining to be paid. She, however, did not state whether she had to share any sum with her in-laws.

Another participant, who received the NAWIS, Burial Expenses and Gratuity, stated she invested this in buying two plots of land for her children and hoped to develop this when the life insurance benefits were paid. She managed the demands of her in-laws' by electing the benefits to share with them. According to her:

> "When they paid me the burial expenses, I did not give them (my in-laws) because the load (burden) was on my head. I was the one paying the children's school fees. But when they paid me the gratuity, I gave them N400 000 because the gratuity is N1.64M (one million, and sixty-four thousand"[90].

By choosing to inform her husband's relative of what benefits have been paid, the narrative above showed the participant evaded the socio-cultural pressure made on widows regarding sharing her late husbands' benefits. In this way, she deployed relational tactics that enabled her to act and navigate her in-law's demands.

What played a role in terms of how the money was used, was influenced by culture. Muslim participants stated that the benefits had to be shared according to the Islamic

[89] It is necessary to note that the gratuity fund was insufficient to complete the house project. At the time I visited the participant in January 2021, the building in which she and her children lived was partly completed, and barely furnished. Interview with Participant, Osun State, January 2021.
[90] Interview with Female Participant, Maiduguri, December 2020

law rites of inheritance. One participant whose brother-in-law was the NOK, mentioned that the money was paid into his account as the NOK. Her husband had died as a lance corporal and was paid N2.7m naira in benefits (approx. $6,522.75). Out of the N2.7m, her share was roughly N300 000 ($725.1). Another Muslim participant also remarked that the money was shared among the husband's family, as is required, and she used hers to buy and develop a plot of land where she currently resides with her children.

Understanding how they used and managed their benefits is essential to understanding their social and economic livelihoods, given the myriad challenges they faced in obtaining the benefits. Key, is how they managed the demands of NOKs and other relatives who claim access to these benefits on cultural and patriarchal grounds (Ajayi et al., 2017; Steen and Asaro, 2006; N.L, 1998).

6.4.1 CHALLENGES OF DEALING WITH RELATIVES AND NEXT OF KIN

Another challenge faced with women was the tensions of dealing with the immediate family members of their late husbands. This is a common feature of widowhood, regardless of the cause or kind of death. While most of the participants interviewed mentioned that they are the respective NOKs of their late husbands, it still did not mitigate the challenges arising from NOK and relatives after the demise.

As stated in subsection (ii) of Findings 1 of the Responsibility of the Nigerian Army to war widows, soldiers are mandated to fill a yearly performance evaluation report (PER) where they get to change their NOKs yearly. However, most soldiers begin their careers as unmarried young adults with their immediate families or friends as NOKs. Since they often get married during their career, the services introduced the PER to mitigate the challenges of NOKs in the event of death or any eventuality[91]. A serving military officer at the military pension's board described how the Nigeria Defence headquarters, through the respective services, inform and lecture personnel on the necessity and importance of reviewing their next of kin regularly. This shows how the Nigerian military attempts to fulfil its social responsibility towards its soldiers/employees.

[91] Interview with Male Participant, Abuja. December 2020

Another participant linked the issue of changing NOK to the social apathy towards death in the African cultural setting which means that soldiers often do not prepare for the eventuality of deployment or combat-related death as the change of NOKship is overlooked. Recalling her experience, she noted that:

> "When I gave birth to my second daughter, I think it was the period I saw him fill his PER for the year. I was now like, what? You still have your father as your next of kin? How can you still have your dad as NOK? Meanwhile, we've been married, expecting our second baby. The next year, that is 2011, when he was filling his form, he said, give me two of your passports so I can go and change my NOK so that if I die, they will pay you plenty of money (he said it as a joke). Then I said what kind of talk that was how it was dismissed in 2011. He died in 2013"[92].

The above quote reveals the events behind NOKship in some military families, and the reasons given for these kinds of narratives or incidents. For instance, if a married soldier dies in combat and his primary NOK is his sibling, parent, or friend, the benefits and entitlements will be paid to whoever is identified on the PER form. As a result of the controversies that arise over NOKship and claim of benefits in the event of a combat death, the spouse (for a married soldier), is advised to be the NOK.

The PER is particularly useful when controversies about a soldier's next of kin arise. When matters of this nature occur, the NOK entered in the report for the previous year is referred to for confirmation purposes. Furthermore, friends and colleagues of personnel may also engage in a "last-minute'' change of NOK, particularly in instances where the NOK is an in-law, and the surviving spouse has taken proactive steps to ensure this is changed before the benefits are paid out. A participant shared an interesting scenario of such a case: "For some women, immediately their husband dies, their friends will go and check who the NOK is. They will collaborate with whoever the Oga is to change the next of kin quickly… I know plenty people that they helped in that way"[93]. Though unauthorised, initiatives such as these are done to assist families of fallen soldiers, so their due entitlements are not stolen away by indifferent or unsympathetic family members, as is usually the case.

[92] Interview with Female Participant, January 2021
[93] Interview with Female Participant, Abuja, February 2021

Also, the Nigerian Military Pensions Board (MPB) has a standing committee or board that interviews NOKs in instances where the NOK is not the wife nor the deceased's child. The procedure is undertaken by both the Nigerian Military Pensions Board and the three services of the Nigerian Military. Explaining the procedure in detail, a military officer noted that:

> "There is a NOK committee or board of the MPB that includes top personnel from the directorate of Army, Navy, and Airforce pensions. These three directorates are always present during the NOK sitting. They are part of the committee. When the NOK is not the son or the wife, they invite the NOK; there are questions that the committee would ask the individual as the NOK, they will ask him, does the deceased person have a wife? Does he have children? Does he have parents? They will then confirm if he did not come with his wife or somebody. They will defer the interview, and we will tell him to come with the wife of the NOK"[94].

The above explains the steps the Nigerian Military Board takes to ensure that the interests of its deceased soldier's wives are protected. However, there are limitations to these procedures as the MPB is powerless to act when NOK's refuses to involve the deceased spouse in the sharing of benefits. In this regard, a participant noted that the military board does not have the constitutional power or responsibility to resolve family conflicts. However, they assist families in agreeing on how the benefits will be shared. As he explained:

> "Constitutionally, we are to deal with the NOK but to reduce this friction, we bring them together and ask, "NOK, you are sure this is the NOK of your husband? Have you people agreed? If they say there is no problem, we pay the money to the NOK. We do not have any constitutional mandate or template. This is based on agreements between them, like the NOK says I'll give you (the wife) 60%, and the family will share 40%. They often agree that 60% goes to the children, 20% to the wife, and 20% to the deceased person's family. But no book or authority states that this is how it should be shared. The NOK can insist"[95].

Acting as an arbiter is another way the military pension's board assists families of deceased soldiers resolve issues that arise from sharing benefits. The families are

[94] Interview with Male Participant, Abuja, February 2021
[95] Interview with Male Participant, Abuja, February 2021

somewhat bound to follow the military's suggestion, given its social status and appeal. A participant shared her experience of the process. According to her:

> "Many men left their brothers as their next of kin or their fathers and were married with children. You could see women that the family collected everything. I must commend the Army for this because they realised the danger involved when a brother of a soldier is the next of kin, they will set up interview boards for NOKs, and the NOK to go and open a joint account. I was once interviewed as the NOK. They ask questions like, how were you able to use some of your benefits. Were you able to give your in-law something and all that? They began to question, and I know women who when the Army realised, they did not give them anything, the next step was if there was any other benefit left, they will summon the next of kin, ask them to open a joint account with the wife. This means that you cannot access that money without the wife's consent. They have to agree".

The above narrative situates the procedure's importance from a participant's point of view. As seen, the NOKs are interviewed by committee members to ensure that the needs of the soldier's nuclear and extended family are protected. The process details the steps taken when the NOK has faulted or reneged on an agreement to share benefits with the families of the deceased soldier.

As laudable as this may seem, some participants contested its suitability or convenience because the relatives, in some cases, are not responsive to the families' needs and these monies, in most cases, are not enough for the family. This amplifies the challenges widows face. Expressing her reservation at the sharing formula policy, a participant wondered why the wife and in-laws would have equal amounts in sharing the benefits. Another participant equally stated how the wives are constrained to take care of the children with their gratuities, whereas the relatives are freed of that obligation. As one participant stated…. then the little gratuity they will pay you, of course, the man did not fall from the sky. He has his extended family. You will see them standing on your neck, especially in a case where he has a mother and a father. They will be telling you that he is my son[96]. The unequal sharing formula with wives and families and the difficulties of dealing with NOKs are some of the concerns expressed by participants with this policy.

[96] Interview with Female Participant, Lagos, March 2021

Regardless of the policy's shortcomings, some Nigerian Army officers have assisted widows who have been cheated out of their husband's benefits by their in-laws in reclaiming their benefits. This occurs in cases where the husbands failed to change their NOKs to that of their wives. These cases are sometimes complex with the absence of offspring between them and are usually capitalised upon by relatives to deprive widows of their husbands' benefits. A participant narrated her experience of how she was cheated and deprived of some of her late husband's benefits and the roles played by the Nigerian Army authorities in ensuring she got some compensation from her in-laws. However, the lack of oversight or control over family affairs and pervasive corruption among some lowly ranked soldiers who intervened in the feud complicated her struggle to get significant compensation from her in-laws. What this shows, is that widows face many different challenges associated with NOKship that strain family relations and result in disputes about pay-out. This could have been prevented if the Nigerian military ensures that every soldier's documentation is up to date before deployment, or when the soldier gets married. However, the fact that the military has a policy in place to address such oversights and disputes, is laudable, especially as these widows often continue to face difficulties in dealing with relatives.

Related to NOK issues are disputes on how the monies should be shared amongst the family. Most of the deceased died intestate, without leaving a will. In such incidents, the benefits are shared according to the religious or customary tradition under which the marriage was contracted. The two widely practiced religions have their different inheritance sharing practices. In Islam, a wife is entitled to a quarter share of her deceased husband's estate if she has no children. If she has children, she is entitled to one eighth (1/8), and In Christianity, the property of a person dying intestate is bequeathed to the spouse of the deceased, or upon those who are kindred of the person deceased.

A participant shared her experience of how her late husband's family contested the identity of the NOK and shared the compensation benefits. To resolve the looming family dispute, she showed her father-in-law the credit notification of the gratuity that was paid and credited him N800 000 (approx. $1776.91) out of the N3.1M (approx. $6885) given to her[97]. Another participant told of how her late husband's family

[97] Interview with Female Participant, December 2021

quarrelled with her on the assumption that she received benefits and refused to inform them. What made matters worse, is that the participant was not even aware of the benefits and the entitlements due to her as his NOK[98].

Others described the challenges widows face with their relatives as a "typical widows" story and the stigma, discrimination, exploitation and ill-treatment widows face in Nigeria and Africa more broadly (Potash, 1986; Cattell, 2008; Fasanmi & Ayivor, 2019). However, given the circumstances surrounding the deaths of the husband/son/brother, there presumably ought to have been a reprieve for women who lost their soldier-husbands in the war. Or, to put more succinctly, women who lost their husbands in the war ought to have been better protected against the antics of in-laws and relatives who may want to subject them to humiliation and resentment by their husband's demise.

> "My in-laws are funny. Just like a normal typical widow's story, only a few of us have good in-laws who wouldn't want anything. In my case, it was different. They threatened to take my kids from me. That was from my husband's siblings. Few of them sympathised with me in the barracks when he died. They saw what we had, and some accused me of not bringing them to the house. I was like, it was my mourning period, and I couldn't go out. I would have asked someone to bring them here if they wanted to see the place. Besides, did you come to see my house or commiserate with me? So many things and issues started coming up. When the money came, I travelled home, called my father-in-law, and asked to organise a meeting to meet in the village. At the meeting, my in-laws subjected me to all forms of abuse and trauma. I told them I came here alone, trusting you all. I was confident that you were my brothers; they were like, what do I expect? This is African tradition"[99].

What this shows is that besides the financial issues of entitlements, the in-laws in some instances subject them to other forms of systemic abuse and humiliation. The children are also affected as they are sometimes denied assistance and support from relatives. A participant mentioned how her brother-in-law advised her to marry off her girl children, instead of sending them to tertiary institutions since she lacks the financial resources to cater to their education. She refused this advice as she (their mother) barely finished secondary school before getting married and did not want to repeat this

[98] Interview with Female Participant, February 2021
[99] Interview with Female Participant, Ogun State, March,2021

experience for her girl children[100]. These instances, which are generic to narratives of widowhood in Nigeria and Africa, regardless of cause or circumstance of widowhood. One would expect that military widows should be given greater social recognition and protection as widows of the State, but the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society, and the social status of widows, inhibits a different treatment and consideration of military widows. In this case, both military and non-military widows in Nigeria share similar social and cultural experiences of widowhood.

6.4.2 THE EFFECT ON LIVELIHOODS: MANAGING THE FAMILY AND THE HOMEFRONT

The death of their husbands had a profound effect on the livelihoods of war widows and their family. For some women, the challenges began after the deployment, especially where their husbands were hastily deployed and there was not sufficient time to brief widows, sign cheques books, and hand over personal matters that the husband normally attended to. Moreover, the erratic nature of communication and the long absence of the soldier affected the family's survival at home. These peculiar challenges of deployment has been detailed in the literature (Segal, 1986; Damousi, 2001; Faber et al., 2008; Chambers, 2013; Tomforde, 2015).

In Nigeria, the most profound effect on their livelihoods stemmed from the challenges with bureaucratic bottlenecks associated with the notification of combat casualty. One participant was not duly notified about her husband's death and was not given the necessary documents to initiate the payments. These created problems with sustaining the family, and she was forced to move in with her parents and on support of friends and colleagues to get the entitlements paid. Sharing her experience, the participant recalled:

> "My husband's unit is in Maiduguri. When everything (i.e., the notification, burial, mourning period) calms down, you know I will start following up because of the children. They normally give a salary of three months before payment of benefits. I didn't have any condolence letter or death certificate that I will use to start processing all these things. I was living in Ibadan. So, when the suffering was too much on the children and me, I left Ibadan and came to my village in Birnin Kebbi. I started living with my parents. My former neighbour, an officer in the

[100] Telephone Interview with Female Participant, February 2021

> Army, encouraged me to write a petition to the then Chief of Army Staff, Lt Gen Ihejerika, demanding my late husband's entitlements. It was when I wrote the petition that I got paid his benefits"[101].

The above quote briefly explains how the husband's death affects the deceased family's daily survival. The participant's experience is consistent with experiences of other military wives widowed in the war. More tellingly are how the post-demise livelihoods of the family are intricately connected to the administration of benefits and other compensations for the widows. This occurrence is not limited to Nigeria alone, but it is prevalent in other African and Western militaries as well (see: Baaz & Verweijen, 2016; Oguna, 2016; Deng, 2021). Although,for some western militaries, this occurrence occurred at different periods of their military's organisational evolution and development (Shamgar-handelman, 1981; 1993; Andrews and Lomas, 2014). The point being made here is that the intricate connection of family and military life significantly impacts military families in the event of a sudden and unplanned death.

Another impact of the death on their livelihoods relates to the difficulties of raising children and caring for the family after the death of the husband/father. This was more pronounced when the widows were either not paid the benefits on time, nor their children awarded sponsorships for their education. A participant narrated how she went into thrift savings and relied on goodwill to pay for her children's school fees. Some women resorted to taking their children to lesser quality schools to manage scarce resources and mitigate death's impact. Combining these creates food, health, and educational challenges for the family. A participant mentioned how she had to withdraw her child from a highbrow school to a less expensive one to mitigate the financial impact of the loss. According to her:

> "When my children were going to primary school here (in Lagos), we paid two hundred and fifty thousand naira (N250, 000) (approx. $601.96) (per term) at a primary school in Lagos. When the incident happened, I quickly used my tongue to count my teeth[102]. I changed their schools because I could afford the cost. How would I have coped? What is seventy-five thousand that they felt they were paying? How much is the money? Let them calculate the feeding of a child alone for three months. The child will eat three square meals''…[103]

[101] Interview with Female Participant, January 2021.
[102] Using your tongue to count your teeth It basically *means to think rationally before making a final decision*.
[103] Interview with female participant, Lagos state. March 2021.

The above quote explains the challenges faced by the women with regards to ensuring the continuity of their education. They have learned to manage and cope with whatever they can get by with in terms of their food security (Glazer *et al.*, 2010; Masten, 2013). One participant explained:

> "They (the children) are coping. If they see, they eat. If they don't see, they forget about it. I thank God that God has given me children that understand me. If I tell them I don't have, they do not disturb me and go about begging. They know if I have it, I will do it for them. The way their father was treating them, they lacked nothing. If it were other children, maybe they would have had a psychological issue. I thank God my children are calm. If I have, I give them. Sometimes, they would even be the ones to encourage me that mummy don't worry. If it is because of us, do not worry. If you don't have, no problem, we can manage. I thank God for that"[104].

Several studies have focused on the impact of death on military children. Some of these studies have highlighted children's behavioural and emotional responses to the loss, as seen in the quote above (Lehman & Cozza, 2011; Lester and Flake, 2013; Holmes et al., 2013; Cozza et al., 2017). While this quote from the participant may appear as an exception, the importance of strong support systems and care for children of fallen service members is crucial, given the vulnerability of widowhood.

6.4.3 DEALING WITH VULNERABILITY AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

Different participants explained how their vulnerable state had been capitalised upon, their widowhood status trivialized, and reduced to the entitlements they received. In this case, military widows are stigmatized and looked down upon. Sharing her experience on how they are treated unfairly, a participant noted that:

> Sometimes if they bring palliatives from the division (divisional military headquarters), they (the soldiers that share) will be insulting us that since they paid them, why don't we use our money to buy food or take care of ourselves and if we misbehave, they will send us out of the barracks or insult them. They try to make us feel like they are doing us a favour. They make us feel bad, and sometimes we don't go to collect because of how they treat us[105].

[104] Interview with female participant, January 2021.
[105] Interview with female participant, Maiduguri, February 2021.

Payment of benefits, whether in full or in part, has impacted how they have been rendered vulnerable by members of the military community. These have also contributed to how they are harassed, as the benefits paid are often not enough to meet the family's needs. Discussions with the participants revealed how they were aware of the vulnerable state their widowhood status plunged them into. The absence of a husband to act as a shield is a reality they have grappled with on various occasions. They have had to deal with various forms of humiliation and abuse. Sharing her experience of vulnerability, a participant recalled that:

> My husband had a car before he died but I sold the car and used the money for something else. When I received the benefit, I used part of it to buy another car. On this fateful day, I went to see someone behind my apartment. I parked the car just in front of one man's house. As we talked, the man came out and said, "madam is it your husband that parked this car?" the woman I visited said, no… I said I was the one that parked it. He said, why will I park the car there? I should come and get the car out of there. I was like; I will do that. He said, Madam, stand up and park the car right away; why will I park there without telling him? It is not as if he doesn't know me o. He knows me. So, I felt bad, but I didn't make it obvious. I felt like supposing it was my husband that I knew he was his senior. Would he have asked my husband to remove the car from there? And he knows I am a widow. Why would he talk to me like that, as if we had issues before? Supposing I am a soldier, he would not have asked me not to park the car there. You see what I am talking about. So, these are the little things we encounter…[106]

For some widows, their situations have been derided out of ignorance, jealousy, and false assumptions related to the benefits and pensions they collect. Participants narrated how friends, families, and other (military and civilian) community members took advantage of and made derisive comments on their widowhood status. Military widows in other patriarchal societies/ militaries have equally reported similar widowhood experiences. The war widows are being discriminated based on their widowhood, and other variables, such as livelihood, education, dress pattern, culture, and social norms etc. They are socially controlled, and are expected to dress a certain manner, discriminated in the kinds of livelihood activities they can engage in, prohibited from participating in certain cultural events etc. These further contributes to their adjustement to widowhood, as a large population of widowed women are young

[106] Interview with female participant, Abuja, December 2020

women, and suffer further social and psyschological vulnerability (Gunawardane, 2017; Pannilage & Gunawardena, 2017; Tunaç & Küçükkaraca, 2020).

Such discrimination is no unique to the war widows in Nigeria. Tunaç & Küçükkaraca (2020) noted that military widows in the Turkish military were stigmatized by members of the society on account of their husband's deaths, and denied the rights to properly mourn their loss. Additionally, the widows were made to belief that the benefits they got were enough to compensate for their loss. Similarly, war widows of government soldiers in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Caucasus, experienced various forms of marginalization and social exclusion as war widows. The monthly pensions given by the State to the widows does not shield them from social surveillance by members of the society, rather it places a certain form of social expectation on them. They are expected to conform to patriarchal norms, maintain ties with their husbands' family, act as heroines of the State, and maintain sexual chastity (Ziemer & Shahnazarian, 2018).

The vulnerable statuses of the women have also been taken advantage of through various forms of sexual exploitation and harassment within the military community. Women are often propositioned for sex by senior NCOs and officers in exchange for swift processing and payments of their late husband's benefits.

> "There are some widows in the Barracks that are not working, and soldiers are taking advantage in the name of help. They will say they want to help you so that they go pay your money quick. One would say give me your phone number, anytime I will get in touch with you. Some of them will say come and see me. If you did not accept to sleep with them, some of these big men will just delay your money. Some are officers, and some are warrant officers".

This is a rather silent aspect of the military widowhood experience that is not so mentioned in public spaces and media as it further impugns their social status: A participant mentioned that the practice is prevalent but being kept out of the public glare. According to her: "It is rampant. Some people are just keeping quiet because they don't want to bring people out. Some of them are married people, and they know your husband when he is alive, yet they will want to take advantage*".* A participant mentioned:

> "As young widows, we face a lot of challenges, especially from the community we are in. When we were at the Barracks, some women do think that as you are a widow, you are enjoying without knowing what you are passing through. At times too, men, it is not easy. Some men will think a man is your problem, so they will come and approach you. If one is married or my husband is alive today, nobody will be saying all those things. So, there are challenges. Sometimes a soldier will approach you when we go for sponsorship for our children, you will see a soldier saying he likes you. Soldiers that used to come and sweep for you and work for you in the house will come and say he likes you. There are lots of them everywhere- Lagos, Abuja".

Another participant explained the brazen and explicit nature of the harassment they encounter from military personnel. According to her:

> "You will hear them tell you, ah! Mrs. A, you are looking beautiful, who warms your bed in the night? That is what some of them – both soldiers and officers do. You will not believe that even some of my husband's friends are approaching me. They want to sleep with you. They will say it is better them than outsiders. They will say, they can keep your secret. It is no longer a shame for them. There are some cases in Abuja, though it did not really happen to me, I heard that when they went, they were telling them that they should meet them in a social place, like a guest house, that you come with your file, you sleep with them, and they will sign the file for you. Some do that. Although, apart from the experiences I have heard around me here, I haven't heard any experience outside. These are some of the things that the widows face."

Evidently, the women's' vulnerability is linked to both their low social, political economic status. Additionally, the sexual lives of widows has always been a subject of social scrutiny and attention in historic and contemporary periods (Buitelaar, 1995). The sexual lives and good/moral chasitity of war widows in Australia, and Britain, during the WW I and II, and also in Iran and Israel were monitored by state officials and used as a basis for ascertaining their continued eligibility for pensions (Shamgar-handelman, 1981; Damousi, 1999; Zahedi, 2006). These instances showed how various states have attempted to control the lives. Furthermore, widows contend with both the bureaucratic and patriarchal power embedded in military as the individuals involved have the agency, and connections to facilitate or withhold their miliary benefits for compliance and otherwise. Expanding on their helplessness, one participant narrated the challenges of widows and dealing with some soldiers:

> “This is the thing some of the widows are undergoing in these Barracks. Some of them (soldiers) will just take that advantage of you because you are helpless. Nobody can help you collect all your husband’s benefits. They want to use that advantage to just sleep with you before they will help you. Let the government help us. so that we will have something doing even though they did not pay the money quick. At least that will hold us down pending when they will pay their money”.

The challenges encountered by Nigerian military widows are like those mentioned by widows in other patriarchal societies/ militaries. A 2016 study on military widows in Sri Lanka that had 292 military widows as research participants found that nearly half experienced some form of sexual harassment, including sexual bribery. However, this is under- reported due to fear of stigmatization (UN WOMEN, 2020). The experiences of some Nigerian military widows, compares to the experiences of war widows in other African militaries, like the FARDC, where Commanders of army units exploit the vulnerabilty of war war widows, by demanding sexual favours or fraction of their payments in exchange for administrative assitance on their benefits (Baaz & Verweijen, 2016). It is comparable to that faced by civilian war widows of the Boko Haram conflict, who encounter vicious forms of sexual exploitation and violence by state security and humanitarian officials overseeing the camps for persons displaced by the conflict (Ajayi, 2020; Njoku & Akintayo, 2021).

Hence, what one sees is that military widows have to deal with vulnerability and sexual exploitation among members of the Nigerian military community. Their vulnerabilites are taken advantage of through snide and degrading remarks, social stigmatization and discrimination, and various forms of sexual harassment and bribery, among officials of the Nigerian Army under the guise of assitance with their entitlements. Through this, we can see that the widows experience a form of vicarious victimization, perpetuated by Nigerian military authorities, through its officials. These are exacerbated by the inability to properly administer their due entitlements, create safe socio-economic spaces for the widows, and give them due regard and honour, as war widows.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The data presented in this chapter provided a descriptive foray into the lived experiences of Nigerian Army widows whose soldier husbands died in the war against Boko Haram. It showed the complex social, economic, political, and administrative difficulties faced by Nigerian Army widows of the Boko Haram conflict. These difficulties impact on the coping and support strategies of the widows, and has led them to being vulnerable, marginalized, and exploited. Yet, widows of Nigerian Army soldiers have coped and survived after their husband's death, by adopting both problem-focused and emotion focused coping strategies and using the available bonding and bridging social capital they have access to.

Findings in this chapter spoke to the objectives and questions of the study. One of these was the difficulties of accessing benefits and compensations for their late husbands. Participants had different experiences relating to little or no information of benefits processing and timelines, incomplete and non-sequential payments of benefits, limited sponsorship payments with stringent conditions and processes. All this point to failures in the bureaucratic administration of widows' affairs. Another was the social support provided by the widows' association. This study found that the support provided by the military widows' association cannot be tangibly measured. The Association has largely depended on the goodwill and influence of its members, who have, in turn, sacrificed and supported other members of the Association. There is limited support across the military and civil society communities for the Association and its members. Finally, the Association still resides under the shadow of the military community, which affects the willingness of civil society to support its philanthropic efforts, due to strained civil-military relations.

Further, the findings showed that a narrow line exists between the women's coping and social support strategies and the impact of the deaths on their livelihood. The biggest challenge to their coping was the non-payment, or late payment of their benefits and other entitlements. This non-payment impacted how they managed their compensations, as well, as how they dealt with relatives and NOKs due to the socio-cultural strictures imposed on them.

In addition to this was the vulnerability and sexual harassment experienced by widows. The women were inappropriately propositioned by officials, most times, in exchange for fast processing of their benefits, and other times, to exploit their vulnerability. Other forms of maltreatment they experienced was due to their social status as widows – no husband or male figure to shield them. Besides this, there was a lack of formal post-bereavement coping and healing processes in place to provide the necessary psychological support to these widows. The findings revealed some issues specific to military community members and are generic to widowed women, regardless of social belonging and category. This was evident in the impact of the deaths on their livelihoods.

Regardless of the generality and sameness of widowhood, the Nigerian military and government authorities must pay attention war widows and military families impacted in various ways by the Boko Haram war. Through prompt administration of death benefits, payments of compensations for the women and their children, provision of social welfare and post-bereavement programmes; empowering the Military Widows Association through take-off grants, subsidies and encouraging it to seek support from outside the military community , the Nigerian military authorities can fulfil its ethical responsibility towards families of its fallen men, and further instil the spirit of patriotism and sacrifice amongst its serving soldiers and wider members of the military and civilian community.

CHAPTER SEVEN

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The main research question this study sought to answer was how Nigerian military widows of the Boko Haram conflict cope with the death of their husbands and the livelihood strategies they adopt where the state fails to provide the necessary support. The research objectives of the study looked at the responsibility of the Nigeria Army to its widows, the influence of the Nigerian military widow's association and the kinds of support they offer to Nigerian military widows of the Boko Haram conflict, as well as the different the forms of coping and social support strategies adopted by the widows.

7.1 THE NIGERIAN ARMY SUPPORT TO ITS WAR WIDOWS OF THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT

Well-functioning military bureaucracies are efficient, impersonal, adhere to standard operating procedures, and works to provide services to its members (Shields, 2004). Poor functioning bureaucracies are inefficient, corrupt, and exist along neo-patrimonial lines (Ikpe, 2000). The operation of a bureaucracy has implications for service delivery as it determines the extent to which it functions.

A major challenge faced by war widows and veterans across different militaries is dealing with the bureaucratic structures of the military institution regarding benefits and compensations. Across different militaries, there are policies and legislations that stipulate how war widows access benefits in different militaries. However, these are difficult for women/individuals involved to navigate (Oguna, 2016; Fadeeva *et al.*, 2022). Dealing with the military bureaucracy was particularly difficult for Nigerian military widows . While they are legally entitled to compensation upon their husbands' deaths, they encounter a myriad of bottlenecks accessing them. The barriers faced by the women are partially due in part to the centralised nature of the Nigerian Army bureaucracy, as well as the absence of a support/advocacy structures that provides them with the necessary information on where and how to begin and follow up on their benefits.

The centralised administration of benefits is the biggest bureaucratic hurdle the women encounter. The process is suffused with burdensome bureaucratic protocols

beginning from the unit level (battalion) to the supervising headquarters (brigade/division) and eventually to the command headquarters (DOAA, NA). The claims need to be vetted at each of these levels, and these cause significant delays in the processing of the entitlements. Additionally, combat realities, such as delays in casualty notification or instances of personnel reported missing in action (MIA), have also affected the processes of administering benefits.

As explained, women are oblivious to the necessary information and guidance on how to get their entitlements and the different challenges involved. There are no support units within the bureaucracy that provides the necessary information on how to claim their benefits and seek redress where necessary. The situation of Nigeria Army war widows differs largely from other advanced militaries where widows or NOK of deceased soldiers are assigned visiting officers (VO) or casualty notification officers (CNO) (as it applies in the UK and US militaries respectively) that interfaces between the military services and the bereaved families, and provide guidance on all financial and non-financial matters relating to the deceased (Cawkill, 2009; Army Casualty Program, 2019).

The absence of an administrative and financial assistance unit for military widows has further contributed to the payment delays as the women deal with corrupt and inefficient military officials that systematically hinder the payments of their entitlements through tacit means. The inability of the Nigerian Army authorities to adequately compensate the widows shows the extent to which the Nigerian Army is a greedy institution. The benefits of service, as we have seen, are not commensurate to the risks incurred by the servicemen and the widows and families they leave behind.

Furthermore, some privileged widows, like those of senior commissioned officers, use their social connections within the military hierarchy to bypass the bottlenecks involved in the payment process. A key finding is how they take advantage of the neo-patrimonial arrangement in the Nigerian military and utilise this for their personal benefit. It also reifies the rank–status dichotomy prevalent in military institutions, as widows with higher connections can use their access, to the exclusion of lower-ranked widows or widows of non-commissioned officers. This clearly demonstrates that the neo-patrimonial practices impede the smooth running of the bureaucratic structure and affect the smooth delivery of benefits to women. To this end, there is a need to address

the administrative processes involved in the dispensing of benefits to women, and improve its functioning in compliance with other advanced military bureaucracies that have and adhere to laid down guidelines and procedures for administering military benefits (US-CMAOD, no date; Ministry of Defence UK, 2015)

Similarly, the challenges encountered by Nigerian Army widows have been experienced by war widows in other African militaries, like that of Kenya and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Military widows in these African states were neither guided, nor assisted in the compensations processes. Rather, they found themselves at the mercy of military officials who requested various forms of financial assistance, including sexual favours in order to help widows process their compensations and secure their benefits (Baaz & Verweijen, 2016; Oguna, 2016). Therefore, it can be said that some military officials do not act professionally and exploit the vulnerability of widows who lost their husbands in the conflict. What the above illustrates is a combination of institutional failures and professional misconduct which affect military widows' dignity and ability to access the benefits legally due to them. To some extent the military widows' association has tried to mitigate the negative affect of this on the bereaved women.

7.2 THE MILITARY WIDOWS ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY TO NIGERIAN MILITARY WIDOWS

The Military Widows Association's was established mid-way into the Boko Haram war, specifically due to the rise in casualties during this conflict. Military widows' associations are often founded as an afterthought of war operations and their impact on women. As politically sensitive associations, the military widows association provides women with the bridging capital that traverses the divide that typically exists between the military institution .and wives of deceased servicemen and enables them to advocate for and make demands for military widows within and beyond the military community (Lomas, 1997a). The role played by the Nigerian Military Widows association is not unique and is also found in other countries (War Widows Association, no date; Damousi, 1999a; Cooke, 2003; Tognini, 2012; Thurley, 2021).

However, the MIWA has struggled to make an impact in the lives of its members by helping the widows push for prompt payment of their benefits and advocating for

much-improved welfare for the widows and their families. Their lack of resources has meant that they have not sufficiently used their agency to bridge access to the Nigerian the military hierarchy. Hampering this, is that the public image of the military has affected their ability to link up with other civil society organisations to support their cause. As such, the Association as a corporate entity does not have the collective social capital to leverage support and put pressure on the military institution to deliver on their legal obligations to compensate military widows. Hence, they often must relay personal connections to secure benefits for its members, which are infrequent and unsustainable. Furthermore, its late emergence into the military family community has limited its influence. I argue that, if a military widows association was formed after the Nigerian civil war ended in 1970, or in the aftermath of the peacekeeping operations in the 1990s, the Association would have been a recognized body, like other military widows associations in different militaries (War Widows Association of Great Britain, no date; Tognini, 2012).

To date, most of the support received by the Association comes from private assistance, public donations, and collective goodwill of its own members. However, the members lack tangible assets, like land, and livestock, and human and financial capital, such as economic assets, manpower, knowledge, and skills, as well as the political capital to mobilise outside of the military community and draw support to their cause. Hence, they fall back on self-support, a function of their bonding social capital. The self-support is used to meet critical needs of members, like paying school fees and medical bills. Other forms of support come from older military widows, some of whom have higher social status, or are widows of senior military officers. Others have shown motherly care and responsibility to younger widows through personal sacrifices, and contributions to ensure the Association benefits its members. These instances show how the Association relies majorly on bonding social capital to support military through these acts of care. Other studies have found that these bonds of mutual support are critical for military widows (Harrell, 2003; Jervis, 2011). However, the Association has been able to provide some briding capital through linking up with associations of serving officer's wives in Nigerian military, and the Nigerian Legion, the Veterans support group.

The support provided by these groups are majorly done on military celebration days, such as the Armed Forces Remembrance Day (AFRD), and other special celebrations of the Nigerian Army, Airforce, and Navy. Support for the Military Widows have also come from non-governmental military support groups, gender-based NGOs, and other civil advocacy associations in Nigeria. They also provide empowerment-based support to military widows through their affiliations with the military wives' associations. These forms of support also exist in other African militaries, like Kenya and Burkina Faso. In these militaries, support to military wives is provided by military and civilian based NGOs (Military Wives Association Kenya (MWAK) – Kenya, n.d.; Sagbe, 2021).

Assistance rendered to the military widows' association, both from within the military community, and the NGO sector are not without challenges. These difficulties concern the forms of empowerment programmes, and their impact, and their relationships with their co-military support associations. These empowerment programmes often reduce the processes of economic freedom to short entrepreneurial training and projects (Ajayi, 2020:13). While self-development and skill acquisition for economic survival are crucial, emphasis should also be placed on other existential needs, such as mental health, housing, education, and jobs for the women. By so doing, they are empowered in productive ways and can adopt constructive coping and survival strategies.

A critical challenge is the MIWA's lack of financial capacity available to embark and administer projects with minimal external interference. This lack of funding has led it rely on military groups for support, which in turn, influences the kinds of training and empowerment programmes it initiates. Furthermore, the MIWA's challenge in working with other civil and military based NGOs stems from the broad difficulties of doing research on the military, and its associated challenges of access, and trust to outsiders (Higate & Cameron, 2006; Ben-Ari & Levy, 2014). There is very limited space for civil and military NGOs in Nigeria to successfully carry out their work without the support of the military community. Although instances of how the voluntary sector have supported bereaved military families are also replicated in other militaries, e.g. the United Kingdom Military (Green *et al.*, 2012), the military widows have to explore other forms of coping and survival outside of the military widows' association.

7.3 THE COPING AND SOCIAL SUPPORT STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY NIGERIAN ARMY WIDOWS OF THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT

One of the key findings in this study is that women's access to social and economic capital are lost upon widowhood. The loss of the main breadwinner, i.e. the husband, causes a significant decrease or loss in a wife's economic capital and access to productive assets and other financial instruments (Corden et al, 2008). This is also inclusive of deaths from other non-natural causes, such as armed conflicts and health epidemics (Ardington *et al.*, no date; Blackburn, 2010).

Evidently, the above is not different for war widows of the Nigerian Army. The deaths of their husbands have led to a decline, loss, or massive shift in the forms of their economic sustenance. The women have resorted to different forms of economic survival, depending on their social rank and status. Widows of commissioned officers are formally employed in government departments. They are also engaged in multiple businesses, and widows of non-commissioned officers who are either not formally educated, or do not have gainful employment, are also engaged in small-scale entrepreneurship activities for self-sustenance. Their lack of gainful employment has significantly impacted their capacity to survive economically after the death of their husbands (Akanle & Ejiade, 2012; Akanle & Adesina, 2016:7835).

While variables, such as the rank of the late husband, and the educational and employment status of the widow, are factors to consider in how the widows' have coped economically, the economic impact of widowhood is burdensome regardless of the military rank or status of the late husband. The women are faced with financial insecurity, anxiety and have to take on new economic roles. All these further heighten their use of emotional coping strategies (Corden & Hirst, 2013). Nonetheless, widows of higher-ranking officers have better economic survival and coping prospects than those of lesser ranked officers. Additionally, their social status counts as additional social capital for them as officers' wives as they are connected through the bonds of belonging and participating in the affairs of the military wives' associations. This creates avenues through which they access social support within the military.

The nature of military work and its demands on families warrants the provisions of formal and informal support to families experiencing the challenges of wartime

deployment, injuries, and deaths. Widows of officers and non-commissioned officers in the Nigerian Army provide peer support and assistance to each other, as this is contingent on previously established relationships. Widows of commissioned officers are the privileged class with the social capital to access the military hierarchy. Widows of non-commissioned officers are not as privileged as they are excluded from this closed social network. Coleman's argument on how network closure, and social relevance of an organization – beyond its main function – facilitates social capital, finds utility in this particular case (Coleman, 1988: 107–108), and further reveals the limitations of gendered social capital within hierarchical organizations. Emotional and financial support is also provided to the bereaved widow by friends, and colleagues of the deceased. These forms of support are temporal (Powers *et al*., 2014:506). However, this can be mediated through institutional and instrumental support from the military that is targeted at helping the women rebuild their lives after their husband's demise. However, the challenge in this regard is in the limited, ad hoc and largely informal nature of bereavement support for Nigerian military widows.

The support available for Nigerian military widows pales in comparison to that provided by Western militaries, that have established units, policies, and programs for bereavement and casualty assistance (Steen & Asaro, 2006; Lester, 2015;250; Ministry of Defence UK, 2015). In Nigeria, the gap in the formal provision of post bereavement support is filled by informal support from military widows, and military wives' associations. This also is not without its intricate difficulties, as such spaces are not devoid of the clashes, dilemmas and complications associated with military spouses (Di Nola, 2008; Parcell & Maguire, 2014). In the absence of social support by members of the military community, which is mediated by weak bonding social capital among the widows, some widows turn to their families for coping with bereavement.

Families are important sources of coping and support. As explained earlier, families are the first responders in bonding social capital, and its importance cannot be overestimated, as they are useful in helping bereaved family members cope with loss. For military families, the death of the soldier-husband often results in the withdrawal or total loss of existing family support, as the soldier is the main breadwinner of the family (Oguna, 2016). An absence of family support leaves the widow with the sole burden of raising and maintaining the family (Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007; Glazer *et*

al., 2010; Dominique van de Walle, 2018). As such, the women experience a double loss, a loss of bonding social capital provided by the family, and the loss of economic support, provided by the deceased family member (Corden & Hirst, 2013). So, we see here that the families, i.e., in-laws and family of the bereaved are also affected by the loss and are unable to render tangible forms of social and economic support.

Additionally, the refusal of the widow to present herself for cultural rites and practices, such as remarrying into her late husbands' family, often results in the withdrawal of family support. Remarkably, Nigerian military widows do not benefit much for their late husbands' family in terms of support as the findings have showed. To this end, some of them have turned to social charities, and religious bodies for support and assistance. In this regard, the widows received different forms of support from military and non-military NGOs in the Nigerian civil society community.

Further support has also been provided by other charities and religious bodies in Nigeria. The support provided by religious bodies feeds into the established body of literature that highlights the role of religion and spirituality in empowering and helping widows cope with traumatic loss (Chapple, Swift & Ziebland, 2011; Bauta, 2020). Like all forms of received support, the support provided by the chaplaincy services and social charities affiliated with the Nigerian military is limited and fraught with its own difficulties in catering for a large population of military widows within and outside the barracks community. Hence, they are still limited in their ability to meet the crucial social and psychological needs of the women. Therefore, the women often resort to religion and personal resilience for coping and survival. Studies have shown how resilience and religious coping has been used as a buffer for psychological wellbeing (Korang-Okrah, 2015; Ozcan, Hoelterhoff & Wylie, 2021).

What this study found, is that in the absence of concrete support from the military community and family members, Nigerian Army widows relied on their personal fortitude, strength, and resilience, as well as their trust and belief in God to go through their experiences. These coping resources, which are emotion focused, complement their limited social and human capital. The experiences of Nigerian Army widows reflect the multifarious findings from different studies that have shown the positive correlation between religion and spirituality (Michael *et al*., 2003; Chapple *et al*., 2011; Park & Halifax, 2011; Testoni *et al*., 2022).

Individual resilience and adaptational capacities developed by military wives during periods such as deployment has also proved useful in their dealing with bereavement (Aducci *et al.*, 2011; King, Carr & Taylor, 2021). Additionally, the widows have relied on support from other similarly situated widows to adjust and adapt. This kind of support exists at an inter-personal level, and widows' latch into the bonding and fellowship provided by fellow widows to move on with their lives (Sekgobela, Peu & van der Wath, 2019). This widow-to-widow peer support exists among Nigerian Army widows, and it is mediated by the strength of the widows bonding social capital. What this shows is that the strength of their social capital plays a significant role in their continued coping and survival. These coping strategies are particularly important, as the death of their husbands has a profound effect on their livelihoods and that of their families.

7.4 THE IMPACT OF DEATH ON THEIR LIVELIHOODS AND THAT OF THEIR FAMILIES

The low economic status and absence of communal support to help cushion the impact of the loss are major considerations in evaluating how the women spent their benefits. This was important as the women had to deal with family members (Next of Kins and Relatives) and manage the dictates of religion and culture. A major expenditure incurred by widows was on private housing outside the military bases. There was no support provided by the military authorities for women transiting from military to civilian accommodations and lives. This again reflects the extent to which the greediness of the Nigerian military is shown and demonstrated. Furthermore, most of the widows were compelled by cultural traditions to disclose details and share monies received from the military with their late husband’s families. A similar experience was recounted by military widows in the Turkish military, as widows of soldiers experienced tensions related to death benefits and compensations with the families of their late husbands (Tunaç & Küçükkaraca, 2020).

The difficulty of managing family relationships is also compounded by the complicated issue of NOKship or who the rightful NOK is. These places the women in dilemmatic conditions as they deal with other in-laws (brother or sister – in law or parents) who are the NOKs and recipients of the entitlements or benefits. The complexity of the economic and social difficulties that military widows face can lead them to feeling of

being dispossessed, excluded, and marginalised. An understanding of how they have managed their death compensations provides a space to examine the effect of the deaths on their livelihoods and family sustenance, as they are doubly victimized, first, by the State – through its inability to properly administer their due entitlements and give them due regard and honour, as military widows, and secondly, by their family, as the loss of their husbands, automatically translates into a loss of their wifehood status.

A major effect of the death was in the areas of family and livelihood sustenance. These two areas experienced its acute impact as it altered the wives' socioeconomic status, and household functioning. Most of the women were housewives, and were dependent on their husbands, as the case usually is, with military spouses. The conditions of the widows aligns with the findings of Miller *et al*., (2012) that household labour market earnings of military families decline substantially in the years following the combat death of a member of the household.

Livelihood and family sustenance for Nigerian Army widows was heightened with the lack of active and practical support in administrative and post-bereavement matters. As earlier discussed in Section 1, the women experienced various challenges in getting the right information about their husbands' deaths and accessing their benefits and this affected their livelihood capabilities. The limited support received by bereaved military families is not limited to Nigeria alone, as a recent study on the UK military has shown. This study indicated that families who experienced loss in the last two decades experienced difficulties in receiving service benefits and pensions (Fadeeva *et al*., 2022:5). However, the differences between Western and Nigerian/African militaries are firstly the organisational head start available to them, and secondly the constant and continuous reviews of policies and procedures in matters of personnel welfare and support.

Additionally, the widows struggled with raising children, playing dual parent roles, and overall family maintenance following their husband's death. These struggles are linked to the non-payment of benefits, and other entitlements, such as educational scholarships for the children as is provided for in other militaries (Joint Casualty and Compassionate Centre, no date). The lack of support from the military heightens the trauma of bereavement for the children as they adjust to the permanent absence of

the late parent (Cohen *et al.*, 2009; Lehman & Cozza, 2011). Support from the surviving parent, in spite of their precarious situations, is crucial in mitigating the impact of the loss (Sogomonyan & Cooper, 2010; Masten, 2013).

What this study found is that Nigerian military widows have encountered various forms of sexual exploitation, especially in exchange for their late husband's benefits. There is a heavy silence on this part of their widowhood experience as the widows risk losing whatever social connections, support and assitance they derived from the military community. Furthermore, they fear being stigmatized, victimised and blamed. Their inability to disclose these aspects of their widowhood experiences, coupled with the weak influence of their Association mean that they are often unable to challenge this through judicial means, or through other forms of civic action, such as public demonstrations, rallies, media interviews. This keeps the affected women in highly disadvantaged and disempowered positions .

The vulnerable statuses of the women have also been taken advantage of through various forms of verbal abuses within the military community. Their social status has been ridiculed, and the entitlements received has also been a subject of idle gossip, envy and bitterness among other serving spouses, friends and relatives, and other members of the military and civilian community. This reflects the system of the wider Nigerian society that is heavily patriarchal, and does not recognize widows, regardless of status, or circumstance of death. These issues, explain the lived experiences of Nigerian Army widows whose husbands died fighting Boko Haram terrorists in Northeast Nigeria.

7.5 CONCLUSION

Given the above analysis, what are the main conclusions drawn from the experiences of war widows of the Boko Haram conflict? The discussions showed the extent to which the Nigerian Army has handled its ethical and legal responsibilities towards the widows of its soldiers who died in the Boko Haram conflict is severely compromised. The study established that Nigerian Army widows have experienced difficulties accessing their benefits due to the centralized nature of the Nigerian Army bureaucracy. The women’s challenges meant that they had to endure long periods of endless waiting for their entitlements. In instances where they are paid, this is often

piecemeal and irregular, with no clear details on when to expect the next batch of payments. Furthermore, the current procedure of centralizing the administration of benefits in the Headquarters of the Nigerian Army and the Military Pensions Board, Abuja respectively has hindered the swift processing of their benefits, contributing to their social and economic despondency. These failures in the administration of widows' affairs expose how the Nigerian Army have neglected to fulfil its responsibilities toward the families of its fallen personnel in the Boko Haram conflict. This dereliction of responsibility and non-fulfilment of their obligations has portrayed the Nigerian Army as non-recompensing greedy institution. It also shows how its bureaucracy functions along neo-patrimonial lines and clandestinely sanctions the neglect and exploitation of military widows.

The failure of the state to fulfil its obligations has compelled women to seek other avenues of support. One of these was through the Military Widows Association. Military widow associations are recognized advocacy and welfare groups and fulfils symbolic and influential roles within the military community. The creation of the Association in the wake of the Boko Haram conflict provided this promise of support and assistance. However, the inability of this Association to provide the necessary bridging capital to enable the women to access the networks of power within the military bureaucracy has limited their social reach and access to the Nigerian military community that has not rendered the fullest support to the Association and its members. Their bridging capital was hampered by their military identity which inhibited them from seeking assistance outside of the military community because of the negative effect on the public image and status of the Nigerian Army. This implies that the MIWA has not been able to use its identity and status to push for a society-wide recognition of military widows, their challenges, and sacrifices. Nonetheless, the Association has provided important bonding capital that is an extensive source of social, psychological, emotional, and material support to the women at inter-personal and inter-group levels.

Besides this, widows of the Nigerian Army have adopted a range of coping and social support strategies to deal with their losses. A key finding is that the women's natural bonding capital (their families) has not provided the needed bonding capital. The reason for this is the inherent cultural rites and practices, such as levirate remarriage,

property inheritance, and general neglect and abandonment of the widow, that are typically associated with spousal death in Nigeria. In many instances, the deaths of their husbands erase the familial bonds provided by marriage and left the widows without natural support systems. Besides this, their most efficient social capital, which is bonding with other widows, is limited by their social status. Despite this limitation, the women have expressed resilience and strength in face of their everyday challenges as military widows and in the absence of instrumental and institutional support. Institutional support from the Nigerian military towards the provision of post-bereavement and traumatic assistance care, and other material support can coexist with their problem and emotion focused coping strategies.

In terms of their livelihoods, the widows have had to contend with different challenges, from sustaining their families, managing pressures from in-laws on the compensations, absence of bereavement support from the military institution, and dealing with social vulnerability and sexual exploitation. While their socio-economic and livelihood challenges mirrors on the everyday challenges faced by widows within the wider society, their status as “widows of the State” warrants a privileged socio-political recognition, support, and prestige.

Evidently, with the lack of support provided by the Nigerian Army and the Military widows Association, Nigerian Army war widows struggle to obtain their benefits and have the resort to other coping strategies to ensure their livelihoods. In this regard, women have resorted to different economic, social, and psychological support strategies, depending on the reach of their social capital and status. Notably, the experience of Nigerian military widows does not differ from the situation of military widows in other African and Asian militaries who have had to cope with wartime loss in the face of limited support from their state’s militaries. There are parallels with other militaries during the World wars, were soldiers died in other lands. The widows of these militaries bore greater burdens of war loss, as their social lives were controlled and surveilled by State agents, because their livelihoods depended on the monthly pensions they received from the State (Shamgar-handelman, 1981; Damousi, 1994; Janis Lomas, 1997a; Lanthier, 2004; Zahedi, 2006).

The limited coping and survival choices of the widows, in the absence of state support, have inadvertently impacted their livelihood. What this shows is that there is a direct

correlation between the failure to pay compensation, school sponsorships for their children, and their daily livelihoods. This study has shown that if the women are paid their entitlements in due time, they can use it to secure permanent accommodation or engage in productive ventures that can sustain their livelihoods. A more significant linkage between the state's dereliction of duties, and their livelihoods, is revealed in how the widows' social and sexual lives were demeaned and taken advantage of, in the name of, assistance with benefits by military officials. The implication of this is that military widows are seen as women in need of relief, and assistance, and can thus be exploited and taken advantage of by corrupt military officials working in a dysfunctional and neo-patrimonial bureaucratic system. Extending this further means that the Nigerian military, and by extension the Nigerian state, places minimal or no value on the sacrifices and symbolic worth of military widows, and families of fallen soldiers who died in the line of duty for the country.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The key challenges highlighted in this study necessitate the proffering of actionable recommendations to the Nigerian military and defence authorities, widows, and veteran groups, on ways of assisting widows of fallen soldiers who paid the supreme price in the defence of the country's territorial integrity. These recommendations are a product of existing practices in other militaries and can be adapted to suit local needs and initiatives in the Nigerian military community. The recommendations are highlighted below:

A major challenge this study identified is the over-centralisation of the military bureaucracy. The records of deceased personnel are sent from his unit to the military headquarters for processing. This process is, error-prone, time-consuming, and laborious. To this end, the Defence Headquarters, and the respective services, in conjunction with the concerned military departments, and formations should decentralize or at the very least streamline the bureaucracy associated with death notifications and payments of benefits. The bottlenecks involved should be cascaded down to the brigade headquarters for ease of administration.

In addition to the above, another problem identified is the lack of adequate information and a timeline for accessing the benefits. Hence the Nigerian Army should provide

and implement ways of assisting families with the necessary documentation needed in the event of a death. This can be done by establishing a casualty operations unit that provides immediate assistance families of fallen soldiers. Bereaved families should also be provided with casualty assistance officers (CAO) charged with the responsibility of providing first-line assistance to NOKs of deceased military personnel as it is done in other militaries. The timelines around the payment of death benefits and other entitlements should be swiftly reviewed with focus on the improving the payment process. Furthermore, soldiers, spouses and NOKs should be adequately informed of their legal rights, demands and privileges, following a death in active service or military action. These should be published in military handbooks, and websites and shared with the respective wives and widows' associations and military formations across the country.

This study has also shown how women are financially affected by their husband's demise. While the benefits (gratuities, pensions, and other contributory schemes) to women are stipulated by the agencies such as National Wages and Salaries Commission Nigeria, contributory schemes, like the NAWIS, and BenFund, among others, there is still a need to support military widows of the Boko Haram conflict. Therefore, the DHQ, together with the respective services, and relevant ministries, should capture widows into a social safety net where they can be paid the national minimum wage to augment the financial impact of loss. Additionally, the educational scholarship amounts, and administration should be reviewed every five years, to capture the inflationary, and socio-economic changes in the country. Provisions should be made for children of deceased officers to be awarded automatic scholarships in primary and secondary schools managed by the Defense Headquarters, Nigerian Army, NAOWA, and or other respective services. This is a way of further compensating and ensuring that scholarships are also put to good and beneficial use.

Findings from this study revealed that the support provided by the military family support groups identified in this study is limited and does not have a real impact on the intended beneficiaries. Thus, this study suggests that the MIWA, NAOWA, DEPOWA, their sister Associations in the Nigerian Navy and Airforce, and the Nigerian Legion, together with members of the civil society can organize series of events, and programs for military widows, and other members of the military community on national

remembrance days, like the Armed Forces Remembrance Day, the Nigerian Army Day Celebrations amongst others. These programs should consist of medical, psychological, and social programs such as free medical tests and check-ups, mental health well-being, financial planning workshops, and other social intervention/welfare schemes aimed at improving the livelihoods of women.

The MIWA can be more impactful for women. The MIWA should be encouraged to collaborate with other widows and gender-based associations outside of the barracks. Through this, it can integrate itself into the wider Nigerian civil society and get the needed social capital and agency to build bridges and links across and within the military and civil society. This will maintain a sense of independence from military oversight and institutionalize the Association (thereby reducing the influence on its members). Also, it provides the Association with the needed wherewithal to apply for empowerment and funding opportunities outside of the military, thus increasing its capacity for advocacy, support, and assistance to widows. Military Widows who vacate their military housing or relocate to their states of origin should be encouraged to join and associate with the nearest branch of the military widow's association. This would help to foster bonds of unity and camaraderie amongst military widows in Nigeria. Through this, the Association can support its members, and develop its social capital, and agency within the Military widows and civilian community.

Widows should be reminded of their ability to adapt, survive, and remain resilient under the difficulties of widowhood. However, this can only be possible when attention is paid to the sustenance of their livelihoods as serving military spouses. In this regard, spouses of serving personnel, irrespective of rank or status, should be encouraged to take advantage of self-employment and other available educational advancement programmes to assist their safe transition into civilian life in the event of the sudden demise of their husbands. There should also be public awareness, and orientation on the rights, benefits and privileges of NOKs following a death in active service or war. Serving soldiers should be encouraged to ensure that their spouses are the NOKs in event of death or any eventuality arising from military service. This would limit the claims of relatives on the demands made by families if and whenever deceased personnel die in line of duty. These should be published in military handbooks, and

websites and shared with the respective wives and widows' associations and military formations across the country.

The current practice of assisting families to resolve differences around whom the rightful NOK is and ensuring that the benefits are shared amicably amongst families should be upheld. While the arbitration role provided by Nigerian Military Authorities is not binding on families, the Nigerian military's decision to act in the interest of its soldiers and their immediate families lends traction its social capital and responsibility, and this should be encouraged. Furthermore, the Nigerian Army authorities should, in liaison, with its medical corps and welfare services department, establish psycho-social and mental health programs for assisting widows and families of bereaved personnel. The aim of this program is to provide bereavement care and support for survivors of military death. The assistance can be provided by military psychiatrists, psychologists, and other social health workers within the military. It will help the widows mentally cope with sudden and tragic bereavement.

Finally, an independent military ombudsman should be established to address issues of bribery and corruption, sexual exploitation, and other forms of harassment perpetrated by Officers against widows and NOKs of a deceased soldier. Similarly, widows and NOKs should be encouraged to report erring soldiers to the concerned department for appropriate action.

7.7 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has revealed the paucity of literature on the wartime experiences of African military families, and more specifically, Nigeria military families in post-colonial conflicts. Existing studies focus on the tales of the African soldier in the World Wars, and the demobilization and challenges of welfare by ex-servicemen, the perception of wartime service among military families, (Stapleton, 2010; Coates, 2016, 2018; Mordi, 2019; Njung, 2019; 2020). None of the previous historic studies focused on the plight of women, as military wives or widows during these periods. Regarding Nigeria, studies on military wives and families have are limited, and existing works have not gained the needed scholarly attention (Mama, 1998; Nzemeka, 2015; Olapegba et al, 2020). These challenges notwithstanding, the intractability and peculiarity of the Boko Haram conflict presented a need to focus on an unresearched aspect of the conflict, and the military community, which was the Nigerian Army widows of the war

considering the involvement and contribution of the Nigerian Army to the interminable conflict.

As this study focused on how Nigerian Army widows of the Boko Haram conflict have coped and survived following their husbands' demise, an area for further research is to examine the deployment and post-deployment challenges among Nigerian soldiers and military families involved in the Boko Haram conflict/and or Internal Security Operations in Nigeria. Beyond anecdotal evidence provided by media reports and a few scholarly works, there is limited understanding of the challenges of deployment and post-deployment for soldiers, spouses, and families. This is an area of military sociology that has been widely studied in other militaries, yet there is a huge deficit of knowledge in this aspect in the Nigerian military (Aducci et al 2011; De Burgh et al., 2011).

Another area for further study is the identity challenges and reintegration into civilian life among Nigerian military widows of the Boko Haram conflict. By focusing on the identity challenges, and the reintegration into civilian life, this study looks at how different widows have approached their new lives of widowhood, and the ways they have managed the changes vis-à-vis their relationship with their civilian community, and former military friends and acquaintances. A study of this nature may be complemented in part, by a focus on the significance of the Boko Haram conflict for the women, and how the widows have dealt with trauma, remembrance, and memory of wartime loss.

Other possible areas of study involve studying the narratives of wives and families of disabled Nigerian soldiers in the Boko Haram conflict. This study will, on one hand, examine the narratives of disability and militarized masculinity among the soldiers, and on the other hand, understand the duty of care by wives of wounded personnel. Further studies should interrogate the lived experiences of soldiers and veterans deployed to the frontlines – examining topics related to their deployments in the battlefront, how they navigated the demands of youth-hood, fatherhood, and family in the frontlines, how they managed and experience wartime deaths, and dealt with the burdens of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and their reflection of sacrifice and patriotism for the country.

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APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interview Schedule

Questions for Nigerian Army Widows

1. How have you been coping and surviving after the loss of your spouse?
2. How did you learn and join the Military Widows Association of Nigeria?
3. How have you benefitted from joining the association as a war widow?
4. In what ways have the association been of support to you, financially, socially etc?
5. In what ways did the Nigerian Army support you; financially or non-financially, after your husband's death?
6. Has the Nigerian Army or Government fulfilled any of the promises it made to you, if yes, how, and when, if no, why?
7. What recommendations do you have for the Nigerian army, military, and government authorities?
8. "How has your husband's war death affected you and your family?"

Questions for Military Widows Association Leaders

1. How and what year was the Military Widows Association (MIWA) established?
2. What is the numerical strength of MIWA, and in what parts of the country are MIWA offices and representatives located?
3. How has MIWA been functioning since its inception? How do they solicit financial and logistical support?
4. Do they get grants and funds from the military authorities, government ministries, NGOs, and other public interest groups?
5. In what ways is MIWA helping the widows to live life in the absence of their husbands?
6. What recommendations does MIWA has for the Nigerian army, military, and government authorities?

Questions for Military CSOs

1. What roles have social charities played in assisting Nigerian military widows and families affected by the Boko Haram crisis?
2. How has the specific NGO played in mobilizing resources to assist military widows?
3. How would you describe the relationship between your CSOs and other CSOs that are working with military families?
4. Why has there been low advocacy among CSOs, and broader society working with military widows?
5. What has been the major challenge faced by your CSO in interfacing with the military widows' association, and
6. What do you think can be done to alleviate the plight of war widows of the Boko Haram insurgency?