

**UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG WIDOWS IN RURAL
KWAZULU-NATAL**

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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HOWARD COLLEGE.**

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‘As the candidate’s supervisor I agree to the submission of this thesis’.

Signed:

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Date: **01 March 2016**

DECLARATION

I **Lindiwe Millicent Cebekhulu** hereby declares that:

- The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my own original work. This research work has not previously been submitted to any other University for any degree or examination purposes.
- This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- This thesis does not contain other persons` data or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
- All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged

Signature

Date

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my late husband Mthokozisi Emmanuel Cebekhulu, thank you for encouraging me to be the best that you always knew I could be. He did not only teach me how to persevere in life but also that some of our schemes are wrought by prayer and humility. May his soul rest in peace!

ABSTRACT

The collapse of apartheid in South Africa meant the end of gender discrimination and power imbalances against women as a minority population. Currently, South Africa is undergoing a process of fundamental transformation aimed at empowering women in our societies. Hence, these transformations stand at the doorstep of an exciting and creative era in which it can make a powerful impact on reconstruction and development in our new democracy. As a result, the South Africa's new dawn has certainly brought about democracy in South Africa in 1994. Does this mean the cultural, social, economic and political experiences of widows have since changed the expectations of women's roles in our societies? Nonetheless, Literature then plays a vital role in this journey as it emulates and interprets the young widow's experiences from their view point. This study, therefore, attempts to examine how young widow's images are depicted in our societies. Furthermore, to investigate whether there is a shift in the way women (young widows in particular) characters are portrayed to represent the current socio-cultural and political reality. It will also draw attention on the plights' faced by young widows, which outlines the dynamics of their encounters and which explains the origin of existing divisions in terms of gender discrimination.

Qualitative research design was adopted in terms gathering data by interviewing young widows in the study area. Purposive sampling techniques were used and sampled population of 16 participants were reached. The opinion of respondents informed the basis of the discussions and analysis which were organised in themes. As a result, analysis revealed that within patriarchal society, young widows appear inadequately prepared for their widowhood. Methodology of data collection and analysis used in this study enabled the researcher to validate information derived from different sources. The study employs feminist theory as a literary canon which critically analyse how these young women characters have been portrayed in various genres. Hence, utilizing feminism theory allowed the researcher to investigate whether the perceived oppression of young widows is reflected in current literature. Based on the outcome of the study, recommendations were made on human rights practitioners, Social workers and traditional leaders. Recommendations for further research are also detailed in the study.

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ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DSD	Department of Social Development
HIV	Human Immune virus
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Work
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
MDG	Millennium Development goals
NGO	Non- Governmental Organization
SA	South Africa
STATS SA	Statistics South Africa
UDHR	Universal Declaration on Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Chapter One

1.1. Introduction and Background of the study

From time immemorial, death has always been understood as an occurrence befalling mostly the old aged. In South Africa, in particular, and in many other African countries a significant number of young women has experienced (and still is) widowhood. It is notable, however, that contrary to the erroneous notion that death is primarily associated with old-age, the developing trend now accounting for this condition of widowhood is largely precipitated by political turmoil accompanied by armed conflict which more often than not has culminated in the death of many young men whose young wives consequently have to endure subjection to suffer widowhood. According to (Bonnano & Kaltman 1999) dealing with loss of human life is a universal human hardship for the ones who remain behind. Among all forms of experiences that occur in any given culture, society or community, death seems to be the one that transcends them all (Rosenblatt and Nkosi 2007; Littlewood, 1992; Parkes, Laungani and Young 1997; Hockey, Katz and Small, 2001; Kastenbaum, 2004).

It is worth noting that widows all over the world face varying degrees of difficulties and untold hardships. This view is corroborated by (Women, 2000) assertion that widows across the globe share two common experiences which relate firstly, to their experience of losing social status as a result of the death of their husbands and secondly they experience reduced economic viability. As argued by (Nna & Nyeke, 2007), the African continent reveals a state reflecting that widowhood is acutely felt by those affected who inhabit mostly rural areas. Thus, for young women situated in such remote rural societies, the death of a spouse cannot only be a painful experience but also a debilitating one (Mughal, 2010). Many of these young women assume their widowhood journey from a distinct disadvantaged position (ibid) occasioned in some instances by obnoxious legislation which subsumes women under male dominance of cultural practices and disinheritance thereby aggravating their poverty and social disempowerment (Nna & Nyeke, 2007). Their plight is also exacerbated by the fact that more often than not they are more likely to suffer a number of setbacks ranging from working in informal sectors of the economy and thus earn less, having a lower political status and also having to depend on men for support and survival (Cattell, 2003). It is in light of this, therefore, that the young widows must of necessity

be prepared for the laborious task of self-reliance, willpower and self-worth and thus emancipate them from such structures of oppressive practices which are characteristically hegemonic. It is generally accepted that young widows are by and large regarded as silent victims of such practices which render themselves helpless in circumstances which deny them an affirming subject position by relegating them to the margins of society. Thus, in opposition to such self-negating ways of thinking amongst young widow in our societies, (Biko, 1978) called for solidarity, emphasizing the need for oppressed groups to identify with themselves and to advance the liberation struggle on this basis. It is this kind of mind set which has the potential of constructing a positive out of the different experiences of widowhood.

Thus, in circumstances such as these widowhood becomes a complex experience especially when the widow is young and is from a remote rural area. Arguably, the predicament of women as explicated above thus behoves us not only to take into cognisance their everyday experiences in their marginalised communities which are fraught with patriarchal strictures which force them to suffer in silence but also to proactively intervene in their plight with the objective of helping them secure social justice as their inalienable human right which derives from the fact that they are being beings.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In most parts of the world, becoming a widow elicits sympathy. It is not so among some communities in South Africa and elsewhere in the world where women are sometimes blamed for their husbands' death, kicked out of the family homes or forced to undergo humiliating "widowhood" rituals (African Independent, 2015: 14). The experiences of widows do not only co-exist but are also interconnected with socio-cultural and political systems. While the South African Constitution with specific reference to its Bill of Rights guarantees equality and human dignity of all South African citizens, widows' rights continue to be violated through cultural practices that demean women by denying them their subject position. There is a stigma attached to being a widow in this country as well as in other countries (African Independent, 2015:14). This situation is not unique to South Africa – many Ghanaian women find themselves abandoned by their families when their husbands die, and sometimes have to take part in ceremonies that, according to local practices, ensure their dead husbands' passages to afterlife. These vary, but

some women report having to spend nights alone with their dead husband's corpses, and even drinking soup made of their fingernails and hair (African Independent, 2015:14).

The death of a loved one is always an excruciating life transition in everyone's life; however, death is one phenomenon that levels all humanity. Africans deem the subject a taboo one which is too weird and morbid to be openly discussed. Nonetheless, young widow's experiences are the focal point of this study. The way that young widows express and construct their experience of grief is within the lens specified by their cultural contexts which are in this study investigated through narrative stories. Authors and researchers like (Lalitha & Jamuna, 2003) focus on elderly widowhood without recognizing the prevalence of young widows and its impact in our societies. The experience of spousal bereavement at a young age brings with it unique challenges and individual needs. Young widows were heirs to a set of discriminatory, isolative, oppressive customs and practices that compromise their constitutional rights to dignity, equality and freedom. The inclusion and promotion of equality for marginalised groups will pave the way for the elimination of the cruel and unconventional widowhood practice.

1.3. Aim of the study

The overarching aim of the study was to explore the experiences of young widows occasioned by the psychosocial factors and culturally determined practices applicable during the period of ritual mourning at Emangweni Area, rural KwaZulu-Natal.

1.4. Research Objectives of the study

The research objectives of the study were:

- (a) To ascertain what the various experiences of individual young widows were subsequent to the death of their husbands.
- (b) To explore and interpret the views of young widows with regard to the role which is played by the mourning rituals in their lives and also to explore relational issues between widows and the members of their respective family.

- (c) To examine the influences of culture, religion as well as the role of acculturation on the conduct of young widows mourning rituals at Emangweni Area, rural KWAZULU-NATAL.
- (d) To establish the views of young widows on the extent of protection offered to them as provided for by South African legislative Acts and policies regarding their rights as widows.

1.5. Research Questions of the study

The research questions of the study were:

- (a) What are the various experiences of individual young widows subsequent to the death of their husbands?
- (b) What are the views of young widows with regard to the role played by the mourning rituals in their lives and also what are the relational issues between widows and the members of their respective family?
- (c) What are the influences of culture, religion as well as the role of acculturation on the conduct of young widows' mourning rituals at Emangweni Area, rural KwaZulu-Natal?
- (d) What are the views of young widows on the extent of protection offered to them by the South African legislative Acts and policies regarding their rights as widows?

1.6. Theoretical framework underpinning the study

This study drew its theoretical framework from the African feminist perspective which by and large contrasts with the Western feminist perspective framework. The choice of the African feminist perspective was informed by the fact the investigation of this study focused mainly on the women's experiences in an African context. It is notable that whilst Western White feminists are battling sexism, black women are battling inequality across social and economic line. It is worth noting, however, that although Western White feminists and black African women are fighting two different battles, they are fighting the same war.

Notably, feminism in the African context is largely a reaction to specific historical legacies comprising, among other things, colonisation and pre-colonial traditions upon whose foundations its modern political, social and economic structures have been built and from which the African feminist strives to emancipate both men and women. In this light, the postcolonial African woman feminist has, out of necessity, to negotiate her relationship not only with Western

Feminism but also with such other contending imperatives as political, historical and cultural specificities. Thus, in the context of this study, the women whose experiences have been the subject of inquiry, have to negotiate their relationship with cultural specificities exemplified in the ritual practices too which these women are subjected upon the death of their husbands. As argued by (Udumumukwu, 2007a:7), for African women in particular, “nothing could be more feminist than the forceful articulations in their writings of deep preoccupations for and attempts at explaining the experiences and fates of women in patriarchal African societies”. It is against this background, therefore, that “feminism as a method and discourse is animated by a desire to reconstruct history in order to reconstruct the woman as subject. This implies that the woman is presented or represented not as a mere object of history put on the margin” (ibid).

Notably, what transpires from the above explication is that feminism as an ideology has several theoretical positions and thus focuses not only on the empowerment of women and their emancipation but also on the creation of equality through the elimination of oppression and discrimination (Roy, 2006). It is worth noting, therefore, that the African feminist perspective was utilized to conceptualize the genesis of unjust treatment of widows by being subjected to gendered ritual practices upon the death of their husbands and as such an understanding is seen by the researcher as crucial for intervention in social work. Having conceptualized the etiquette of young widows living conditions, the study employs the as a basis for social work intervention and the formulation of intervention strategies.

Generally, the position of feminist theorists is that the oppression of women stems from the patriarchal norms and values of the society (Randall, 2003; Malley, Morrison & Hines, 2004). (Code, 2004) highlights the fact that feminist theory contends the status quo by challenging patriarchal norms presented in societies which support the socialization of women in accordance with the required role and status in society to serve the needs of the dominant group. Thus, following that line of argument means that women have been socialized in a way that denies them their voice and also their inalienable rights. Additionally, women’s expected behavior and place within the marriage institution is decidedly subordinated (Chalk & King, 1998). Feminist theory, therefore, tends to explain, in depth the violence in the social functioning of widows (Gopal & Salim 1998; Heath 2001; Randall 2003). So, by documenting women’s lived

experiences and their concerns, gender-based stereotypes and biases, feminism probes into women's subjugated consciousness through research and this forms the basis of the primary concern of and principle of the feminist struggle (Sprague & Zimmerman ,1993:266). Thus, using the African feminist perspective as a theoretical tool, this study sought to interrogate the basic structures and ideologies which are responsible for the oppression of young widows in our societies. To this end, this study adopted the narrative approach which offered the requisite context for young widows to share their experiences in their own words. Through this approach, the study sought to mark the beginning phase of creating awareness and promoting dialogue among rural young widows with regards to their human rights.

The study adopted the African feminist perspective as it values young women's experiences and centres as a basis for understanding widowhood. In essence, the study brought young widows' voices which are often excluded from knowledge production and policy making. It is also notable that the findings of the study are designed to facilitate and enable policy makers and practitioners to enforce policies and strategies that will assist in ending all forms of discrimination against women, widows in particular. (Dominelli, 2002) asserts that feminist research goals are to foster empowerment and emancipation for women and other marginalized groups.

Thus, in order to understand the lived experiences of young widows and the issues which prevent them from being liberated it is best that they are given a platform in which they can express themselves without fear of judgement. In contexts such as the South African one which has a historical background based on racial discrimination, it is important to consider the role that feminism plays in the transformation agenda. The history of South Africa shows the active role which was played by women's struggles in the country, for example in the 1950 `s black people were required to carry passes to enter designated white urban areas. The Federation of South African Women campaigned against the role of the law in oppressing women .The leaders of the anti-pass law campaign were arrested and charged with treason. Again in the closing decades of the twentieth century, women united on a non-racial basis to address issues like rape, prostitution and sexual harassment. Presently South Africa has a Bill of Rights that protects women. The country also has laws which protect women against gender based violence and sexual offences,

amongst others. The active role women have played in challenging oppressive regimes can be used as leading examples to young widows to eliminate the subordination. In summation, studies such as this one can apply their findings in the service of promoting social change and social justice for women.

1.7. Rationale / justification of the study

The researcher is a social worker employed by the Department of Social Development (DSD) in Estcourt. Part of her duties as a social worker is the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes and these include assisting clients to access social security. The researcher observed that her caseload has a huge number of young widows who come to the office to apply or who are beneficiaries of the child support grant. During consultation with them, they present a number of challenges and life strains which push them to come to the social work office for help. Unfortunately, in most cases during consultations, the support grant application protocols do not provide the scope for the exploration of the young widows' experiences and all other elements of their lives. Poverty alleviation has become the main priority of service delivery in the Social Development office. Therefore, the scope of the work of Social Workers does not allow for the holistic exploration of young widows' lives. This has been a cause of concern to the researcher since she believes that social work should provide an arena in which clients can their concerns and establish see how they can best manage them in order to live an affirming life. The researcher believes that any service provision should be informed by a holistic understanding of the clients' well-being and their situations. According to the new IASSW/IFSW definition of social work cited in (Sewpaul, 2013), social work aims at engaging people and structures to address life challenges and enhance their well-being. It is thus notable that there is a service delivery gap in the Estcourt Social Development office and it is this state of affairs which has prompted the researcher to conduct this study.

The researcher is a young widow who lost her husband in the year 2010. For the researcher, the journey of being a widow has been a harrowing experience almost every day. As a consequence, she felt the need to make sense of her loss in relation to the economical and socio-cultural dimensions of being a widow and most importantly to step outside her own subjective experiences by understanding the world of her cohort constituted by young widows in her

immediate vicinity. The researcher's struggled to find meaning deriving from the death of her husband by addressing the excruciating moment's incidental to the death of her husband. It is notable, therefore, that the death of the researcher's husband has by and large informed her decision to embark upon this investigatory study which examines the process of mourning broadly. As a result, the researcher's challenge of defining what mourning meant to her sparked her curiosity to investigate how widows construct their own meanings as dictated to by their own lived experiences of mourning.

1.8. Significance of the study

This study addresses the gap in research and in literature which relates to the experiences of young widows. Additionally, the study will in all likelihood contribute to the transformative agenda which seeks to improve the equality and the empowerment of women in societies in general. The study also addresses the role which social workers play in enhancing the worth and dignity of individuals. The dignity of women is in this context mitigated by the role of the law and the organisations within which social work is practised (Payne, 2005).

In general, the study heightens awareness on the bewail elements which scholars consider as unpleasant treatment of widows. This is done by looking at outlandish dress code or mourning clothes (*Inzila*) which serve the purpose of publicly displaying the aggrieved widows' experience as occasioned by customary laws. The practices informed by customary law are problematized in this study. For example, those ritual practices which are mainly centred on the norms, customs and traditions that typify widowhood are fore grounded. The researcher views customary laws simply as social constructions which fall within the main domain championed by social work which is premised on the idea of maintaining social order. The study also discusses how human rights as instruments should be utilized in response to the peculiarities of young widows' plight and thus help prevent the violations they by virtue of them being widows. The study thus addresses both international and national imperatives which need to be included in the policies, interventions and programmes that continue to address and improve the status of all women in our societies. It is hoped that the insights gained from this study will be made accessible to Social Work practitioners to help them deal with the plight of widows through the office of Social Development.

It is also hoped that the study will increase the level of awareness among the community members of the population under study with men being the specific target of the need to adopt a somewhat transformed mindset in regard to the existing forms of violent acts against women in the society. Put differently, it is hoped that existing forms of violent acts against women in the society as explicated in the study will in all likelihood help forge a renewed consciousness among men that will spur them to denounce as inhumane the subjection of women to the ritual practices associated with mourning.

1.9. Definitions of Terms

- **Death**

Death is defined as the act of passing away, the end of life, or the permanent destruction of something (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 2011). It is therefore a drastic event in one's life (Vess & Arndt, 2008) and brings a need to repair the wounds caused by the loss. (Ngobese, 2004:12) argues that: "Physical death does not necessarily mean discontinuity of life hence when a person has died the Zulu would refer that he or she has gone to be with the forefathers (*useye koyise-mkhulu*)... There is a chain between the living and the dead that creates continuity in terms of carrying forward family traditions. The perception of life as a unity enhances and strengthens the view that it cannot be terminated even by death. Those who have died are seen as having moved into another world, which is part of the whole reality." Image 1 below depicts a typical African funeral service in a rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Image 1: Typical African funeral service



Source: Web 1

- **Cultural perceptions of death**

All societies see death as a transition for the person who dies. Socrates postulates that humans cannot know what death means in terms of their continued existence, but that all people have beliefs on death (Carr, Nesse & Wortman, 2006). Greek thinking provides one aspect of western beliefs about the relationship of life and death. Different perspectives are offered on how the afterlife in western cultures is understood. Western religion (Christianity) associates an afterlife with concepts of heaven and hell (Carr *et al.*, 2006). (Harvey, 2000) acknowledges that people construct and use meanings differently in their respective cultures. Western traditional understanding of grief and the use of this to identify with grieving in ethnic cultures are in conflict because the contexts from which grieving is conceptualized are different (Hockey *et al.*, 2001).

- **A young widow**

(Pearsall, 2001) defines a widow as a woman whose husband has died. Moreover, (Ngubane, 2004) stated that a widow is commonly known as “*Umfelokazi*” in the isiZulu language. This

means that a woman acquires this name as soon as her husband dies. In the context of this study, a young widow is a young woman who is between the ages of 14-35 years, who is widows. 35 years is informed by the (South African National Youth Policy, 2009-2014)'s definition of a young person (14 to 35 years). Moreover, through specific clothing, practices, and periods of mourning; she is identified as the one whose husband has died. Since death has been treated with great respect and continues to be so in our modern day culture (Pearsall, 2001; Kastenbaum, 2004), different cultural groups symbolise their respect through different practices and rituals. These are discussed in a section below. A study of African women as well as an African widow is an attempt to draw attention to the misfortunes and travails of the African woman's experience as one defined according to (Sossou, 2002), as being cruel and dehumanizing towards the woman. He further describes widows in Africa as silent victims.

- **Grief**

(Attig, 1996:8) describe grief and addresses the adaptation and adjustment of bereaved young women to their new lives: "... [We] address our new life situation, come to terms with the absence of the one who has died, deal with our anguish, pick up the pieces of our shattered lives, and move into the next chapters of our biographies which are indelibly colored by our bereavement (*ibid*). (Sadock & Sadock, 2003:61) describe grief as a subjective feeling precipitated by the death of a loved one. Grief work is a complex psychological process of withdrawing attachment and working through the pain caused by bereavement. Grief helps the individual to recognize the loss and to prepare for the processes of mourning. Without the experiences and learning provided by acute grief, mourning cannot take place (Rando, 1993). For most of the twentieth century, it was generally believed that to get over the loss of a loved one it was necessary to do one's 'grief work' (Stroebe *et al.*, 2000).

According to (Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay & van Dyke Stringer ,2010) mourning the death of a loved one is a ubiquitous human experience. Like any other significant life transitions, following the death of a loved one, the bereaved individuals need to adjust and go back to normal life. Moreover, most cultures have prescribed bereavement and mourning rituals to facilitate adjustment of the bereaved. Young widows in our communities went through such transition in

their life situations. Some of them have been forced to go through some of the mourning rituals in their living environments. .

- **Mourning**

According to (Weizman & Kamm, 1987), they asserts that mourning as understood in the discipline of psychology refers to the mental and emotional ‘work’ carried out following a loss. For this reason, mourning is the expression of grief. The word is derived from a Gothic verb meaning ‘to be anxious’ and it ultimately comes from an Indo-European base meaning ‘to remember’ or ‘to think of’ (Weizman & Kamm, 1987:40). Mourning involves remembering and thinking of the deceased and thereby making a person feel anxious and uncomfortable (Ibid). Mourning in its strict sense is the process by which grief is resolved. It is the societal expression of post-bereavement behavior and practices (Sadock & Sadock ,2003).

In addition, (Stroebe & Schut,1999) reiterate the definition of mourning as ‘the social expressions or acts expressive of grief, which are shaped by the practices of a given society or cultural group’ (in Hockey, Katz & Small, 2001:5). In essence this means that grieving within the socio-cultural context has meaning for those individuals in that context. Thus, as much as mourning is behavioral, it is also cultural. The condition of the widows in rural areas is even more intense.

- **Bereavement**

Bereavement literally means the state of being deprived of someone by death and refers to being in a state of mourning (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Notably, (Bannano & Kaltman, 1999), in (Stroebe & Schut , Stroebe *et al.*, 2001: 760-776) consider bereavement in terms of four components. The first is the context of the loss, which refers to the risk factors associated with the type of death, these can be related to: age, gender, social support and cultural setting. The second factor is the continuum of subjective meanings associated with loss. These range from appraisals and evaluation of everyday matters and problems, and existential concerns about the meaning of life and death. The third is the changing representations of the lost relationship over time which plays an important role in the grieving process. The fourth is the role of coping and

emotion: regulation processes that highlight the range of coping strategies that may lessen or exacerbate the stress of loss

1.10. Demarcation of the dissertation

This dissertation is demarcated as follows:

(a) Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter focuses the background of the study, statement of the problem, aim of the study, research objectives, research questions, theoretical framework underpinning the study, rationale/justification of the study and significance of the study and the definition of terms.

(b) Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter the researcher probe into the dynamics of widowhood as it affects young women in the African continent with particular focus given to the South African context.

(c) Chapter Three: Research Methodology

In this chapter the researcher discuss the method used both in the collection of data and also in the analysis of the collected data.

(d) Chapter Four: Data Analysis

In this chapter the analysis focuses the discussion on the data collected from the respondents.

(e) Chapter Five: Summary of Findings

This chapter outlines the summary of the findings in the study.

(f) Chapter Six : Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter concludes the study by drawing on the arguments advanced in the literature review in chapter two, data analysis in chapter four and five. The researcher then make recommendations based on the synthesis of what emanated from both the literature review and the data analysis as represented in chapter four.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This section reviews the literature that is pertinent to the plight of young widows in the South African local communities and in the African continent as a whole. Even though losing a spouse is one phenomenon that affects almost everyone, the issue of young widows, however, seems to be an unspoken subject not worthy of being accorded the consideration it deserves. This issue of young widows seems to stem from certain feature of prescribed institutionalized cultural and religious norms. Though women today are being increasingly recognized as important, powerful and meaningful contributors towards the socio-economic development of a nation but countless women continue to be the victims of torture, violence and large scale deprivation, amongst them the condition of widows is quite thought provoking. Studies such as (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Manyedi, Koen & Greef, 2003; Magudu, 2004; Ngubane, 2004; Demmer, 2006; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Shange, 2009; Selepe & Edwards, 2008; Bhana, 2008; Radzilani, 2010; Dlukulu, 2010) have to a very large extent highlighted not only the social roles assigned to widows in African societies but also their marginality.

2.2. Bereavement

- **Eurocentric and afro centric view on bereavement**

Eurocentric view on bereavement emphasizes that bereavement allows the significant others to cut their bonds with the deceased. According to (Nwoye, 2005), Eurocentric view is largely concerned with the individual reaction to loss; this is done through community interventions which is only work done by professionals. However, (Nwoye, 2005) defines Afrocentric view as the patterned ways invented for communities for the successful healing of the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons. It is therefore, healing system that is grounded in ecologically sound rituals and ceremonies that facilitate experiential healing and its target clients are any members of the community burdened by the painful loss of a loved one. This view is contrary to the Afrocentric views which advocate that the bereaved must stay connected with the deceased (Biermann, 2005: 24). Thus, (Michael White, 2002) as quoted in (Biermann,2005:24) argues that when the metaphor of “saying goodbye” is not working for the bereaved, the bereaved must employ the metaphor of “hello again”. He contends that if the bereaved struggles

to cut bonds with the deceased that is “saying goodbye” the bereaved must reclaim the relationship that he or she once had with the bereaved by saying „hallo again“. Saying “hello again” opens the connection with the deceased instead of disconnecting with her or him. Image 2 below is an example of how many African communities express that sense emotional struggles during bereavement.

Bereavement represents the experiential state or being in a state of mourning that one endures after realizing a loss (Bhana, 2008). Bereavement is also perceived as a period during which grief and mourning occur (Rosenblatt, 1976). Bereavement resulting from the death of a spouse remains one of the few areas in contemporary psychological well-being of widows to have received far more attention from bereavement researchers than any other in the areas of death and dying (Fry, 1998, Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, 1993). To this effect, the area of focus has been on the effects that both the loss of a spouse and the entire bereavement process do have on the psychological well-being of the bereaved spouse (De Vries, 2007; Field, Thompson and Gallagher-Thompson, 2006; Gallagher-Thompson, Futterman, Farberow, Thompson and Peterson, 1993).

Evidence from stress research ranks spousal death as the most stressful event individuals are likely to encounter in their lifetime (Daggett, 2002). Thus, spousal death is seen as inherently stressful, based on the idea that the death of a primary attachment figure results in social isolation occasioned by the loss of the lifetime companion (Babchuk & Anderson, 1989; Morgan, 1984) or difficulties with adjusting to a new “partnerless” identity as well as assumption of new roles many of which were shared with the deceased spouse (Richardson & Balaswamy, 2001; Van Baarsen, Van Duijn, Smit, Snijders, & Knipscheer, 2002). Thus, the next section focuses mainly on the processes of bereavement progression and its impact on young widows. In order to have a basic understanding of bereavement two components of bereavement processes are highlighted in this study. Comparatively speaking, “it is the younger widowed [...] who are at the greatest risk” for psychological stress and trauma (Ball, 1977; Maddison & Walker, 1967, as cited in Stroebe & Stroebe, 1993, p. 210) when they are compared with old widows. For younger widowed people, bereavement is a non-normative event and as such its effects are less familiar. At younger age widowhood is associated with a greater decline in

physical and psychological health (Prigerson, Maciejewski, & Rosenheck, 1999; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987; Wilcox et al., 2003).

▪ **Interpersonal processes of bereavement**

Intrapersonal processes of bereavement in this study focus on young widows’ internal experience during their bereavement progression. (Oates, 2003:15) argues that in all cultures the intrapersonal experience of the process of bereavement is the same. Since there are many models of bereavement the researcher opted to confine herself to the Kubler-Ross’s Stage Model of Grief.

Table 1 : Kubler – Ross’ Stage Model of Grief cited in (Biermann,2005)

STAGE	FEAR	HOPE
Denial	Fears s/he is dying Is afraid of pain & death	Hopes s/he will be cured & not suffer.
Isolation	Fears rejection. Noone else has suffered & noone understands.	Hopes contacts with others remains.
Anger	Fears wrath of God. Fears dependance. Fears s/he is deserting family & feels guilty.	Hopes to regain some control. Hopes not to have heavy responsibilities. Hopes family will be looked after.
Bargaining	Fears bargain will not be agreed to. Fears judgement so bargaining for more time.	Hopes bargain will be held. Will have time to finish. Will not be harshly judged.

Depression	Fears separation & loss of limbs, function, roles, relationships, identity & life. Fears abandonment, loneliness, suffering, Regrets in the past. Fears to be a burden.	Hopes not to be abandoned. Separation & loss will be bearable. Hopes s/he will be courageous.
Acceptance	Fears that relinquishing control will be seen as giving in. Fears loss of dignity. Fears family not ready.	Hopes struggle will be understood. Hopes s/he will be able to maintain dignity. Hopes family will be reunited & will be OK.

Kubler– Ross in (Biermann, 2005:15) proposes the abovementioned table comprising five overlapping stages of the grieving process. These are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. She argues that not everyone experiences all these stages and if one experiences all of them she or he may not experience them in a particular order.

2.2.1. Model of bereavement

Young widows’ situational variables surrounding the death can impact on adaptation following bereavement (Carr, House, Wortman, Nesse, & Kessler, 2001). For example, when the likelihood of widowhood is very small, as is usually the case for young widows, forewarning of spousal death is important (Balkwell, 1981). Very long terminal illnesses may allow the surviving spouse to prepare for the death and anticipatory grieving may take place (Donnelly, Field, & Horowitz, 2001). (Wells & Kendig, 1997) are of the view that people who provided care for their spouse may experience lower levels of depression following widowhood compared to those who were not caregivers. In sudden death situations, on the other hand, there is usually no

opportunity to discuss impending death with the spouse and it is, therefore, often associated with severe grief reactions (Burton, Haley, & Small, 2006). Looking at the young widows' experience at Mangweni Area; (Oates, 2003) delineates four phases of bereavement which a bereaved individual passes through. Oates argues that these phases of bereavement phases are constituted by avoidance, denial confrontation and accommodation phase (Oates, 2003). Oates further asserts that the avoidance phase begins when one learns about death. As a result, one becomes not only confused and disoriented but also wonders whether what he or she is feeling is normal or not. There are also physical characteristics which are prominent in this stage. These include trembling, physical weakness and exhaustion. Depending on the cause of the death, the emotional shock may vary from mild to acute physical manifestation. As the numbness wears off the client may move into denial.

The next phase after denial is the confrontation phase which is regarded as the difficult one since the bereaved experiences an intense emotional pain of sadness, anger and frustration. Due to the pain, the bereaved may try to numb the pain by resorting to drugs and alcohol, for instance. Also, one may return to the avoidance phase. The last phase is called accommodation phase which is regarded as a recovery stage. This is a phase whereby the bereaved learns to live with the loss and adjusts to the present reality by integrating the past and the present. (Oates, 2003: 30) asserts that "sometimes the bereaved are more likely to construe their situation as taking them back emotionally and physically to the previous phase".

Moreover, (Oates, 2003) further argues that within these phases there are six processes of mourning. The first process involves recognizing the loss which is part of phase one namely, avoidance. In this stage, the bereaved is expected to acknowledge and understand the death. By acknowledging the death, the bereaved is expected to accept death both emotionally and intellectually. The funeral services, obituary notices and the paying of homage to the deceased help the bereaved to accept the reality of death as evidenced by the death of the spouse. Sudden death may be difficult to acknowledge since the bereaved would have had no time for anticipatory grief. As a way to find closure, the bereaved would want to know what it is that caused the death because without this understanding the bereaved may become anxious or confused.

The second process is confrontation which (Oates, 2003) regards it as reacting to the separation. The confrontation process is part of phase two which is denial. This process requires the bereaved to experience fully the pain of the loss. The pain can be experienced in many dimensions including spiritual, psychological, physical and social. The bereaved can put his or her feelings into words by writing in a journal. Joining a support group can also be helpful to some people.

The third process is to recollect and re-live the experience of knowing the deceased and the relationship which the bereaved and the deceased had. Re-experiencing, reviewing, recollecting is part of healthy grieving. The bereaved has to remember the good times, good qualities and also admit the weaknesses which the deceased had. Such remembering is useful in the healing process. Remembering and reviewing may involve collecting memorabilia about the deceased such as his or her pictures and photographs.

The fourth process requires the bereaved to relinquish old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world. The old assumptive world means the deceased's beliefs, hopes, dreams, daily routines which were taken for granted before his or her death. Marked events can be used to relinquish old attachments and the old assumptive world. The bereaved can create their own rituals such as going for camping with trustworthy friends in celebrating the life of the deceased.

The fifth process is readjustment and moving to the world without forgetting the old assumptive world and adopting new ways of being in the world. This fifth process goes with phase three which is accommodation. The bereaved must readjust his or her life to fit in new goals and new dreams without the deceased. The bereaved must assume a new identity. The sixth process involves reinvesting and this is part of the last phase which is accommodation. This final process involves reinvesting emotional energy that has been invested with the deceased. This may involve setting new goals, learning new behavior or taking new roles.

Image 2: Bereaved struggling to say goodbye to the deceased



Source: Web 2

According to (Nwoye, 2005), he defines African grief work as the patterned ways invented in traditional communities for the successful healing of the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons. It is further asserted by that “while Western researchers have been largely concerned with the individual reaction to loss, the African perspective focuses on the spiritual/systemic/interactional nature of healing and grieving and the resources that the community makes available to the bereaved (*ibid*). This is done through community interventions which are not only run by professionals but also engage indigenous community efforts to bring healing to one of its grieving members. The traditional process of bereavement is largely informed by the belief that the deceased continues to live even after death. The perception of life as a unity enhances and strengthens the view that it cannot be terminated even by death (*ibid*). Those who have died are seen as having moved into another world which is part of the whole reality.

Additionally, what also informs the traditional Zulu process of bereavement are two concepts (*Ubuntu* and *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*). Both concepts illustrate the communal nature of the Zulu people. As (Ngubane, 2004) puts it, solitude and individuality are regarded as anomalies in the Zulu culture. This indicates that the self for the Zulu is defined in the connectedness to others unlike in the Western culture which is individualistic. Hence, (Van Dyk, 2001) argues that in the black culture no emotional assistance or counseling is given to either the adult or children. Once all the burial rituals have been fulfilled the grieving process is regarded as completed. However, (Selepe, 2008) contends that in most African communities, especially in the rural areas, the bereaved count on the clergy in order to make sense of what has occurred.

Lastly, in the process of mourning, the bereaved in the black culture, including the Zulu people, are expected to visit the grave of the departed. The reason for this practice as stated by (Ngubane,2004) is that once a person has died he is regarded as an ancestor and the ancestors are seen as part of the reality of the African people. It is believed that they sustain and nurture the interests of the living. The visit to the grave helps the bereaved to contemplate on the life he shared with the departed and plead for luck and success.

2.2.2 Mourning

- **Mourning rituals: The broader African context**

Rituals are assumed to affirm the cultural values of people through their utterances and actions within a given context (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998 as cited by Radzilani, 2010; Taylor, 1980 as cited by Radzilani, 2010). The functions of mourning rituals are quite varied. For example, writing on the Tshivenda people (Radzilani,2010) argues that these mourning rituals serve as a public display of grief among the people and provide an avenue for approval and validation by the community (Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998) which is very important to the Venda people (Radzilani, 2010). Thus, (Niemeyer, 2006) is of the view that the mourning rituals serve the purpose of giving identity as a widow to the woman that has lost her husband or assists in her change of status to that of a widow .Other functions include assisting the deceased on his way to the afterlife thus providing healing or therapy and purification to the mourners (*Ibid*). The mourning rituals performed by Zulu young widows seem to take on similar roles. Notably, by

their very nature, some of these rituals developed have a major negative impact on the young widows' lives.

As observed by the (World Health Organisation, 1998), in Africa, some of the traditional mourning and burial rites involve harmful and degrading treatment of widows. It is claimed that there are degrading and painful trials which widows undergo and are forced into. This happens, it is alleged, particularly in countries where the concept of performing so-called crimes of 'honour' exist. In Ghana, for example, Mama Zimbi who is a television and radio host has begun something of a revolution among women in Ghana since "some women report having to spend nights alone with their dead husbands' corpses, and even drinking a soup made of their fingernails and hair" (African Independent, September 18-25, 2015). The WHO report cited in (Women,2000) claims that widows are coerced into participating in these rites through fear of losing their status and protection and also fear of not only eviction from the family home but also of having their children taken away from them. Some rites can be life-threatening as well as degrading such as the cleansing ritual through sex when a husband dies of HIV/AIDS. In some countries widows are forced to drink the water in which their husband's corpses have been washed (*ibid*).

African widows, irrespective of their ethnic groups, are among the most vulnerable and destitute women in the continent. The customs are used to oppress and exploit widows (*Women, 2000*). The low status, poverty and violence experienced by widows stems from discrimination practiced through inheritance customs, the patriarchal nature of society and the domination of oppressive traditional practices and customary codes. These oppressive practices take precedence over constitutional guarantees of equality, modern laws and international women's human rights standards (*Women, 2000*).

- **Mourning rituals: The South African context**

- ✓ **A Historical Review**

The process of mourning and the rituals accompanying this process in the South African context have been studied by various authors such as (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Manyedi, Koen & Greef, 2003; Magudu, 2004; Ngubane, 2004; Demmer, 2006; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Shange, 2009;

Selepe & Edwards, 2008; Bhana, 2008; Radzilani, 2010 and Dlukulu, 2010). While (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999) examined the psychological significance of traditional African mourning practices in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the attendant implications for mental health. Thus, (Kilonzo & Hogan (1999) argue that the increase in psychiatric and psychological problems is associated with incomplete mourning and unresolved grief. Hence, (Manyedi *et al*, 2003) explored the widowhood experiences and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people. The findings indicate that among the Batswana people widowhood is complicated by the cultural beliefs and customs which may be a stressful experience for the widows. Similarly, (Bhana, 2008), (Magudu, 2004) and (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) conducted their studies in different contexts. Moreover, (Bhana, 2008) study focused on the social construct of mourning by Indian widows. Consequently, (Magudu, 2004) unravel the experiences and perceptions of 'ukuzila' among the Amahlubi tribe in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Hence, Magudu highlights that the mourning customs are more oppressive to women than men. As a result (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) findings on the South African Zulu widows in a time of poverty and social change also indicate that the mourning rituals stretch over a year and have the propensity of subjecting the widows to estrangement from the entire society. Further studies include (Ngubane, 2004) whose focus is on the traditional burial practices of Zulu people.

Moreover, (Radzilani, 2010) focuses on the performance of bereavement rituals in a TshiVenda speaking community. Hence, (Selepe & Edwards, 2008) explored the intervention model of grief counseling applied by the African Indigenous churches (Mapostola) in Venda. The study sheds light on how social support is valued within the VhaVenda communities. Upon hearing of the death of a loved one, support is expected from families, friends and the entire community. The therapeutic value of performing the death rituals is made manifest by bringing the community together.

The discriminatory nature of the mourning rituals in Southern Africa does not differ significantly from what has been described in the rest of Africa. Thus, (Mkhize, 2008) asserts explains that in most African societies, when death is announced, the family is immediately regarded as 'polluted' 'isinyama' or 'sefifi' in Setswana, which implies a negative shadow which also means that the family is thrown into a state of disequilibrium. The Zulu culture considers a family death

to have contaminated the relatives of the deceased, particularly the wife. The term ‘pollution’ in the context of the death of a family member is also used by (Hutchings, 2007 & Ngubane, 2004) both of whom refer also to death as a state of contamination.

In the Zulu culture, death is regarded as a highly intensified form of contamination or pollution. Among the Vha Venda ethnic group, it is believed that when death occurs in a family, the family members have been symbolically crushed by a mud wall and need to be released. This imaginary wall surrounding the survivors symbolizes their bereavement (Radzilani, 2010; Selepe & Edwards, 2008). As a result, they may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified or cleansed through the performance of a ritual.

The period preceding the burial is accompanied by the enactment of rituals that are performed. According to (Mpofu, 2006), ritual enactment is one approach of traditional healers or the family to cast away malevolent spirits. These include the smearing of the windows with ash to reflect a gloomy atmosphere, turning wall pictures from sight, switching off radios and television sets (Bopape, 1995). The rationale behind all these efforts is to demonstrate openly the intensity of their deep sorrow and remorse. Again, the rationale would be to symbolize death to the whole community and to observe and symbolize the family’s respect to the deceased through the practice called, “*ukuzila*”. According to (Ngubane, 2000) the practice of ‘ukuzila’ is defined as showing respect by avoidance. There is avoidance of certain behaviors and places in order to show respect for the deceased (Magudu, 2004).

The symbolic expression of any aspect of mourning could just be to retain a connection with the deceased (Niemeyer, 2006) or simply for the visible expression of the status of being a widow (Radzilani, 2010; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007), both of which remain significant parts of the mourning ritual in the Zulu culture. In reference to the Zulu culture, the findings of this study indicate that symbolism seems to be inextricably linked to a dress code of one form or another. This happens immediately after the husband dies and the first thing that happens is to change the way the widow wears her clothes by turning them inside out. The introduction of the blanket and subsequently the wearing of the “*inzila*” constitute a central role in the mourning process. The majority of young widows who took part in the interview felt that wearing mourning clothes was

central to the conduct of the process of mourning. Notably, some of them were quite happy and proud to wear the mourning clothes.

Image 3: A woman wearing Inzila



Source: Web 3

Among the Zulu tribe, the widow is the main focus of the ritual of mourning (Ramphela,1997) as cited by (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Apparently, her observance of mourning is most extensive and is symbolically, practically and spiritually of great importance (Rosenblatt & Nkosi,2007). Ngubane (2004) argues that the central role of a married woman whose husband has died is designated as the chief mourner. The beginning of the mourning period includes the chief mourner occupying a sacred mourning physical space where candles are lit (Hutchings, 2007). This could also mean being isolated from the community for the period of mourning or being covered with a blanket while having only married women allowed to sit with her. As a symbol of

'ukuzila', a widow shaves her head (*ukuphuca*) and must wear mourning clothing called *'inzila'*, which are commonly dark in colour (Mbizana, 2007).

Image 4: Young widow of Emangweni being shaved by an elder.



Source: Web 4

The period of wearing *'inzila'* is determined by families or cultural groups. The common duration of the mourning period among the Zulu tribes is a year. During that time, the widow stays at home and is not allowed any social contact or sexual contact. Participation in social activities or public gatherings like weddings, funerals, parties and church services are prohibited as they are believed to be inappropriate for a widow who is still mourning (Magudu, 2004). Once the determined mourning period has expired, the woman mourner *'iyagezwa'* (is cleansed) of *'isinyama'* (the impurities) and *'ibhadi'* (bad luck) that are believed to be associated with losing a husband. For almost a year, the widow is regarded as impure and lives under a black cloud and only a series of purification ceremonies can give her the status of being a 'normal

human being again' (Daber, 2003). Even after the widow has gone through all the widow rites and rituals, she continues to be referred to as '*umfelokazi*', a status that stigmatises her and renders her less of a woman irrespective of her age and abilities.

- **Transformation through Removal of the mourning clothes**

After removing the mourning clothes at the end of the mourning period, opinion is one which forms a fundamental transformation on the lives of young widows. (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003) indicate that the Batswana widows express their discomfort at wearing black attire because doing so stigmatizes them. This presupposes that the widow may be quite happy to experience feelings of rebirth at the end of mourning as a deliverance from the stigma of wearing the mourning dress as suggested by (Melgar, 2009) writing on *Freud's Mourning and Melancholia*.

- **Significance of the mourning rituals**

According to (Friesen, 1990; Kilonzo & Hogan ,1999) rituals address adjustment to present change in role and status, community tensions, reworking previous losses and relocation of the deceased into a new role and function in the community .This means that the rituals facilitate adjustment to present change in role and in status of the deceased. For example, when the person that has died is a husband, his wife becomes a widow and there is a specific dress code called "*Inzila*" which is also accompanied by certain behaviors and actions. Hence, (Gumede, 1990) asserts that death upsets the social equilibrium of the society which results in certain prescribed rites and ceremonies being used to restore the disturbed balance. In summary, therefore, (Rando, 1993) also asserts that rituals are most often used to facilitate the relinquishing of relationships and transition to a new role.

Secondly, it can provide therapeutic value as rituals are seen as the best entry point to facilitate healing (Walsh & Mc Goldrick, 1991)given the fact that death is seen as painful and traumatic for the survivors (Bento, 1994). Each ritual in the traditional mourning process has a deep psychological function as it provides a vehicle for expression and containment of strong emotions (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Romanoff & Terenzio, 1998). This implies that the reaction to grief can also be accompanied by strong emotions and performance of a grief ritual can serve as a vehicle of expressing those emotions.

Thirdly, rituals, according to (Radzilani, 2010), can be seen as vehicles through which communities are delineated and distinguished from others. Additionally (*ibid*), it is stated that rituals symbolize how people identify with their culture, religion and also with the deceased. This means, in communities where cultural and religious identities are emphasized, they serve to strengthen and reaffirm group identities. Hence, according to (Dlukulu, 2010), identity is anchored in a particular social context or in a specific set of social relations. Therefore, the identity formation process involves a dialectical relationship between the individual and the society. This implies that we become who we are as a result of a particular form of socialization. Rural environment forms significant part of this study as it portrays the young widows living conditions.

2.3. Rurality in South Africa

The development of rural areas in South Africa has posed challenges for past governments as well as the present government. In the context of this study, the issue which is of particular concern is the fact that the South African economy has in the past developed and generated extreme income inequalities between and within geographical spaces. The poverty facing rural areas in South Africa today can be understood in terms of the way apartheid shaped access to economic opportunities and government services through rigidly enforced tenure, settlement and labour policies which were based on racial segregation (Gwanya, 2010). Hence, (Smith, 2007) argues that “South Africa is still one of the most unequal societies in the world, with poverty still skewed along racial lines”.

In support of the above assertion (Terre Blanche, 2002) indicates that South Africa is so divided that it seems to consist of two worlds with little interaction: one is modern, smart, professional, efficient and globally orientated, and the other neglected, messy, unskilled, oppressed and thriving on crime and violence. The burden of these unequal worlds is mostly felt in the rural South Africa where there is a lack of access to infrastructure and services. Other issues felt most in rural areas include the unavailability of public amenities and government services, low literacy and skills development as well as gender inequality.

- **Rural communities**

From the review of literature, (Ngubane, 2004 & Magudu ,2004) highlight that the practice of 'ukuzila' which was defined as showing respect for the deceased by avoiding certain behaviors and places and that this should last until the end of the prescribed mourning period. The perception that people in rural areas have a lot of respect compared to the people in the urban areas is also highlighted by (Dlamini, 2005) to the effect that disrespectful practices or 'ukungahloniphi' in Zulu customs have been associated with behaviors of the people living in urban areas.

Rural communities have traditionally used their homestead as a final resting place where their dead would be buried. For example, a man would be buried in a kraal in the yard of the homestead. This was done because there was a specific meaning attached to the dead being buried at their home. Thus, (Dlukulu, 2010) interprets this concept as place identity. There is often an attachment to place which has become interwoven with the individual's personal identity. Every person has an environmental past that consists of places, spaces and their properties which have served instrumentally in the satisfaction of one's biological, psychological, social and cultural needs which serve as part of the socialization process during which self-identity is developed.

- **2.3.2. Urban communities**

According to (Stuart, 1998), he argues that very few South Africans live within a traditional cultural framework. About 63% of the country is urbanized with the majority having been urbanized for more than one generation and this has changed much of the world view, values, rituals and traditions of such people. Even if this is the case, few studies have focused on the performance of bereavement rituals in South African urban environments. For example, (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007) compare the experiences of mourning of Zulu widows in urban Soweto, a township in South Africa with that of a Zulu widow living in the rural KwaZulu-Natal.

Hence, (Dlukulu, 2010) focuses on the experiences and coping mechanisms with bereavement of Black urban widows in a transitional society. The findings of(Dlukulu,2010) study indicate that the absence of some traditional rituals in the mourning process of the bereaved widows living in

urban environments appear to have been a significant in determining factor in coping with the loss of their loved ones.

The dress code at urban funerals also highlights some of the changes that have occurred over time (Ditshego, 1995). In the urban areas, unlike in traditional rural environments where dress code is strictly stipulated, women must cover their heads and wear long dresses at the funeral, The widow must be covered with a blanket on the day of the funeral and men must wear their formal jackets to show respect for the occasion with the urban environments seeming to have a more relaxed approach when it comes to the dress code. Hence ,(Posel,2002) asserts that in funerals which were once solemn and sad occasions, women no longer cover their heads, dress codes have become positively risqué with women in very short, tight skirts and men in the latest fashions.

2.4. Widowhood

Widowhood in the African context attributes the great strain widows experience to the fact that many bereaved spouses often find themselves “caught” in a double-bind of carrying out household tasks singlehandedly while simultaneously attempting to project the image of an idealized widow through continuously carrying out household and family chores (Jali, 2000; Manyedi, 2001; Kalu, 1990; Somhlaba, 2006; Sossou, 2002). Thus, it stands to reason that the problem-solving coping strategy and depression represent the behavioral and emotional reactions of a broader facet of conjugal grief. The surviving spouse’s situation is thus rendered precarious given the fact that the bereaved spouses may have kept mechanically busy with more urgent problems to attend to without the instrumental assistance and support previously given by the deceased spouse, the absence of whom may still be at the forefront of the bereaved spouse’s emotions, thoughts, and general “reminiscential” memories.

▪ **Widowhood in South Africa**

According to (Tonah, 2009), widowhood is a condition in which one loses his or her spouse through death. In the socio- cultural context, widowhood refers to a situation where either the man has lost his wife or a woman has lost her husband through death. Despite the trauma suffered by widows through the death of their husbands and despite the fact that this status is

becoming more common, widowhood remains an issue in which people are hesitant to speak about. According to Statistics SA in the year (2011), the highest number of deaths occurred in KwaZulu-Natal (21, 3%), followed by Gauteng (19, 4%) and Eastern Cape (14,8%) and Northern Cape had the lowest percentage (2, 8%). It has been indicated that 25% of South African households are fatherless with KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) having the highest number of fatherless households. This means that widows in KZN account for 5, 9% of the women from fatherless households. The death rate among SA men is said to have been 51, 5% in the year 2011 (Statistics SA) compared to the years (2009-2010) having the highest mortality rate of men in the South African history (*ibid*).

According to (Berger, McBreen & Rifkin, 1996) assert that widowhood can be better understood as one of life's transitions, events, and processes occurring at any point in the life process. It is not always predictable or sequenced. Characteristically, widowhood induces significant stress and requires coping strategies that differ from those needed to meet the demands of predictable and anticipated transitions throughout the life course (*ibid*). Unlike men, women suffer more with post-traumatic stress disorder (Tolin & Foa, 2006) or they are perhaps more easily discernible among women because of cultural factors linked to the belief that men ought not to display emotions. Contrary to this view, this study highlights how widows' experiences co-exist and are interconnected with socio-structural and political systems. Although, the Zulu people adhere strongly to their cultural norms in order to become fully fledged members of the society, however, it is not easy for them to accept the outside influence towards change.

- **Patriarchy and widowhood practices**

In this study, it is contended that patriarchy is one of the major contributory factors that lead to the isolation and disempowered of women. Therefore, (Marle & Bonthuys, 2007) are of the view that the concept patriarchy was first used by social scientists to describe a system of government where men held political power in their capacity as heads of households. Central to this concept is the idea that in all societies and in all cultures men dominate the public world and through this domination are able to control and define the behavior of women (Roy, 2006). This fact notwithstanding,(Roy, 2006) contends that women's rights are not necessarily violated by men but are sometimes violated by women themselves. Similarly, (Stopler, 2008) conceives of

patriarchy as “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women in the society. Characteristically,” patriarchy exists in the structure in which the rule of the male as the head of the household forms the basic principle of the social organisation of family and society (Ruether, 1996 cited by Shumbambini, 2006) and is a common form of societal organisation in Africa and Asia (Women, 2001). Moreover, (Shumbambini, 2006) argues that in the culture of the Shona of Zimbabwe, the in-laws do not protect, instead they create an atmosphere of fear in the lives of widows. Moreover, the patriarchal norms seem to have governed and controlled the way women are treated in most societies in the world ranging from the timing and conditions of marriage through to the manner in which economic resources are controlled and this extends even to the number of children they bear (Women, 2001).

In the context of the mourning rituals, patriarchy displays a particularly negative and oppressive side in most African societies (Ayikukwei, et al., 2007; Feni, 2011; Gunga, 2009; Korieh, 1996; Owen, 2007; Pheko, 2007; Shumbambini, 2006; Women 2000, 2001; Taylor, 1983). Asia also displays the ill treatment of widows where, for example, sati or widow burning occurs as a direct result of the role of patriarchal behaviour (Women, 2001). Moreover, (David, 2003) asserts that the intellectuals of radical feminism believe that eliminating patriarchy and other systems which perpetuate the domination of one group over another will liberate women from an unjust society (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004). Patriarchy thus seems to be a key influence in any interpretation of the context of mourning rituals conducted among the AmaZulu widows.

2.5. Cultural practices associated with widowhood

Widowhood rites are ceremonies performed for a person on the death of a living spouse and also to ensure smooth transition of the spirit of the deceased spouse (Nukunya, 1969 & Kirwen, 1979). These practices are generally instituted within social systems such as patriarchy. In most African countries, widows' lives are governed by cultural and traditional rules which are sometimes not only discriminatory, but involve degrading and life-threatening mourning and cleansing as well as burial rites (Women, 2000). As asserted in September 18-24 (2015:14) *African Independent* “many Ghanaian women find themselves abandoned by their families when their husbands die and sometimes have to take part in ceremonies that, according to local

practices, ensure their dead husbands' passages to the afterlife". Notably, therefore, South African rural widows are not exempted from these experiences.

Although the South African constitution, especially the bill of rights, guarantees equality and human dignity of all SA citizens, widows' rights continue to be violated through cultural practices that ignore them as individuals with their own minds. Prevalent cultural practices such as '*ukungena*' (levirate marriage), continue to violate widows' rights to choose on matters concerning their sexuality (Women , 2000).The most excruciating part of this is that these women do not give consent to the aforementioned practices.

Young widows in our communities are still trapped in dehumanising subordinate positions. This calls for a collective approach towards eradicating these oppressive practices. By calling for a transformative approach, there is no delusion about the fact that change will not happen overnight as it requires a restructuring of all basic social arrangements in our societies.

2.6. Psychological impact of widowhood

Death is an inevitable consequence for every human being. The death of a close person often leaves behind feelings of deep sadness and loss. A wife whose husband has died has to cope with widowhood, grief and the enormous adjustments in lifestyle that bereavement brings along (Goosen & Klugman, 1996). Hence, (Sadock & Sadock, 2003) argue that bereavement, grief and mourning apply to the psychological reactions of those who have experienced loss of a loved one. Many widows report a range of emotional reactions, including confusion, shock, fear, uncertainty, fury, and low self-esteem (Cattell, 2003). Cattell further asserts that for widows, this transitional moment is the beginning of a permanent life of poverty. Widows experience a loss of status and identity as they are often they are forced to change their living arrangements and conditions. In addition to the abovementioned issues widows have to endure, they also have to face loneliness and loss of a breadwinner until they themselves die.

Young widows have been identified as suffering from depression (Blanchard & Becker, 1976; Zisook & Schuchter, 1991 Cited in Niemeyer 2006) and more severe grief reactions and lower morale as compared to older widows (Morgan, 1976).In addition, (Niemeyer, 2006) also asserts

that grief is a personal process and can only be fully understood in the context of our continued process of constructing and maintaining our most basic sense of self. When events disrupt our sense of self and world, we tend to respond by attempting to interpret them in ways that are consistent with our basic worldview and sense of identity (Neimeyer, 1998, as cited in Walter, 2003). Several authors have linked young widowhood with both physical and psychological health problems following bereavement (Blanchard et al., 1976; Parkes & Brown, 1972; Pearlin, 1982; Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987) as cited in (Tomer, 2000).

Both (Stroebe & Stroebe (2002) summed up the age predictor in their conclusion by asserting that the younger widowed are at greater risk for health complications and also suffer more emotionally. On the basis of the findings emanating from the literature above, it can be argued that younger female widows are incomparably susceptible to difficulties of adaptation to bereavement in comparison to older women. This argument is drawn from the fact that spousal bereavement in young women is an unexpected event which disrupts the expected course of life and brings stress not normally associated with the stage of life these women are in.

2.7. Social support and widowhood

Widowhood practices normally place widows in disadvantaged, vulnerable and dependant positions where they may experience social exclusion, economic, physical and psychological abuse (Sossou, 2002). Notably, social support is very important in African cultures especially when a death has occurred. A widely shared understanding regarding bereavement in research literature is that the quality and availability of social support and intimate attachments are among the most important moderators of grief symptoms (Fry, 2001; House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988; Levy et al., 1993; Picton et al., 2001; Stroebe & Abakoumkin, 1999 as cited in Moore, 2003). Social support is positively associated with physical and mental health and can buffer the adverse health impacts of stressful life events and chronic strains (Christakis & Iwashyna, cited in Moore, 2003). Increased physical seclusion, social isolation and reduction in social activities during spousal bereavement have been found to severely distort perceptions of self-worth and self-esteem (Sanders, 1988; Utz, Carr, Nesse, & Wortman, 2002; van Baarsen et al., 2002). If a widow perceives that support is unavailable or unattainable, that perception can have a profound impact on the coping strategy adopted by the widow in question and may contribute to her

inability to adjust to her loss (Goodkin et al., 2001; Rando, 1993; Sanders, 1988 cited in Moore, 2003).

According to (Shange, 2009), both the availability and the extent and quality of social support are important determinants of the resolution of grief. Thus, (Nwoye, 2005) argues that in the African culture, pathological grief is not known due to the nature of support offered to the bereaved person. However, recent studies by (Opperman & Novello, 2006) conducted on complicated grieving attest to the changing nature of the supportive functions in African communities. Whilst, (Shange, 2009) is of the view that widows do benefit from support from friends and relatives. This fact notwithstanding, these studies do not indicate how social support can prevent the onset of pathological grief reactions in people who have lost their loved ones.

2.8. Widows Economic Challenges

Widow's economic challenges according to (Sossou, 2002) are of the view that the effects of widowhood are associated with the economic challenges that include the loss of the breadwinner or co-bread winner. This results in poverty, health challenges associated with poor nutrition, inadequate or no shelter, lack of access to health care and vulnerability to violence. Hence, participants in Carton's (2003)'s study shared their experiences of suffering from "mourning fatigue" and becoming "poorer with each burial," because of the number of deaths and the financial burden this brings about. Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007) indicate how the economic context shapes grieving practices, as many do not have the time to grieve.

As a coping mechanism for widows, grief and loss are pushed aside as people try to find meaningful ways of surviving. In some communities, grieving is construed as a "luxury" (Demmer, 2007). Moreover, to worsen their plight the widows are denied access to their husband's piece of land to farm, houses and animals etcetera and they are without a voice in this regard. In the event of them attempting to react, they are beaten up, stigmatized, abused, and ostracised (Ewelukwa, 2002).

The Minister of the Department of Social Development Ms Bathabile Dlamini in her address at the National Women's Conference held in Boksburg, Gauteng, on the 2nd of August 2011 asserted that her department provides assistance to over 15 million vulnerable individuals. However, she conceded that the feminization of poverty as evidenced in the over-influx of women in the informal sector and underpaying jobs remains a challenge in gender mainstreaming and she thus proposes community based approaches to reduce poverty.

2.9. Widows' Physical challenges

Widows physical challenges according to (Msimango ,1995) cites a Zulu custom of “*ukungenwa*” (Widow Inheritance/ leverage marriage) as one of the practices that disadvantage widows by rendering them vulnerable to sexual violence. “*Ukungenwa*” is a custom where the brother or any male figure of the extended family takes the wife of the deceased brother and cares for her and has sex with her regardless of the widow's approval. According to (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2000), this act is called sexualized violence and is one of the most humiliating forms of gender violence that is experienced and does not only demean the victim of such an act but also the community.

2.10. Studies on Widowhood

▪ Broader African context

The growing number of young widows and their experiences are not only an exception in the South African context. Social structures that are used to oppress young widows such as patriarchy seem to be widespread in sub-Saharan Africa and in other third world countries (Women, 2001). In Nigeria, for example, it is claimed that the husband's kin do not provide the widow with any economic support particularly if she is reluctant to become an additional wife to one of her husband's brothers (Oniye & Women, 2001). The psychological, health and economic status of these women is said to be worsened by the long periods of incarceration during mourning, an obligatory poor standard of hygiene; deprivation of the husband's property and maltreatment by the relatives (*ibid*).

A study conducted in Tanzania also reveals ill-treatment of widows by their in-laws or by the society at large. A study conducted in 1999 found that about 500 widows were killed because of accusations of being witches (Women, 2001). Another ethnic tribe known as the Bakiga was also studied. In this community, widows were made to perform different ceremonies prescribed by a medicine man (Liman, 2003). These ceremonies included but not limited to the medicine man rubbing widows' 'private parts' with leaves from a plant called *akatooma*, *instructing the widows to urinate* on the plants, brushing with thorny plants on the forehead of the widows and other rituals that are believed to be removing the deceased husband from the widow (*ibid*).

Image 5: The picture below shows the isangoma performing mourning rituals.



Source: Web 5

In some communities, it is believed that if the widow has a sexual relationship with any man before these rituals, the man will die. After all these rituals, the widow has no discretion to decide who to marry after the death of her husband.

Among the Shona, widows are victimized as witches and prostitutes and accused as the underlying cause of the death of the husband. This results in them (the widows) being alienated and viewed with suspicion especially by wives of the brothers of the deceased husband because they fear for their own marriages in the advent of polygamy through the levirate marriage (Chimhanda, 2002 as cited in Shumbamhini, 2006). Such victimization of widows is definitely a common feature of widowhood in African and Asian cultures (Gunga, 2009; Owen, 2007 & Women, 2001). The case of a widow from Swaziland who was barred from bathing for 3 years after the death of her husband because she did not want to wash away her sorrow for her husband (Kidd, 1925) is an example of the gross violations of the rights of widows to be treated with respect and dignity..

- **Broader South African Context**

In this context (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999) examine the psychological significance of traditional African mourning practices in the context of HIV/AIDS pandemic and implications this has for mental health. (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999) found that the increase in psychiatric and psychological problems is associated with incomplete mourning and unresolved grief. Similarly, (Manyedi et al, 2003) explore widowhood experiences and beliefs with regard to the mourning process of the Batswana people. The findings indicated that among the Batswana people widowhood is an experience is influenced by the cultural beliefs and customs in such a way that it may be a stressful experience for the widows.

Further studies include (Ngubane, 2004) who focuses on the traditional burial practices of the Zulu people. Hence (Ngubane, 2004) asserts that most Zulu people are unable to perform their traditional custom due to the changed nature of environment in which they live. On the other hand, (Shange, 2009) focuses on bereaved employees in South African organizations. Finally, (Demmer, 2007) focuses on professional caregivers in rural KwaZulu-Natal on AIDS-related loss and grief. In view of the aforementioned fact on young widows in South Africa, literature

addressing their needs, everyday life experiences opportunities, challenge and related controversies calls for special attention.

▪ **Studies on Legal and Policy issues impacting on widowhood in South Africa**

The Constitution contains South Africa's Bill of Rights. A constitution sets out how all the elements of government are organized and how power is allotted to different political units. It contains rules about what power is withheld, who wields the power and over whom it is wielded in the governing of the country (Bill of Rights, 1996). The South African constitution of 1996 was constructed on liberal tenets. Much has been made of the gender sensitive nature of this document, as well as of the institutions it created to secure gender equity and in enforcing women's rights. However, African feminists in particular and other scholars for some now time criticized liberalism's emphasis on the legal-institutional domain as a bias rather than as a social variable that really improves the lives of women. Women's right is one of the major elements of the human rights struggle over the years. It is in this light, therefore, that this study makes reference to regulatory instrument decided on at various conventions which place a great emphasis on the rights of women. These include the following: the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by the General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) fourth world conference, the Human Rights resolution 2002/49 and the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003). These human rights instruments had remarkable international influence on legal and institutional reforms to women's rights.

Women and widows are protected by the full range of rights guaranteed in the new South African Constitution. These include the right to life, dignity and privacy. Women receive specific protection by Section 9 (3) which deals with "Equality". This section provides that 'The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth' (National Gender Policy Framework). The concept of gender equality as used within the policy framework takes into account women's existing subordinate positions within social relations and aims at the

restructuring of society so as to eradicate male domination. Therefore, equality is understood to include formal equality and substantive equality, not merely simple equality with men (National Gender Policy Framework, 2007).

- **Chronological Legal Policy Issues Impacting on Widows**

Until the early 1980s women's human rights were given a back seat in international law. In recent times a culmination of human rights instruments at the international and regional levels have addressed human rights issues concerning women in diverse ways and their relevance cannot be overemphasized. These have, however, proved inadequate in really protecting and promoting the rights of women, and more specifically widows. This is because although these instruments have made significant progress in improving women's conditions and access to resources, the basic structure of inequality in the relationship between men and women continues to be an impediment towards full realization of these rights by women. It is thus notable, therefore, that women's rights in all spheres continue to be neglected (Freeman & Fraser, 1994). Notably, the collapse of apartheid in 1994, has cemented the pathway towards social change.

Consequently, the rights and freedoms of the disadvantaged become particularly critical issues. In this regard, women's rights are also placed high on the global agenda because women are still fighting for their rights – socially, politically and economically. The issue of women's right is one of the major elements of the human rights approach over the past decade. It is worth noting that gender inequality not only leads to human rights violations but may also have implications for the overall development of a nation (Mukasa, 2008). Realising the importance of gender equality to socio-economic development, the international community in the Millennium Declaration agreed to eliminate gender inequality in every aspect of human endeavour by 2015. Moreover, these progressive and transformative documents such as the Millennium Development Goals of 2000, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) of 1966, and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 article 1; are among the documents which over the years, have continued to fight for the protection and the improvement of the status of women in the world.

At the regional level, the Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women (The Women's Protocol to the African Charter) of 2005 have made remarkable progress in protecting the rights of women in Africa. In addition to the international and the regional commitments, the South African Constitution, Act 108 of 1996 enshrines the rights of all people in South Africa and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom of all citizens (section 7 of the Constitution). Despite all these progressive documents and interventions, widows are not only regarded as candidates for destitution but are classified among the group of the marginalized in our communities and their human rights continue to be violated through socio-structural systems such as patriarchy (Ehusani, 2002). Whilst, (Roy, 2006) argues emphatically that all social and moral issues pertaining to the rights of women are conceptually connected to the notion of 'human rights', because all women's rights fall within the domain of human rights. Human rights as 'defined in philosophical literature are those rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as dignified human beings' (Roy, 2006). Therefore it is highlighted that human rights are not only concerned with the rights of women but that they encompass the rights of the whole of human kind. However, in South Africa, where violence against women remains a problem of enormous magnitude, the problems associated with the status of widows and widowhood is unsettling.

2.12. Universal declaration of Human rights (UDHR)

The UDHR (1948) is the first international instrument that articulated the rights to be accorded to every individual. It also provides that "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights". The general assembly of the United Nations (UN) unanimously adopted the declaration as an international pledge to human rights. The declaration further elaborates that everyone has the right to own property and in doing so gives full recognition to property rights as part of human rights. This means that property rights are recognized as human rights and therefore all persons who own property are guaranteed the enjoyment of their property and freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender, race, and social status. By right, widows should be the beneficiaries to any property which is entitled to them through inheritance or gained in any other lawful ways.

2.13. The empowerment of widows

Young widows have suffered enough through oppression, discrimination and isolation. In order to combat these issues, widows need to be empowered. The term empowerment has different meanings in different socio-cultural and political contexts. Zastrow (2004:431) defines empowerment as: ‘the process of helping individuals, families, groups and communities increase their personal, interpersonal, socioeconomic, and political strength and influence toward improving their circumstances’. On the other hand, (Griffen, 2005) argues that a proper understanding of empowerment requires a sense of what ‘power’ means because the word means ‘adding to women’s power’. Due to the fact that empowerment has definitional impression, (Deere, Diana, & Leon, 2001) admonish that the term empowerment is likely to be a *debased* term or to have its value notwithstanding its importance in the context of social work practice. When the usage of the term is explored, it has the following features that appear to be common according to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) (2001:9) “ *Self-strength, control, self-power, self-reliance, own choice, life of dignity in accordance with ones values, capable of fighting for one’s own rights, independence, own decision making, being free, awakening and capacity.*

2.14. Caring, caretaking and context

In this concept, (Weick, 2000) as cited in (Saleeby, 2002) argues that ‘social caretaking is the profession’s hidden voice, hidden because it is also a woman’s voice’. Therefore, social caretaking and social work as observed from the perspective of strength denotes the revolutionary possibility of hope which is re-in forced by social relationships in the family, neighborhood and community. This idea gives way for social workers to be able to utilize people from within their family and neighborhoods to assist the young widows. Moreover, (Cooke & Ellis, 2004) advocate the use of the *exit, voice and rights* strategy in empowering the oppressed and disadvantaged. These three aspects of the strategy can be utilized to empower widows in different ways that can help them minimize the impact of patriarchy.

Denouncing oppressive practices and overcoming this problem have always been the desire wishes of many widows. However, when they experience this problem, the widows find themselves engulfed by the problem and it is at this point that the exit strategy may be seen

useful. The exit strategy is applied or can be used to spur widows to challenge their being ill-treated by appropriating these strategies and turn them into new perspectives that help them see the problems in a different light. In addition, (Cooke & Ellis, 2004) assert that empowerment through *voice* uses a democratic approach where widows are allowed and given the opportunity to speak out about their problems. Using this strategy is likely to enable widows to express their opinions with regard to the plight they face as widows. This could create for the young widows an atmosphere and an environment where they can be free to articulate their concerns. However, in cases where widows cannot speak for themselves, the social worker can speak on their behalf by advocating for their needs and concerns.

Most importantly, (Cooke & Ellis, 2004) describe the *rights strategy* as the ‘preferred strategy [...] since it is based on the adoption of universal rights for all’. In light of the practical limitations of different versions of empowerment, (Means and Smith, 2007) as cited by (Cooke & Ellis, 2004) suggest that for many people empowerment can only be achieved through a process of ‘struggle’ in challenging the realities of power relations. A ‘struggle’ for a widow within African societies would mean the advocacy of rights in a process which entail going against the patriarchal nature of society.

2.15. Conclusion

This chapter provided the foundation for the study. It drew on debates from a Psychological perspective about death, grief, loss and mourning. Women, including widows, are encouraged to seek and claim their rights to redefine their mourning, despite the fact that this entails a process of restructuring. Most significantly, this chapter provided an overview of the mourning rituals as practiced in different parts of the world, globally, Africa and South Africa in particular. Whilst there are positive expectations from the observance of the mourning rituals, what emerged from the overview seemed to portray the young widows the world over as victims of degradation and sometimes downright inhuman treatment during the performance of mourning rituals. In most cases, the performance of the rituals for the fulfillment of customary requirements leaves widows impoverished or with enormous difficulty. These rituals undergone by the widows following the death of their husbands seem to be the practice throughout West, East and Southern Africa. There are still some knowledge gaps since only a few ethnic groups in South Africa in particular

have been studied and even those have not been exhaustively examined. Furthermore, most studies, according to (Lalitha, K. & Jamuna, (2003) reflect the rituals from the point of view of the male and European researchers and not from the African female researcher's point of view. In South Africa, however, an era has begun in which studies conducted by female African researchers (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007; Radzilani, 2010) are taking place.

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3. 1. Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological approach that was used in conducting the study. It provides an in-depth analysis and discussion of the results from interviews young widows in KwaZulu-Natal. Given the location of the participants, the researcher deemed it expedient to adopt the use of interviews which, in the researcher's view, had the potential of rendering visible the social relations in the family and community settings and which recognizes the context in which widowhood is experienced. According to (Neuman, 2000), feminist researchers interact and collaborate with the people they are studying by attempting to comprehend their experiences while sharing their own feelings and experiences. In turn, this creates a non-hierarchical a nonthreatening environment.

This study was qualitative in nature and it focused on the experiences of young widowhood as a phenomenon. In this regard, the study aimed to describe and make sense of the meanings that the participants expressed (Thyer, 2001). Notably, a qualitative approach also focuses on the exploration of what is real for the participants and how they make sense of their world using their own language and voices. As such, this is about collecting and analyzing information rather than identifying, isolating and controlling variables as it is the case with the quantitative approach (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). Thus, in contrast to the quantitative approach, the qualitative approach allows flexibility in its content, focus and question (Neuman, 2006). It is against this background, therefore, that in this study a qualitative approach was used given its openness to ideas, experiences, opinions, feelings and perceptions which were expressed by the research participants to the researcher. The choice of the qualitative method afforded the young widows the latitude to share their experiences without restriction.

3.2. Research Design

According to (Ospina & Wagner, 2004), the qualitative method emphasizes not only the social context and social processes but also emphasises the creation of social meanings which occur in specific contexts. Thus, in order to fully understand the experiences of the young widows under investigation, this study employed a descriptive research design. As argued by (Burns & Grove,

2003), descriptive research characteristically provides a picture of a situation as it naturally happens. It is against this background, therefore, that this method was used not only to investigate current cultural practices, but also to obtain insight into the lived experiences of the young widows and their opinions with regards to widowhood rites.

3.3. Study Area

▪ Brief Description of the Research Site

This study was conducted in the rural community of Emangweni. Emangweni is a Tribal Authority under Imbabazane Local Municipality in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Emangweni area has twelve villages ‘izigodi’ under Emangweni Traditional leadership of Chief Mazibuko. Spatially, it is the smallest local municipality in the uThukela District. Its area size is 853 square km and has a population of 110 594 people with Zulus constituting 96% of the total population and 4% is constituted by are white farmers residing in the rural villages (Integrated Developmental Plan (IDP), 2013-2014).

EMangweni area is located in the uThukela District at the foothills of the Central UKhahlamba Drakensberg Park (World Heritage Site) and is situated between OKhahlamba, UMtshezi and Mooi- Mpfana. The majority of the population of Imbabazane resides in the rural villages scattered throughout the area, particularly in the traditional council areas (*ibid*). Imbabazane is the name of an African Tree. According to (Wright, 2007), in 1817 King Dingane and his troops used to rest under the aforementioned tree. As a result of structural oppression, Imbabazane people ended up ruled by the white farmers. Although for several decades the land had been exclusively owned by the white farmers, it was brought back to the indigenous people. Historically, Chief Langalibalele took over the kingdom and he was known as a legendary ‘rain-maker’ (Liebenberg, 1972), and his people (the Amangwe) were removed from their land by the English government to a new location between the upper Mtshezi (Bushman’s River) and uMsuluzi river. As noted by (Wright, 2007) the new location was formally named Emangweni. It is worth noting that the place was under the influence of English missionaries who, despite the minority, owned vast tracks of the land. Even today many of the households work for the white farmers on their farms. In summary, (Wright, 2007) asserts that Chief Phuthini in 1940 took over

stead to observe that her caseload has a huge number of young widows who come to the office to apply or who are beneficiaries of the child support grant. During these consultations with these young widows, they raised a number of challenges and life strains which push them to come to the Social Work office for help. It is unfortunate that in most cases during consultations, the support grant application protocols do not provide scope for the exploration of the young widows' experiences and all other aspects of their lives. This was a cause for concern to the researcher since she believes that social work should provide the opportunity for clients to raise their plight as young widows to ascertain how best they can manage them in their attempt to live a meaningful life. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that any service provision should be informed by a holistic understanding of the clients' socio-cultural context and the cultural practices embedded in that culture.

The following criterion for selection was used:

- (a) The sample was selected from the closest Area that the researcher could access.
- (b) Having observed that her caseload has a huge number of young widows, the researcher then contacted eleven of these young widows through home visits and they were very keen to participate in the study. The enthusiasm spurred to refer other young widows residing in their immediate vicinity.
- (c) The target population for this study was fifteen (15) young widows who were under the age of 35 years, who are widows. The age restriction of 35 years was informed by the South African National Youth Policy (2009-2014)'s definition of a young person (14 to 35 years).
- (d) In addition to the age restriction, the inclusion criteria dictated that these young widows should have been married and living together at the time of the spouse's death so as to provide for some consistency regarding the experiences articulated. The researcher's preference was that the young widows needed to have had personal experience of widowhood for them to meaningfully provide insightful descriptions. This lived experience of widowhood would, arguably, enable (as it did) them to articulate their experiences and be willing participants (Wilson & Hutchison, cited in Netshishive, 2006).

In summary, the participants were supposed to have been in the widowhood state for at least one (1) year or more from the time of the death of their husband. In the researcher's view, this was an objective necessity in that the participants' lived experience of widowhood would put them in good stead to relate clearly and vividly the loss they have had to endure for as long as they were alive.

3.5. Data Collection Techniques

Most significantly, (Dominelli, 2002) raises important questions about appropriate research methodologies relating to women's and women's issues. She further argues strongly for the use of participatory research methods where women are treated as active agents in the research process. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that in this study, the researcher created an environment that 'gave voice' to the individuals under study.

▪ Semi-structured Interviews

The researcher used semi-structured interviews to collect data. Although demographic details were also the main focus of the interview was on the views and experiences of the young widows which were explored and described using open ended questions. The Interviews elicited insightful views from the participants on the subject under study and this enabled the researcher to comprehend the complexity of the respondents' complex social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Of great importance to note in semi-structured interviews is that usually there is no time limit fixed. The young widows as the research interviewees were free to formulate their responses. The ease with which they expressed themselves accounts for why this type of interview is the most suited for studies such as this one given its flexibility in relation to the types of questions asked and the time limit imposed thereon. The latitude given to the participants to share their experiences without being unreasonably restricted in terms of how much time they take doing so, finds support in (De Vos et al, (2006) assertion that when a semi – structured interview is conducted “the participant can be perceived as the expert on the subject and should therefore be allowed maximum opportunity to tell his story.”

- **Bias in Research**

In some cases that qualitative researchers address personally significant topics (Stiles, 1993). It is noted by (Lincoln & Guba, 1990, in Stiles, 1993) that in the course of sharing these processes with the reader new meanings evolve. The fact that the researcher has also lost her husband means that widowhood has not only impacted upon but also influenced how she understands and interprets the experiences of the co-constructed stories of the participants. The information gathered in the process of developing an interpretation represents an important source of information in its own right. Accordingly, the researcher's influence in terms of her culture, gender, educational background, as well as understanding her mother's experience of widowhood is acknowledged as it informs her thinking. In this regard, biasness cannot be ignored.

- **Dependability**

According to (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, and McNeill, 2002), dependability is determined by the consistency of the research process. The overall research questions in this study were considered to be clear and logically connected to the research design and objectives. Notably, the use of face to face interviews is consistent with qualitative research processes. Thus, the discussions took place in the language of the participants which is isiZulu. This ensured that the participants were given a voice and were treated as active agents who are experts in matters concerning their own lives. The use of the participant's language minimised misinterpretations between the researcher and the researched. In this regard, care was taken not to assume meanings.

- **Conformability**

Conformability refers to whether or not the findings and conclusions of a study are amenable to the research objectives despite the values and biases of the researcher (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Although the researcher recognized and documented her own subjective self in the research process, the distinction was maintained between her personal values and those of the research participants. Pragmatically speaking, this was achieved by documenting and reviewing the field notes, tape records and also had the expectations of the study reviewed in accordance with the stated objectives of the study.

- **Transferability**

According to (Terre Blanche et al., 2006) transferability refers to whether the findings of the research in question are transferrable to other contexts or not. This study was a context specific study whose aim was not to transfer the findings to other contexts. Notably, qualitative research aims to produce conceptual findings that are representative of specific groups or populations within a given context. Thus, findings of this study accurately represent the prevailing situation of young widows in the study's area of investigation.

3.8. Ethical Issues

According to (De Vos et al, 2006:57) “ethics is a set of moral principles which are suggested by an individual or group. These principles are subsequently widely accepted and such acceptance offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students”. Hence, (Strydom, 2002: 63) argues that “ethical guidelines serve as standards and as the basis on which each researcher ought to evaluate his or her own conduct’. Consistent with the ethical requirements of research, the researcher observed the following ethical principles: gaining access, informed consent, confidentiality and the privacy of respondents.

This, therefore, means that ethics can help prevent researchers not only from making experiments which may harm the research participants but also from asking questions that can prove to be embarrassing or threatening and from making observations that would deceive or place subjects under duress and from reporting information that would constitute invasion of privacy (Singleton & Straits 2005:515). In this study, the following ethical issues were considered, namely the gatekeeper's permission, informed consent and confidentiality, Anonymity, beneficence, deception of subjects, protection from harm and the freedom to withdraw from participation.

- **Gate Keepers Permission**

To gain access to the participants, the researcher secured permission from the Amangwe Tribal Authority Inkosi Mazibuko to conduct the research study in his area of jurisdiction. After having presented the research proposal to the university higher degrees research committee, the

researcher approached the office of Inkosi Mazibuko where she introduced herself and presented the research proposal. The aim of the research, objectives and research methodology were succinctly explained to the chief and since the chief was satisfied with the details presented, permission was duly granted.

- **Informed Consent**

Consistent with the requirement(s) regulating informed consent, the participants were informed about the purpose, the nature of the study and the approximate amount of time the interviews would take (Schurink 1998; Strydom 1998). The aims of this study were explained to the participants at the time when they were solicited to consider volunteering their participation in the research. After negotiating a suitable date and time to meet, they were briefed again about the aims and purpose of the study, that is, to hear about their experiences since being widowed. Having been presented with the consent forms (see Appendix C) the participants were informed that their cooperation was valued and their signature on the form signified confirmation of their consent in respect of participation.

It bears repeating that participation of the respondents was based on their willingness to do so. Therefore, they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants who chose to participate were asked to sign an informed consent form, and were told that they were able to withdraw at any time if they felt the need to do so. They were also assured that participation or non-participation to the study will not jeopardize their benefits as the service users at the researcher's agency. All the participants were assured of confidentiality. Notably, confidentiality is defined by (Strydom, 1998) as 'a continuation of privacy which refers to agreement between persons that limits others' access to private information except in reporting research results as agreed and that the information will not be used for any purpose other than research. This was achieved through the use of pseudonyms and storage of audio recordings in a lockable cabinet in the researcher's office.

- **Anonymity**

In accordance with (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) view that a research participant has a right to privacy, the researcher ensured the participants' right to privacy by adhering to the

principle of keeping anonymity and confidentiality in respect of the respondents' identity. As argued by (Babbie, 2001) in (McLaughlin, 2007) anonymity implies that only the researcher and few other researchers who are involved in the empirical study know the identity of the research participants. Since the researcher already possessed identifying particulars of the participants since they were from the researcher's case files, pseudo names were used for the study to protect the privacy and the confidentiality of the research participants.

- **Beneficence**

Beneficence in qualitative research is an ethical principle that encourages being good to others and preventing harm from happening to them (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000). As indicated earlier on, the participants were invited to participate voluntarily. In this regard, they were informed from the beginning that they would not be given any remuneration for their participation. Even though the participants did not get remunerated for their participation, they were nevertheless rewarded in that they were assured that since they were participants in the research study they would see the fruits of their participation. This would entail assisting policy makers in designing intervention programs aimed at addressing the plights faced by young widows in their immediate vicinity. In this light, the participants were to construe their participation as instantiating a transformative process towards alleviating the plight of young widows in their condition of widowhood.

Given the sensitive nature of widowhood as a field of study, the researcher entered the site aware that this study had the potential of invoking unintended distress or post-traumas. Hence, the researcher was sensitive to the participants' emotional well-being when probing questions that had the potential of psychologically harming the participants. The researcher made it clear to the participants that if they felt that they did not feel like continuing with the interviews, they were free to withdraw from the study or choose not to answer the questions (see informed concern). They were also given the option of contacting the researcher, research supervisor or a counselling social worker at the agency at any point during or after the interviews should they need any counselling or debriefing services. There were, however, no cases of research participants who were traumatised during the interviews. On the contrary, listening to young women was a challenge since most of them spoke randomly without taking regulated turns. The

researcher had to be stern in maintaining a cooperative environment for purposes of gathering as much information as she had envisaged upon conducting the interviews.

- **Deception of Subjects**

Deception of subjects' means deliberately misrepresenting something in order to make another person believe what is not true thereby violating the respect which every person is entitled to (Babbie & Mouton, 2003). In that respect, the researcher maintained integrity throughout the entire research progression. The participants were further encouraged to ask questions when they required clarification or did not understand the questions they were asked at the time.

- **Protection from Harm**

Most significantly, (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) assert in a cautionary way that the most fundamental and important issue which the researcher has to consider when conducting research is the treatment of the research participants. It is argued that a researcher has to be cautious and not expose research participants to undue mental and physical harm (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). Similarly, (Singleton & Straits, 2005) assert that mental harm could mean personal harm which refers to humiliation or embarrassing the participant.

Additionally, it can include psychological harm which means losing self-esteem and social harm which translates in to losing trust in others. Notably, (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101) advises that in cases “where the nature of a study involves creating a small amount of psychological discomfort, participants should know this ahead of time, and any necessary debriefing or counselling should follow immediately after their participation.” Given the fact that the researcher is a professional social worker skilled with therapeutic models of interventions, referrals for further assistance were prepared timorously to deal with any eventualities. However, the researcher did not encounter any unfortunate eventualities throughout the whole research process. During the entire interviewing sessions, the researcher observed cultural protocol and was thus cautious and sensitive, for example, by not calling an older person by her name but rather refer to her as “*sis*” which means big sister in isiZulu.

- **Freedom to Withdraw**

Remarkably, (Oliver 2003) in McLaughlin (2007:62) highlights the fact that the research participants have a right to withdraw their involvement in the empirical study at any time without prejudice. Additionally, the participants are not required to give notice of their withdrawal and they may not give explanation regarding the withdrawal as well (Oliver, 2003). Hence, (Johnson & Christensen, 2004) caution, though, that the participant at times might feel pressured to carry on with the empirical study despite the fact that she or he has been told about his or her freedom to withdraw. In this instance, the participant is not completely free to withdraw. The researcher must convince the participant that withdrawing from the research will not have diverse effects on him or her. It is against this backdrop, therefore, that the participants were informed about their rights to withdraw in the event of them not feeling comfortable carrying on with the interview.

3.9. Limitations and Steps Taken to Minimise the Limitations

In spite of the thorough, impartial and unbiased research procedures employed in the study, some shortcomings were noticeable in the course of the study. In light of this, the researcher was conspicuously aware of the interview challenges which tended to compromise her ingenuity in managing the interview process. These challenges notwithstanding, the researcher, however, tried various ways to eliminate the menacing challenges so that the study could be successfully concluded. It is against this background, therefore, that (Fouche, 2005) argues that ‘problems are never completely eliminated from any study in the caring professions and the researcher must spell out the various means by which he or she tries to limit such’.

It bears repeating that Emangweni community is a traditional society with its people having strong cultural beliefs rooted in the Zulu traditions. In Zulu communities, it is common practice to emphasise collective identity rather than individual interests whose achievement of fulfilment is attached through the group (Hutchison, 1987). In this regard, one’s existence from birth to death is organically embodied in a series of associations and life appears to have its full value only in these close ties (Healy, 2007). This is so since each member belongs to a clan which translates to the family system with its own interpersonal relations. In such communities, a decision affecting an individual is made in consultation with others. Thus, the researcher was aware that the process of negotiating and contracting with the research participants might be a

Sindisiwe

Sindisiwe is unemployed and dropped out of school in grade 9. She is a 28 years old widow who is taking care of her three children. She depends on the government child support grant for her children. She has temporal jobs which sustain her livelihood. She was married customarily and her husband was working in Johannesburg at the time of his death. Her husband was shot dead in front of her by unknown people. She mourned for a period of 6 months. At the time of the interview, Sindisiwe had been widowed for 3 years.

Lynette

Lynette is 34 years old and is unemployed with two adult stepsons and an 11-year-old daughter. Lynette and her husband had a home at Nonyameni Area (Emangweni). They married in community of property (civil marriage). Her husband was self-employed at the time of his death. He died after a short-term illness. Since Lynette had been assisting her husband in their business now that he is dead and she is unemployed. She mourned for a period of 18 months. Lynette and her husband had been married for nine years at the time of his death and at the time of the interview she had been widowed for 1 year.

Ncamisile

Ncamisile is a 26 years old South African citizen locally residing at Mnyangweni in the Emangweni area. She is employed at Vukuzenzele (Temporal job) and she earns R500. Ncamisile and her husband were married for a year and lived together for two years before they married customarily. Her husband was under T.B. treatment and was admitted in hospital with their baby that passed away after the father's death. Ncamisile's husband was a taxi driver at the time of his death. He fell sick for almost three weeks before he eventually passed on. She mourned for a period of 3 months. At the time of the interview, Ncamisile had been widowed for two years.

Bizeki

Bizeki is an unemployed 33 years old widow who is taking care of her four children. She depends on the government child support grant for her children. She has temporal jobs to help sustain her livelihood. She and her husband were married customarily. Her husband was working

in Durban at the time of his death. He died due to severe cough which lasted for only one week before he died. She mourned for a period of 18 months. At the time of the interview, Bizeki had been widowed for 18 months

4.3. Interpretation of themes

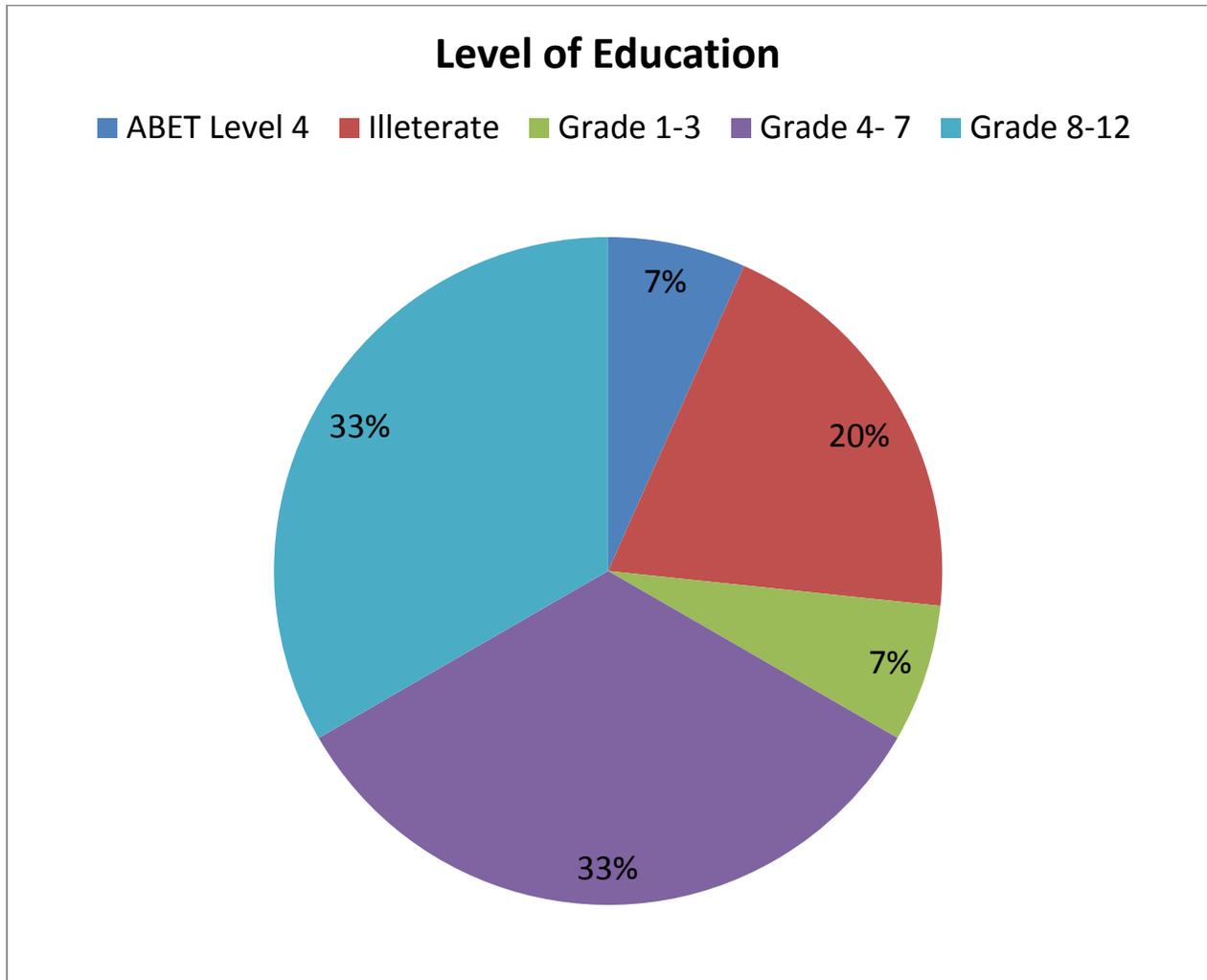
4.3.1. The participants age information

The participants were between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age. According to the life span model, this is a period associated with accomplishment and productivity, probably a period when people are most goal-directed according to the life span model (Berger, McBreen and Rifkin, 1996). Ironically, therefore, death has to some extent compromised their prospects of becoming the kind of persons they would probably have become had death not deprived them of their beloved ones at such an early age. Before reaching middle age, these young women are already subjected to traumatic experiences usually associated with old age. Sabani was the youngest as she was 25 years old of all the participants when she became a widow. She became a widow at the age of 25 years.

The majority of the participants got married between the ages of 17 and 22 years. Thelekile's case was more concerning as she got married at the age of 17 after she has been cohabiting with her husband for three years. The implication, therefore, is that Thelekile started living with her late husband at the age of 14 and this is one example of how the rights of these women, particularly rural girls, are violated over time and how patriarchy continues to oppress women in rural communities. Constitutionally, Thelekile was a minor when she started living with her late husband and the husband in law committed statutory rape which is a punishable criminal offence.

4.3.2. The Participants' Level of Education

CHART 1: The Participants' Level of Education



The chart above indicates that 33% of the participants are between grades and 4-7, 33% are between grades 8-12 whereas 7% are between grades 1-3. 7% have ABET at level 4 and 20% of them are illiterate. Over the past years, there have been moves towards addressing illiteracy among women. The UN Global Millennium Development Goals have, as one of its key priorities, the provision of basic education to all. The UN launched the literacy decade (2003-2012) campaign in 2003 with the aim of bringing literacy to all by the end of this decade (Dighe & Reddi, 2006:15). The targeted group in this campaign were women who are reportedly facing literacy challenges. Women constitute the majority of the world illiterate as they count 64% of

the world illiterate who can neither read nor write (UNESCO, 2006). Most of the young widows who participated in the study only two completed Matric, three are illiterate and the rest have lower educational grades. Forty-two percent of African girls in general get married before the age of eighteen (Nour, 2006). Child marriage is a human rights violation that prevents girls from obtaining an education, enjoying optimal health, maturing, and giving birth to healthy babies (Nour, 2006). Socially, early marriage forces girls to drop out of school at a young age, and thus permanently disadvantage their educational careers and earning potential (Ouattara, Sen, and Thomson 1998). In support of this, the participants highlighted the following:

“In terms of education, I need to be taught on doing business so that when I die my children will not have to suffer like me” (Sbongile).

“I need to be educated because nowadays one you cannot have a good life without education”, (Zinhle).

“I need special education in growing vegetables in the garden so that I know how to grow them. In our community vegetables are a good source of income. I can be able to even sell them and get money to sustain my children`s livelihood.” (Phikiwe).

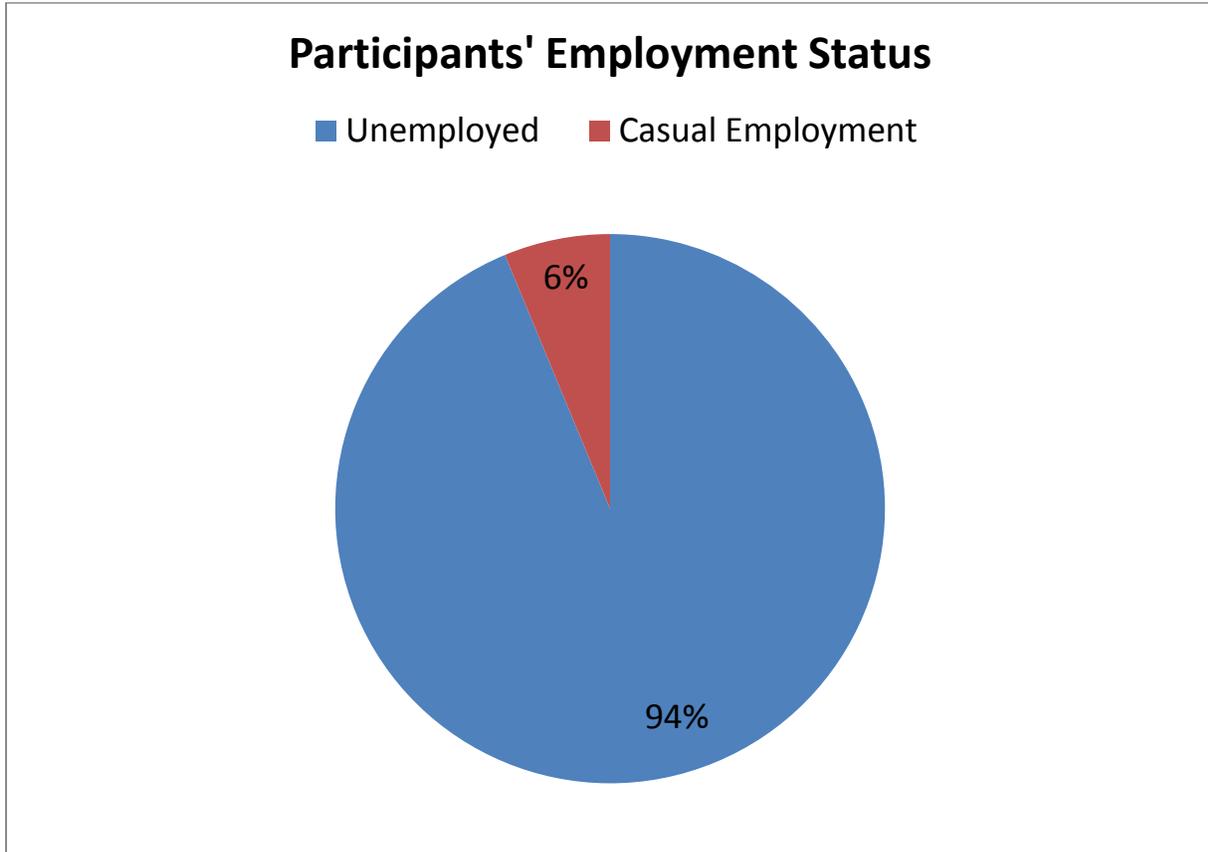
Arguably, education and information have a liberating function in everyday life. Thus, given its emancipatory potential, education is very important (Rao Gupter, 2000), not only to widows but to women in general. Education has been described by (Medel-Anonuevo, 1999) as empowering and is needed to enable widows to have more self-help skills, more information and more knowledge on how the society they live in works. Notably, Safieddin (1999) is of the view that education raises widows’ awareness of government institutions and non-governmental organizations that can provide them with assistance when they face difficult circumstances.

All of the ten participants have children. Many of the children were of school going age as evidenced by the participants’ concern for financial resources for educating their children. In her study of Emangweni Community, (Izumi, 2006) found that the average age of the orphans left behind was eleven years which is the age range postulated to be in need of support for food,

education and health. However, there is a tendency at Emangweni rural society for individuals to spend money on the education of boys only, because males are viewed as future breadwinners. As a result, women are mostly burdened with menial work such as gathering firewood, fetching water and cooking. Notably, household chores can be a huge burden as they have the potential of limiting a woman's opportunity to further her education. Young Widows are also in need of skills necessary to use and exercise their inheritance rights which could be achieved by making them literate. They need training in communication as regards legal rights to inheritance so that they can foster interfamily communication (Rao Gupter, 2000). Whilst, (Chinkin, 2001:67) argues that 'public education and advocacy' are crucial for educating not only widows but also the public about the rights of widows. Hence, (*ibid*) argument is that there is a need to use multiple and broad strategies in educating stakeholders, especially decision-makers and civil society at all levels.

4.3.3. Participants' Employment Status and their Economic Needs

Chart 2: Pie Chart Representing the Employment Status of the Participants



According to chart 2 above, 94% of the young widows who participated in the study are unemployed. Hence 6% of them are employed. This throws light regarding extent to which these women need to have basic needs made accessible to them. Out of the 94% (15 out of 16) of the participants are unemployed, one is employed as a casual worker in one of the economic development initiative that is taking place in the community. This high unemployment rate of participants was unsettling. It is notable, therefore, that these young widows can possibly work hard towards sustaining their livelihood provided of course on opportunities made available to them. Notably, it is generally asserted that in the global village, more women than men are unemployed and illiterate (ILO, 2009; World Bank, 2005). The prevalence of unemployment among women poses a bigger challenge when these women become heads of households. This high unemployment rate among women is closely linked to their high illiteracy and low skills levels (Gangopadhyay & Wadhway, 2003:3). According to (Wanasundera, 2007) 110 million

children in the world do not attend school, and of these two thirds are girls. This leads to the feminization of illiteracy and thus decreases the employment prospects of women.

According to (Chant, 2007), one the main reasons for the female-headed households to be among the poorest of the poor, is the fact that they are deprived of one of the main routes through which access to income is achieved. It is further argued that black women have a nurturing role that has limited career opportunities because they are burdened with nurturing children which limits their freedom to seek employment.

Almost all of the young widows who participated in the interview indicated that they need jobs to sustain their livelihood. It is in this regard that one of them said:

“in my life I just think that if I can get money I can start a business, I can go and stock and then sell and I can be able to cover all the cost and buy food. That can satisfy all my needs and for the whole family. I usually see that when I take a small amount of money from the one I get for child support grant to buy small things to sell. I see that if I can ever have a larger amount of money I can have a successful business. I am able to buy everything I need when I am selling goods” (Philisiwe).

Enhancing economic needs of the young widows is of paramount importance to meet subsistence needs after losing their sole breadwinners. The International Committee of the Red Cross (2006) avers that women can be left entirely without social status when they lose their husbands, especially in patriarchal societies. This means that the death of the main breadwinner can cause a breakdown in the economic status for a widow when they take on roles traditionally reserved only for men.

“When my husband was alive, there was no time where we find that there is no food to eat at home; he was trying his best to support the family. He was giving me money to buy food”, (Philisiwe).

“ things are difficult since I’m currently unemployed , in most cases I miss his presence wishing that he is still alive so that we could help and support one another but I’m on my own and everything is my responsibility while I’m unemployed”, (Lindiwe).

“As he has passed away, I find it very hard to cater all the needs of the children because you find that two children do not have shoes to go to school, no meal, finding that I am no trying to count and think that with the money I get I have to buy shoes and there is no food and I just remember that if my husband was alive he should be doing something about it”, (Sabani).

“I miss my husband, although he was not working but he was building houses, after getting paid, he was giving me all his salary he got to buy food for the family and take care of our children. Now I do not have money and I am not able to buy all the basic needs of the family. I used to think about him and say if he is still alive, I shouldn’t be hungry but I should be cooking and eating now. I miss him a lot”, (Philisiwe).

Moreover, (Aderinto, 2000) argues that widowhood impacts negatively on the economic well-being of women as the situation becomes worsened when the woman has been denied access to the deceased’s (late husband) savings and other economic resources.

“I regret the day my husband passed away, what my brother in-law did to me.....eish ! He made my life miserable; after my husband passed away he took all his clothes and wears them without my approval as a legal wife. He sold my husband`s tractor at used that money for his own needs. When I confronted him he slapped me and told me to go back home.....eish!” (Dudu)

4.5. Reaction towards loss

In the twentieth century, it was generally believed that to get over the loss of a loved one it was necessary to do one’s ‘grief work’ (Stroebe *et al.*, 2001). Whether the mourning rituals are the expression of deep sorrow for someone who died (Pearsall, 2001) or just a culturally patterned expression of the bereaved person’s thoughts and feelings on the loss of a loved one (Kastenbaum, 2004) is in the researcher’s view, arguably an important and integral symbolic and

communal validation of the changed reality of young widows. The participants in the study shared their feelings towards the death of their husbands.

“I was very shocked; because they were admitted at the hospital with one of my children. The two of them were in hospital .I was at home when I received a call telling me that they need to talk to an elderly. I was not aware that they will tell me that he passed away. They then told the older people that my husband has passed away” (Thelekile).

In the study of (Kubler-Ross, 1989) cited in (Biermann, 2005) she deals with the five stages of dying. Her five stages consider the following: Shock and disbelief. Thus, (Kauffman,1993) asserts that the shock experienced in the initial stage of grief is actually an acute dissociative reaction caused by the inability of the survivor to accept and assimilate the fact of death. Right after a loss, it can be hard to accept what happened. If someone you love has died, you may keep expecting them to show up, even though you know they are gone forever.

“ They shot him in front of me and my children ,I was frustrated and confused and I told myself that it was the end of the world to me, judging from the way things happened.....I still have that picture of him lying down ,hopeless, in blood and not moving (Crying)..... ”, (Sindisiwe).

“He got into fight with his friends where they were drinking alcohol at a nearby neighbourhood and he started fighting with some of his friends and people tried to stop them. When he come back home, he was very angry and he went to his friend’s home because it is nearby. I tried to warn him not to go back and I told him that they will sort their issues when they are sober because they were all drunk. By that moment he was very angry and shouting that he cannot get away with this. He then left home to his friends, when he arrives at them; his friends were already waiting for him. They then started beating with stones him until he dies there. So that pain cannot get away from my mind”, (Philisiwe).

“I was at home since I had just got the baby a day ago and the stitches or the surgery that was conducted during birth was still new. I had from my brother that my husband had been knocked by the car but he is fine. I was uneasy and I ask my mother to look after the baby so I can visit him in the hospital. I saw him and we spoke and promised to visit on the following day. On my

way home, I received a call from the hospital that he passed away right after my visit I did not believe them. When getting home I ask my mother to call the hospital. The told her that he is gone, but still I couldn't believe because I saw him and he was not badly injured. I told myself that no, maybe it's someone else", (Cindy).

"Ai...I did not believe the time they tell me that there is an accident, I just thought they were just lying and I thought he will wake up because he has fainted". (Thelekile).

Sadness – Profound sadness is probably the most universally experienced symptom of grief. You may have feelings of emptiness, despair, yearning, or deep loneliness. You may also cry a lot or feel emotionally unstable”.

"I cried more that you can imagine, I wanted to follow him, I could not eat for days my sister, there is nothing so pain full than losing your man", (Thelekile).

"It was 2004... it was 2005 when he died. He was in Gauteng and they shot him in Gauteng. I was at home getting ready to give birth; I heard that he was missing. On Friday, I then heard that he was found in a hospital, injured and shot. On Monday he died. I cried a lot and I then came back but it was really painful to such an extent that I had told myself that I will never stay in this house anymore but it just happened that we continued staying as you can see, ey it was hard", (Dudu).

- **Guilt**

The respondents in this study expressed feelings of guilt as a result of the death of their husbands. These feelings expressed concerned the things they did or didn't say or do. Some of the guilty feelings expressed were related to the failure of having done nothing to prevent the death, even if there was nothing more they could have done. In the following extracts Sabani and Lynette expressed their feelings of guilt for not being around or able to help their husbands when they were dying.

“We had a fight the previous day and I was angry at him as a result I went home to ease my mind. The following day after I was gone I saw my brother in-law talking to my mother outside the house. I then heard my mother screaming to death. She could not tell me what happened until my brother in-law told me that he passed away. I cried bitterly and I could not forgive myself for leaving him.” (Sabani).

“I felt so helpless for not being able to help my husband. I know, there was nothing I could do- but I just wish there was something I did to help him.” (Lynette).

Some of the participants expressed anger and resentment towards the killers of their husbands, themselves, God, the doctors, or even their partners for abandoning them without preparing them. The following statements were expressed by the participants:

“I will never forget the day my husband passed away, because I was called to see his body crashed with stones and bricks. I had never seen such a thing before; I can't remove that picture in my eyes. It was a worst day of my life, I will never forgive the people who killed him, I can't even look at them. Whenever I see them I just think of their cruelty and heartlessness”, (Philisiwe).

“Where was God when my husband passed on? I stopped going to church the day my husband was killed”, (Dudu).

“If the doctors wanted to help my husband, they were going to save his life. You see- in this hospital, if you don't have money- no one cares about you. The doctors just want your money.” (Cindy).

“I blame the doctors for the death of my husband. When my husband went to the hospital, he did go to be operated. The doctors operated him by mistake. When they failed to help him, they asked me to switch off the machines that were assisting him to breath. I can't forgive myself for switching off the machines. I can't sleep at night- thinking what if I did not switch off the machines ”, (Lindiwe).

“I only believed his death when the elders came to tell me that he has passed away. I cried for a long time and they said I fainted for a long time. That happened at 6 and they said I woke up at 10. I did not want to wake up. I wanted to die with him. I still blame God for waking me up that day”, (Sabani).

▪ **Living without a husband**

Some of the young widows who had been living with their husbands found it very difficult to live without them. The burdens that were mentioned during the interviews were often those of having to shoulder the financial responsibility of the household single-handedly. Three participants in the study portrayed their plights of losing their late husband’s properties since they passed on.

“...after my husband’s burial, they told me to pack all my belongings since the man I married to is deceased. I ask them about my house and the things my husband bought for me. They made it clear that I don’t own anything that belonged to my late husband. I insisted to stay but the condition was horrible in such a way that my brother in-law who is older than my late husband sold my husband’s gun. They did not end there but they almost sold my husband cattles and share that money with other family members. Me and my children could not even get a cent,eish!, sometimes life is not fare. I wish he was here with me..... (Crying).” (Cindy)

“They told me to leave their household because they don’t understand how their son died. They even told me to leave my children because I did not bring any children when I first came to marry my late husband. They went behind my back to claim my husband’s funeral benefits from where he was working. I now that if my husband was here they wouldn’t do such things to me. He used to protect me from his family since they didn’t like me in the first place” (Bizeki).

Although it is generally argued that the relationships between young widows and their in-laws are by and large supportive as far as performing the ritual is concerned, Zulu widows experience high levels of poverty (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Such abject poverty is accounted for by the fact that the widows are often suspected of having killed their husbands. Thus, as a consequence

“By the grace of the Lord we [she and her child] have survived in that situation .My strength is in the Lord and I have forgiven my in -laws.... . My wish is that God forgive them as well because I did not kill my husband”, (Jabu).

“The involvement of the church in issues that affect women has made it possible for widows to be empowered in spiritual dimensions as well” (Walker et al., 2004:8). In support of (Walker et al., 2004), one of the participants stated the following:

“The only thing that keeps me going is the prayer, I pray a lot sister.” (Lynette)

However, from one of my participant’s perspective, she mentioned that some times as a widow she did feel isolated by the principles that guide the church. She gave an example that widows are not allowed to sit with the fellow church members while wearing “Inzilo’ (Mourning gown). They are told to sit at the back towards the entrance. The will only allow them after they are cleansed with “Ichibi” (spiritual water) which is used in church as a part of the cleansing process.

- **Intimate Relationship**

The desire of a romantic relationship may signify that one had come to terms with the death of her spouse. My research participants stated that seeking intimate relationship after the death of your husband does not always an indication that they have move on or they have forgotten their husbands. But it could be an indication that despite being widows they are still sexual beings. Some of my participant expressed that they were lonely and miss the sexual pleasure – especially because they are still young.

“I was very young when he passed on, I m used to cry most of the time. I use to like a child who insists on having something it cannot have. I never dared to hope for a better life, and always said: “Well that’s how it is and its Gods will “.” That was one part of me, the other was dreaming and waiting for the prince charming that would take me from my depressed home and bring me happiness. I said to myself this is not the end of it all, I am moving on with life. I am happy with my new boyfriend and we have a baby boy now (smiling)”,(Bizeki).

“Psychologically, I think I need help from the social workers... if they can people with troubling thoughts....they need to help me to accept that he is no more. I feel counseling on this one will assist me. I ask myself several questions some of which I cannot answer myself”. (Thelezile)

“I wish I can have guts to speak to my priest. At home, they think I am ok now but they don’t know that I still cry at night. I want to reach a stage where I don’t cry when thinking of my husband”, (Bizeki).

4.7. Social System

Traditional community norms put a high premium on sharing joys or burdens. They believe that no family should go hungry while other families have food (Nkosi, 2005). These beliefs are still prominent in the context of my study and they cause resentment to those in need if they don’t receive support from the community or family members.

“My husband’s family had distanced themselves from me and I don’t have any idea as to why they hated me so badly. My neighbours who still had their husband also distanced themselves from me. Another mother from the neighbourhood told me that she heard them saying that I might take their husband. As from that day I make sure that I don’t greet their husband because they might think I’m in love with them”, (Bizeki).

Lindiwe: “The only support I had was from my family, they showed love during the time I needed them most. “

“Ai...they ran away from me but there are those who are still close to me although the death of my husband has caused many people to move away from me”, (Sindisiwe).

The study conducted by (Manyedi *et al.*, 2003) reported the high levels of stress among the widows due to all the customs that the community expects them to follow and to the lack of support they receive from their in-laws compared to what they receive from their own relatives and from other members of the community.

In contrast, Lynette had a different perspective, she said: *“My husband’s families were very close, very supportive after he passed on. They’ve been wonderful to me. Always saying on the phone, how much they love me ... talking about my husband and I ...what we were to them, and how wonderful the relationship was. How much they love my children and how much they’re always going to be there for me.*

However, The importance of social support for the lonely widow cannot be overlooked, because it has been found that low levels of social support are associated with increased loneliness, complicated grief, poorer coping levels, lower levels of quality of life, increased levels of depression, poorer mental health and decreased psychological well- being (fry 2001,otto 2003, Lee *et al .*, 2001).In supporting the above statement, participant said:

“Ai...they ran away from me but there are those who are still close to me although the death of my husband has caused many people to move away from me”, (Dudu).

4.8. Participants understanding of Human Rights

The South African government has shown commitment to addressing issues of inequalities and gender discrimination. However, the issue of human rights still needs to be addressed in our societies. The reason is that all the study participants have no clue about the human rights and its relevance in their situation.

For example, Sindisiwe said: *“I do not want to lie to you; I do not have enough knowledge when it comes to human rights of the country”.*

Philisiwe: *“No, I never heard or seen any right for widows in the country”.*

Lindiwe: *“I heard that there are people who help women who are abused, but I do not know where to find them and I don ’t know what they do*

Thelezile: *“I know nothing about people fighting for women and I never had heard about such institutions”.*

4.9. Conclusion

In conclusion, mourning rituals of the widows gives that impression of contributing an imperative role in lessening and possibly even healing the pain and sorrow of the bereaved widows especially among those who believe in the healing value of the mourning rituals. Most importantly, the gender biases towards women were also noted and furthermore most of the widows felt stigmatized by the act.

Social support, which was often the key for the successful completion of the rituals, was not always available and quite often lack of social support helped create the negative feelings held by the participants. While some participants did not believe in the rituals although they performed them, their views must also be respected even if they do not see and appreciate the value of the mourning rituals. The issue of human rights approach on young widows shows that it is inefficient since they lack information. Hence, despite the conventions and national laws that protect women against property stripping, women still continue to be robbed of their legitimate rights as the literature has reveals.

Chapter Five

Summary of Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the discussion of the main themes that emerged during data analysis. Insights were generated from the experiences, perceptions, the meaning attached to young widows in South African's rural environment. The aims and objectives of the current study were:

- (a) To ascertain what the various experiences of individual young widows were subsequent to the death of their husbands.
- (b) To explore and interpret the views of young widows with regard to the role which is played by the mourning rituals in their lives and also to explore relational issues between widows and the members of their respective family.
- (c) To examine the influences of culture, religion as well as the role of acculturation on the conduct of young widows mourning rituals at Emangweni Area, rural KWAZULU-NATAL.
- (d) To establish the views of young widows on the extent of protection offered to them as provided for by South African legislative Acts and policies regarding their rights as widows.

The study has outlined the increasing obstacles faced by young widows in rural KWAZULU-NATAL. The study showed that woman inheritance after the death of a husband is a reality not a myth. Most importantly, the study highlighted the high predisposition of in-laws to grab the young widows assets left by their late husband. Furthermore, limited intervention strategies noted in assisting the young widows and their children in such harmful practices predominantly in rural areas. The inclusion of women, the South African Constitution, act 108 of 1996 and other international human rights instruments are aimed at protecting and promote the rights of women in general. However the exercising of these instruments seems to be in vain. This has been shown through participant's lack of knowledge about the aforementioned rights in the study.

The findings in this study were consistent with the African Feminist approach on which this study rests. Each participant's narrative is socially constructed within the broader networks of

their community. Thus, (Mullally, 1998) points out that Feminist approach views problem as being rooted in the oppressive and inequitable socio-economic, cultural and political structures. Therefore, this approach can make people to understand and de-construct the influential structures that impacted their lives. This research is useful in the sense that it holds a different perspective of widowhood. However, this study does not eliminate previously held thoughts about widowhood; rather it adds a different perspective to the topic under study.

The research design of the study was informed by qualitative approach. The study was carried out at Mangweni Community. The population of the study was young widows and the sample size was fifteen (15). The researcher used purposive sampling techniques to select the respondents. The instrument used for gathering data was semi- structured interview guide which was in line with the research questions.

The data was gathered within the period of three months in 2014. The views expressed by respondents during the administration of the interview guide were recorded and transcribed, coded and put into themes. Descriptive narrations were used in presenting the data. Insights generated from the findings of the current study highlighted the significant perceptions, meanings and feelings about the widowhood. The findings indicated that among the AmaZulu people of Emangweni Community, widowhood is complicated by the cultural beliefs and customs which may be a stressful experience for the widows.

The available literature that specifically focuses on young widows issues of mourning and bereavement in South African rural areas seems to be limited. Consequently there were insufficient studies to compare with the findings of the current study. Some parts of the literature were based on the researcher's personal encounter and very little has been documented in the literature. Consequently, creating a new identity as a young widow according to the study participants was a result of experiencing spousal death. Moreover, even if the new identity of "widow" this was embraced by the feelings of loneliness.

Notably, from the findings, all of the respondents expressed in one way that they have no idea about bodies that advocating for women’s rights (widows in particular). Of course, this is understandable since majority of the respondents were illiterates. The young widows of Emangweni community’s personal encounters has shown that when widows are educated in their fundamental human rights, they would be able to know and put them into practice to curb the incidence of their rights being trampled upon patriarchal norms. These findings notwithstanding, has actually emphasized the need for more education on people in the study area in order to have a deeper understanding of the human rights issues involved in the rites associated with the practice so that they can better appreciate them and modify them for the good of humanity. This will give credence to the popular saying that “culture is dynamic”.

5.2. Discussions:

a) The narrative of the mourning rituals of the Young widows

The narratives of young widows as the study participants were captured in the study. Their narratives describes the sequence of events from the moment their loved ones declared dead until the morning ritual is concluded and the widow is released once again to resume her normal sequence of life. Whether the mourning rituals are the expression of deep sorrow for someone who died (Pearsall, 2001) or just a culturally patterned expression of the bereaved person’s thoughts and feelings on the loss of a loved one (Kastenbaum, 2004), it is clearly viewed as an integral symbolic and communal validation of the changed reality of the young rural widows. The study attempted to provide a rough systematic insight into the beliefs and practices of the young widows of Emangweni mourning rituals also provides a background for examining some of the information recorded from the research participants.

b) A widow’s experiences of the mourning rituals

As the narrative of the AmaZulu from Emangweni community mourning rituals made by the young widow in the study, it suggests that this may be the common practice of mourning rituals among the young widows within the Emangweni area. The following narrative is intended to reveal their experiences as they went through the rituals. The turning of the clothes inside out from the moment of death as mentioned by two of the widows interviewed, represents not only the beginning of the creation of identity as discussed above but also marks the start of the ritual.

Sitting behind the door which represents seclusion from the community, seems to be an accepted part of the morning ritual (Ngubane, 2004; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Hence, (Ngubane, 2004) points out that the widow has to be secluded so that she does not mix with other people. This is interpreted as showing respect by avoidance.

c) Participants voicing out their voices.

The study participants unanimously agreed that widows are not forced to go through the rites; instead, they go through the rites willingly. Few respondents too were of the view that some aspects of widowhood rites are not good but lamented that there was little they could do about the situation since they have been “bought with cows”. Besides, majority (65%) of the respondents expressed the fact that widowhood rites were observed in honour of the dead husbands, while the other 30% indicated they go through widowhood rites to avoid being haunted by the deceased’s spirit or evil spirits. Few respondents (5%) could not, however, assign any significance to the practice.

Furthermore, majority of the respondents (63%) indicated that the practice goes against the dignity of women, while a few (25%) were of the view that the practice of widowhood rites is in fulfillment of culture. Furthermore, a greater percentage of the respondents (75%) contended that widows and widowers are given the same treatment in passing through widowhood rites whereas a few (25%) held the view that widows and widowers are not given the same treatment.

From the findings, 33% of the respondents expressed in one way or the other having an idea about bodies that fight for the rights of women while the majority (67%) said they did not know any institution advocating for women’s rights. Of course, this is understandable since majority of the respondents were illiterates. Surprisingly, the study also revealed that about a significant number of widows (53%) is aware that widowhood rites practice violates the fundamental human rights of widows.

d) Mourning

The study highlighted that the psychological understanding of the meaning of mourning and performance of mourning rituals as explained by the majority of cultures and also psychological

approaches in understanding the dynamics of losing a spouse. Moreover, young widows in the study gave an impression of being quite dissatisfied about the manner in which grief over the loss of their loved one is handled; however, they think there is very little done to prevent the practice of the unjust treatment amongst them. Notably, future research on the mourning rituals could focus on the factors motivating the drivers of this newly emerged behaviour and also on how societies could preserve and sustain the values of traditional mourning practices.

e) Bereavement

This study has focused on the ways in which bereavement and widowhood influence psychological wellbeing. It highlighted the distinctive between the effects of bereavement and those of widowhood in understanding the lives of young widows. The study revealed that both bereavement and widowhood can affect psychological and physical health and can have substantial influences on young widow`s interactions with the social world. The study showed that circumstances that precede the bereavement can influence how well people can adapt to being widowed and cope with their bereavement. The study further made it clear that factors such as age and gender influence the ways in which people adapt. It is also clear that there are different ways in which people confront their lives as widowed people and these can influence how people live their lives as widowed people. However, it is important to remember that for young people bereavement and spousal loss are atypical and that the majority of young adults take these events in their stride. They miss their spouses but life goes on.

f) Culture

The study indicated that part of the function of the mourning rituals seemed to be to take the widow to the point of acceptance of her loss. According to (Radzilani, 2010), following the loss of their spouse most widows and the community describe their state of being as ‘not normal’. The performance of the mourning rituals even by those reluctant to do so was a way of returning them to ‘normal’ status. Both the cultural and religious construction of the mourning rituals had major influences on the conduct of the rituals but with the same aim of returning the widow to ‘normality’. The gender power imbalance also encouraged the widows to perform the mourning rituals in order to return to their ‘normal’ status. This study provided a brief summary of customary law rules that discriminated against women in inheritance and succession. The chapter

pointed out some of the central arguments and conclusion of this research. The participants indicated that they are revived by their religion in times of sorrow. Therefore, church plays a significant role in some of the study participants.

5.3. Problems faced by young widows

- **Economic deprivation**

One of the most immediate problems mentioned by young widowhood who are the participants in the study is economic deprivation. The widows face deprivation due to the economic disadvantages rather than widowhood itself. Almost all widows face two big problems, both closely related Money and Finding jobs, because of their inexperience in dealing with financial matters and their lack of occupational skills. This makes their economic condition worse.

- **Emotional deprivation**

According to the information shared by the participants, they indicated that they become physically weak and mentally distressed. Sometimes, some of them become so highly disturbed that they even doubt their husband's death. Emotional reactions may include anger, guilt, depression, anxiety or adjustment due to individual hindrances like nervousness, moods of depression and morbidity, tendency to worry and general emotional instability. 65 % of young widows participated in the study illustrated withdrawal from their friends and relatives and suffer from personal loneliness in life. As a result loneliness was reflected by their social isolation, psychological isolation, or a combination of both.

- **Cultural deprivation**

Among the amaZulu the findings of this study indicate that symbolism seems to be inextricably linked to a dress code of one form or another like dresses of different colours. This happens immediately after the husband dies the first thing that happens is to change the way the widow wears her clothes, turning them inside out. The introduction of the blanket and subsequently the wearing of the "*inzila*" seem to constitute and play a central role in the mourning process. The majority of young widows who took part in the interview felt that wearing mourning clothes was central to the conduct of the process of mourning. Even today, widows are discouraged from taking part in any auspicious ceremonies and ritually sacred activities.

5.4. Legal policy issues impacting on widows

Extracting from the findings of the study, to date the South African Government has failed to fulfill the following major conventions: To ensure equal access to education (Convention on the Rights of Children [CRC] 28; Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Woman [CEDAW] 10, to modify laws and the social behaviour to eliminate customary practices that discriminate against woman [CEDAW 2f & 5a] and to ensure the right to marry who one pleases [CEDAW 16]. This study found that across the literature, there are no specific gender policies targeted at widows to interrogate their challenges. In spite of the economic, emotional and psychological problems associated with widowhood practices in many South African societies. What exists is a number of gender policies at local, national and international levels that addresses gender inequality and discrimination among women generally.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has rendered an explication summary of the mourning rituals practiced in traditional African societies and the functions of the rituals when death has occurred. Unlike in western cultures, death and mourning in African cultures do not end with the funeral. There are rituals and ceremonies observed and performed by the deceased's family members after the deceased has been buried. South Africa's unique history of colonization, industrialization and the practice of segregation its policies seem to have affected the lives of the black people who lived in the rural environment.

The cultural and religious influence and the gender bias of mourning rituals were examined in relation to how they impact on widowhood. The cultural construct in particular seems to have major influences on the character of the mourning rituals. The gender power play as exemplified by the marriage transactions seems to place women at a disadvantage as they are unable to make independent decisions or to negotiate on matters that affect them. This gender power imbalance

seems to be carried through into many aspects of women's lives including the practice of the mourning rituals.

In summation, Young widows still live in fear of being intimidated and they feel oppressed, and these forms of practices are disguised under cultural practices. The crux of this dissertation is not to impose change, but to encourage the development of situations in which young widows can make real choices about their own lives and other issues.

Chapter Six

Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses conclusions drawn from the study and the recommendations made. These conclusions and recommendations are made from the study that was conducted at Emangweni Area. These were made according to the themes of the study. The recommendations concern legal matters, mainly the policies and laws affecting women, Social Work and, finally, recommendations for further research. It is believed that the overall objectives of the study have been met and research questions have been answered based on the findings of the study discussed in chapter five.

6.2. Promotion of human rights

The Following are the major recommendations, which have been drawn from the results of the interviews & interactions with the young widows. No doubt, a joint venture and effort of the various government departments and other agencies could bring about a marked change in their lives. Both national and international institutions contribution on the rights of young widows should enforce provisions on the promotion and protection of widowhood rights in all instruments to which South Africa is a signatory. Therefore, these rights should locate more emphasis on the young empowered and made aware of their existing rights, legislation and policy that is adopted to protect them. As a result, Young widow should be given a chance to voice out their opinions about oppressive and discriminative traditional practices serves as a stumbling block in benefiting from their rights. Moreover, the equality provision in the Constitution must be the point of departure when a right is violated.

Information on inheritance issues needs to be accessible in local languages so that even people with minimal education will be able to comprehend it. This will enable any state make any progress in promoting the human rights of widows, where there is a need for education. As (Schuler, 1993) have described this as 'legal literacy'. Additionally, non-governmental Organisations and Community-based organizations which are advocating for the abolishing of

harmful widowhood rites should collaborate with traditional authorities to modify the practices, especially aspects that violate the rights of women.

6.3. National Level

One of the biggest challenges to the promotion of widow's rights stems from the fact that there seems to be ignorance about or even apathy towards the plight of widows, at the international level. One big step in reversing the prevailing trend of massive violation of widowhood rights is through publicity, so as to raise awareness about the plight of widows in Africa. Moreover, the importance of world conferences in publicizing human rights can bring women's rights (widows in particular) to the fore front. It is therefore hoped that this will sort of publicity and bring the plight of widows to the fore and this may mark a starting point for affirmative action to better the lot of widows, particularly in Africa.

Apart from world conferences, other programmes may be engaged in to address issues peculiar to widows. The Special Reporters on Violence Against Women may be tasked with the responsibility of visiting countries in which widows' rights are violated with impunity. Through these fact-finding visits, the issue of widowhood rights could be brought to the attention of many countries that may have overlooked such practices as one major problem confronting widows. Hence, the international bodies that have been created by the UN to advance the promotion of women's rights may focus on under-privileged widows such as those in Africa by training them to be self-sufficient. This will in no small measure improve the conditions of widows in Africa, most of who are subjected to all forms of abuse on account of their being illiterate, poor and totally reliant on the families of their deceased husbands for survival.

In summing up, the international human rights regime to have a meaningful impact on the protection of widows' rights, widows' issues must be moved 'from the margins to the centre'.

6.4. Regional Level

It is worth noted that the African human rights system has contributed in diverse ways in enhancing the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. It has not only complimented the work of the international human rights system by lightening the latter's load, it has also

concentrated on areas peculiar to Africa and which may be easily overlooked by the broader international community. Consequently, Widowhood rites, for example, exist in different parts of the world; however, most African countries have indigenous communities that have practiced dehumanizing widowhood rites from time immemorial. Therefore, introducing measures within the African human rights system that has mechanisms could be best suitable to deal with the peculiarities of the continent.

The African Charter has proved inadequate in protecting the rights of specific groups of women, such as widows. The Women's Protocol to the African Charter sought to address this issue. Accordingly issues pertaining to widows have been addressed in articles 20 and 21 in a comprehensive manner. However, there is still some room for improvement. The Protocol to the Charter, for example, could have given widows the benefit of the right to welfare and social services within certain circumstances. Many widows will be encouraged to resist certain widowhood rites if their states provided them with some sort of welfare scheme. This is because, for most rural African women, being married is a source of livelihood, as they are totally dependent on their husbands for their upkeep. Additionally, the African Commission may focus on widows when assessing the country reports of states and insist that states puts in place measures to promote and protect the rights of widows. It is thus hoped that the African Commission will organize regional conferences seminars and symposia focusing on widows. To this end, governments should be encouraged to empower rural widows economically. Also states may be encouraged or mandated to provide some sort of welfare scheme that will benefit widows.

In conclusion, the aforementioned activities may beef up the Protocol on Women, which still leaves a lot to be desired.

6.5. Social Work Services

According to the International definition of social work, as adopted by the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers in (2000), social worker's roles, amongst others, are to be Educators, change, social justice, human rights and the empowerment and liberation of people.

6.5.1. Social Work Roles

- **Social work as Educator**

As an educator, the social worker may play a vital role in assisting in educating young widows about human rights. Moreover, (Farley et. al., 2006:123) describes this as having an important component of ‘increasing human capacity’ which is integral to the philosophy behind social work. Moreover, The pursuit of educating young widows can offers a measure of protection against HIV/AIDS, and reducing the levels of risk and vulnerability to the disease by providing information and skills, increasing young widows connectedness and security and increasing literacy. This will facilitate public education and information campaigns to educate the public on gender equality, equity, the rights of widows and how the South African legal systems operates; and encourage widows to assert their rights by reporting unlawful discriminatory activities.

- **Social Worker as a lobbyist**

Social workers may play a leading role in increasing young widow’s involvement in the promotion and protection of their rights. Hence, (Banks, 2012) affirms this role by indication that social workers have a duty to bring to the attention of their employers, policy makers, politicians and the general public situations where resources are inadequate or where distribution of resources, policies and practice are oppressive, unfair, harmful or illegal. Moreover, lobby for the development of case law jurisprudence on the constitutionality of young widows rite.

- **Social Worker as an Advocate**

According to (Banks, 2012) Social workers should be prepared to challenge discriminatory, ineffective and unjust policies, procedures and practice. This could empower youth widows with empowerment skills that will bring change in their lives.

- **Social Worker as a Counselor**

There is a great need for social workers provide counseling in order to deal with the emotions of young widows who experience traumatic deaths of their husbands. Taking into consideration that widows also experience challenges dealing with the trauma that their orphaned children undergo, counseling could best assist the young widows. Hence, counsellors should be trained to provide

therapeutic and educational programmes for young widows with a focus on improving their self-esteem. Such programs could include life-skills, negotiation and assertiveness training skills in order to empower women to become more self efficacious, as proposed by (Inungu & Karl, 2006).

- **Social Worker as a Community Developer**

Young widows in the study indicated their economic hardship and economic disempowerment. Social workers need to assist young widows in terms of implementation of income generation projects with an aim of reducing poverty. This will capture more emphasis self-reliance and participation of young widows. Furthermore, (Ife & Tessoriero, 2006) highlight that, “a community worker will often adopt an advocacy role on behalf of the community in order to represent the interest of the community and putting their case for a better deal, this might involve appearing at hearing, lobby or making representation to local or central government”. Moreover, (Weyers, 2001) states that government bodies are the most important role players in the legitimising process. The social worker may assist the young widows through advocating that councillors at local municipality do not abuse their power but respond to the needs of the community they serve.

As a supporter, according to (Ife, 2007:291), “One of the most important roles for a community worker is to provide support for people involved in community structure and activities”. As a community worker in this case, I will also play a role as a mediator between the volunteers and the municipality. This can be a fundamental role in terms of problem solving, conflict resolution and community building. Therefore, these are contemporary ways in which social workers can be involved reconciliation between the project co-coordinator and the ward councillor since he did not bother to help them due to political agendas. Moreover, there should be workshops that will help unemployed young widows to find ways to deal with all the problems they are facing in terms of employment skills. In summation, applying the principle of self determination of the community members which according to (Lombard, 1992) will allow people to show their ability in decision making that can affect their lives. Therefore, community work assumes that people have potential to improve their circumstances.

6.6. Public works programmes

Drawing attention to public works programmes, (Standish 1992) cites the following reasons why public works programmes have positive direct effects in the short term;

- The provision of employment and income to those whose poverty is endemic.
- The provision of skills and training to the participants of a public works programme.
- Public works programmes produce the infrastructure for economic development, e.g. schools, clinics, the extension and upgrading of roads, the building of low income housing, slum clearance and the development and extension of urban transport system.

In summation, Public works programmes can play a vital role in delivering services and infrastructure to the young widow’s households. Moreover, Job creation in rural communities might have a major impact on poverty reduction.

6.7. Tradition, Religion and culture

African traditional beliefs and practices can play a significant role in defining psychological problems facing young widows in our communities since some of the interviewed young widow has a well-built traditional believe. This will therefore monitor any form of violation of human rights on (young widows in particular) that should be eliminated by traditional leaders. Therefore, young widows should strive to challenge every custom and traditional norm that causes discrimination; this could be done through collective engagement in fighting for discriminative practices. In other words, customary marriages laws in KWAZULU-NATAL need to be examined in order prevent the young widows being discriminated. In summation, customary laws needs to address the problem which suggests that extra- legal interventions for young widows. In précis, most African cultures, the church and contextualized theology should work at providing refuge and emotional support for widows as people created in the image of God whose human dignity is at stake. It should also provide practical interventions countering the cultural beliefs and practices that subjugate widows. The religious leaders should have properly organized counseling available, in which the widow is helped to appraise herself realistically in her new situation. She should be equipped with new skills to help her deal with her new reality. She needs help in acquiring strategies for handling grief. Moreover, religious organizations can play a significant role in liberating women from the unjust experiences they go

through in the community. The church is a critically important agent in achieving a society in which women's equality and dignity is recognised. If the dignity and importance of women in general is not recognised, the plight of widows cannot be addressed. The church has to identify and side with women, not only in order to better the situation of widows.

6.8. Recommendations for further research

Because this was an exploratory study, future research needs to deeper explore the components of young widow's narratives aspects. Nationwide, larger sample needs to be recruited to discuss these aspects. As a result, Research needs to focus on young widow since there is little empirical evidence regarding their narrative accounts. The study was conducted at Emangweni Community, therefore there is a need for further research on a larger scale and in different context as findings from this study cannot be generalized to the entire population young widows. As a result, further research that is based on the survival strategies that can be used to assist young widows in surviving with their loss.

According to (Erikson's, 1963) psychosocial development theory, participants demonstrated a sense of mastery regarding the final life stage, integrity versus despair. This means they did not look back on life and feel regret, despite becoming a widow. Instead, they accepted and coped with the death (Kubler-Ross, 1969), which helped them experience general feelings of satisfaction and the ability to accept their own death.

In addition to the above statement, more comprehensive traditional research on young widow's attitudes and narratives is suggested. Moreover future studies should be conducted with larger and more diverse samples. Additionally, data should be gathered on a wider variety of demographics and cultural belief systems and practices. It is therefore recommended that findings of this study be disseminated in conferences and seminars that target practitioners and policy makers. In summation, the legitimacy of levirate system needs to be evaluated by empirical findings.

This chapter has discussed at length the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study and the recommendations that have been made. Also the recommendations have been made in a similar

way to give space for critical thoughts, better service delivery from the field of social work, traditional leaders, Public works programmes as well as to enable further research to establish new facts in the future.

6.9. Overall conclusion

It is envisaged that articles for publication were extracted from the study. Additionally, attempts were made to make specific aspects of the research findings readily accessible not only to the affected designated group but also to other stakeholders whose involvement in addressing the situation at hand is indispensable if we are to attain an equitable society that respects the human dignity that every human being regardless of his or her gender is entitled to by virtue of being human. It is also hoped that on the basis of the outcome of the research structured workshops on the dehumanising effects of the ritual practices attended to mourning will be organised with the view of sensitising communities of the need to denounce and rid communities of these cultural practices which right from their inception have dehumanised women by denying them subject position enjoyed by men.

Based on the findings of this study, it is imperative to conclude that the young widows as participant in the study looked at bereavement ritual as informed by cultural discourse. This article has focused attention on the ways in which bereavement and widowhood influence psychological wellbeing. It is important to distinguish between the effects of bereavement and those of widowhood in understanding the lives of widowed people. Both bereavement and widowhood can affect psychological and physical health and can have substantial influences on older people's interactions with the social world. Their experiences with regards to widowhood were intermingled with their modesty to the dominant patriarchal norms that prevailed in culture. However, other participants did not have any problems with the norms. Moreover, it is therefore important that to other young widow's bereavement rituals serves as part of therapy. The aims and objectives of the study were met as the study has highlighted the experiences of young widows in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

The study revealed the everyday struggles that these women endure through widowhood practice. The study has shown the plights that widows are going through. Oppression against

young widows was the main crux of the subject matter. (Mullaly, 2002) indicated that: “Oppression is the exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner. Moreover, it is an act or instance of oppressing, the state of being oppressed, and the feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions, and anxiety.” This means that a person is blocked from opportunities to self-development and liberation by internal and external forces of oppression. Failure to disrupt these mechanisms is [...to] lose one’s basic humanity (*ibid*).

In growing to understand our own culture and community and its impact upon our experiences of oppression and privilege, we can begin the process of change. This is a change that begins at the individual and global levels simultaneously. Because people exist within environments, therefore healing is contextual. Most importantly, insights from this study was aimed at addressing both international and national imperatives by informing policies, interventions and programmes that can be utilised in addressing and improving the status of women (young widow in particular).

Most importantly, the issue of widowhood is rarely talked about and still regarded as a taboo since people believe it is connected to “*darkness*” or “*bad luck*”. Let alone the consequences of widowhood which include social ostracisation, economic dependency and marginalization, legal discrimination, political insensitivity and human rights violations. All these consequences are intensified by the fact that they are being faced by young child widows who are extremely vulnerable.

In conclusion, it is my hope that the outlook presented by these sixteen young widows have provided information which will be used to other women who experience spousal loss. I hope that better understanding of the needs of widows will enable them to identify needs more effectively and find the most beneficial ways of addressing these needs. In addition, I hope that this study will shed light on the pain that some young widows experienced after the losing their husbands.

6.10. References

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ANNEXURE A. (this was translated in IsiZulu)

P.O. Box 461
Loskop
3330

Inkosi Mazibuko
Loskop
3330
Dear Sir

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT EMANGWENI AREA

My name is Mrs. Lindiwe Cebekhulu and I am currently a registered Masters student at the University of KWAZULU-NATAL (Howard College Campus). I am doing a research on the experiences of young widows in rural KWAZULU-NATAL: the implication of cultural, the adoption of constitutional rights, discrimination and oppression on widows. I am seeking permission to conduct research on young widows at the aforementioned area. The researchers finding will provide a key recommendations that will assist in the contribution young widow's identity development, liberation as well as their personal growth. This study is also conducted with an intention of contributing to the existing body of knowledge regarding the experiences of young widows in their communities.

.....

Mrs.Lindiwe Cebekhulu

.....

Date

ANNEXURE B

I, the undersigned

INKOSI SX. MAZIBUKO

Granted authority to Mrs.Lindiwe Millicent Cebekhulu to undertake a research study on experiences of young widows at Emangweni Community. I am aware that the research involves interviews on young widows at my vicinity. I am aware of the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to my people. I am aware that the data will be used to produce written reports for publication and that these will not contain any identifying information about my people. I acknowledge that I gave my consent willingly and without being influenced to do so by the researcher or any other person.

SIGNATURE

Mazibuko



STAMP

