

Narratives of Lived Experiences of Widows in Botswana: An Ethnographic Examination of Cultural Rituals of Mourning

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Abstract

This investigation examined experiences of widows in Botswana as they undertook mourning rituals in following their husbands' deaths. The study sought to uncover rituals that enhanced healing and those that hindered healing; and how the investigation results can inform relevant psychological services. Data was collected through two focus group discussions and seven key informants from two villages in the Northern and Central districts of Botswana. The study results revealed that if cultural rituals were undertaken timely by a designated elder and in a meticulous manner, they provided widows with multiple sources of support, enhancing healing. However, when the tradition protocol was disorganized, widows reported insurmountable emotional hurt, perceiving elders as neglectful and uncaring—delaying healing. Another revelation was other bothersome issues not addressed through ritual undertaking; calling for legal and psychosocial supports. Combining both approaches to healing can ensure holistic care to grieving widows.

Keywords: Widows, rituals, grief, healing, counseling.

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INTRODUCTION

The death of a husband in Botswana, dating back to the early 1980s was associated with elderly women who were beyond reproductive age. As such, there were cultural and age-specific ways of responding to this tragedy, and these responses were tailor-made to suit the population and the stated time period. These responses entail the performance of cultural rituals that are a common tradition for the people of Botswana during the time of death.

Currently in Botswana there have been noticeable and drastic changes in the lives of *Batswana* (people of Botswana), some of which can be attributed to the consequences of modernization. One such consequence of modernization that has weighed heavily on the lives of Batswana is the advent of HIV/AIDS, which emerged in the early 1990s. To date in Botswana, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has accounted for innumerable numbers of deaths [1] of many talented and young people. This study focuses on widows who lost their husbands during the reproductive ages and underwent the laid down mourning protocol.

The major purpose of the study sought to unveil how widows in Botswana experienced the performance of cultural rituals of death, loss, grief, and

bereavement, as they mourned their husbands' death.

Due to influences of modern living on the lifestyles of Batswana, as well as advances in technology and science, the traditional response of employing only cultural rituals in providing care to grieving widows, may no longer be fitting and sufficient for present generations and the prevailing state of affairs. There needs to be an up-to-date response to the event of death, one that is at par with contemporary lifestyles in Botswana. One such response may be the utility of counseling interventions.

The professional counseling intervention is a scientific-based and Western approach, and a "relatively new phenomenon" [2] in Botswana. Highly recognized as it may in official circles in the country, it is not necessarily effective, as it falls short of fully addressing some of the major concerns that result from deeply buried traditional beliefs held by significant numbers of indigenous masses in Botswana. These cultural beliefs, even though generally dormant, do become vigorously animated in times of calamity, specifically when there is sickness or death of an adult member in the family.

One major factor that will always push for the value of cultural rituals in the lives of Batswana, is the

commonly and strongly held belief in Botswana and most of Africa that, “nothing harmful ‘happens by chance;’ everything is caused by someone directly through the use of mystical power” [3]. Therefore, cultural rituals come into play to help the survivors find answers to the cause of death and to prevent further occurrences of a similar nature in the family. Cultural rituals are thus undertaken as a protective mechanism.

Employing either the counseling approach or cultural rituals performances without the other may not be adequate to address the complexities of life of a typical indigenous *Motswana* (singular for a Botswana citizen) living in a modern world, since the individual is affected by situations from both the modern and the traditional worlds [4].

Therefore, to provide a psychosocial service that is culturally sensitive and appropriate, and one that meets the needs of the people, and addresses their concerns from their world view, it is essential for professional counselors in Botswana to combine the indigenous practices with Western-based counseling interventions. The Western-based interventions have earned high recognition in official circles in the country, but are outweighed by indigenous systems in that, although they have no place in official quarters, they continue to be highly practiced in the day-to-day lives of the indigenous people of Botswana, specifically during the funeral of the head of the household—in this case the husband.

Witmer [4], a consultant for establishing a Guidance and Counseling Program for the University of Botswana, suggested combining the best of traditional medicine and family life as well as emerging human and social services of modernization to enhance the well-being of service users. Sentiments related to the combination of indigenous practices with Western-based approaches were expressed in major international conferences such as the American Counseling Association (ACA) Convention, 2006; Society for Student Counseling in Southern Africa (SSCSA) Conference, 2006 & 2007. Most significantly, authors such as Pedersen [5] and Usher [6] have questioned the usefulness of these originally Western methods with non-Western (African) clients. These sentiments and suggestions from renowned experts have influenced the focus of this research project. This study sought to find out how widows experienced the utility of cultural rituals as they mourned the deaths of their husbands.

BACKGROUND

Geo-Political Background

Botswana is a landlocked country in the southern hemisphere of Africa, formerly known as the Bechuanaland, was a British Protectorate during the colonial era dating from the 1800s to the early 1960s [7]. Botswana was granted her political sovereignty on the 30th day of September 1966. Since she gained

independence, Botswana has maintained cordial diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom and also developed relations with other countries in the Western world for example the United States, Canada and Australia to mention a few.

British Influence on the Botswana Citizenry

The major consequence of the British governance on the culture of Botswana was the assimilation of a substantial amount of British lifestyle including her educational principles to the detriment of their own. Chilisa [8] asserts that “years after the struggle for independence, the content of what is taught, methods of teaching remain western in a non-Western world” (p. 650). This lifestyle assimilation is visible on an ordinary day in Botswana, and it may not be easy to identify the true picture of a *Motswana* (citizen of Botswana) on a non-eventful day.

Only on an action-packed day like death of the head of the family, the behavior of a *Motswana* is animated as they institute the cultural rituals, which cannot be ignored on such an occasion. The attitude of concealing our indigenous lifestyle emanates from the derogatory descriptions that were accorded the performance of cultural rituals by the colonizers [9, 10]. This attitude is well articulated by Ngugi [11] when he states: “they (elites) see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland, it makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people’s culture rather than their own” (p. 3). The so-called wasteland has a greater influence of the lives of many Botswana. As a result, the Western approach to care in grief is highlighted more in official circles than the cultural approach, but behind closed doors the most prevalent and most potent is the cultural approach.

Influence of Christianity

Christianity is another element which further distanced an African (*Motswana*) from openly undertaking their traditional rituals. Indigenous knowledge systems, beliefs values, customs and practices of Botswana were often described as...”unworthy, uncivilized, barbaric and superstitious” [8]. As a result, most Botswana internalized this attitude and continued to view their own culture through the eyes of the imperialists.

The Influence of Colonial Education and Misconceptions

Education was introduced simultaneously with Christianity as a civilizing factor and further alienated indigenous masses from their culture and people. To be educated meant travelling to schools that were remote and isolated from the student’s people and culture. This arrangement enforced and accelerated the rate of extinction of any knowledge that was acquired by the child earlier at home [11]. According to Fanon [12]

...they (elites) are elevated above their jungle status in proportion to adoption of the mother country's cultural standards (p. 18). These attitudes can be held accountable for the lack of recognition of traditional approaches in the counseling programs to supplement the healing provided by traditional structures. This is what Chilisa [8] refers to as the 'colonial syndrome' which is predominant in Botswana and is still perpetuated from one generation to the other.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative examination with an ethnographic approach was utilized for this study which sought to find out the lived experiences of widows in relation to cultural rituals they undertook as they mourned the deaths of their husbands. Marvasti [13] describes qualitative inquiries as methodological techniques for analyzing nuances, or the quality of human experience. While in ethnography, the researcher examines the groups' observable, learned patterns of behavior and ways of life [14]. This approach is well suited for this study as it explores the quality of nuances and the ways of life of participants.

Population for the Study

The participants in this investigation were widowed women who had lost their husband 6 months to 5 years before the study was conducted, and had undergone the standard cultural rituals observed during mourning. The widows were aged from 35-65 years. The participants were drawn from two villages, one in the North East and the other in the Central Districts of Botswana and amounted to twenty four in number.

Sampling

A non-probability sampling procedure was used to identify study participants. Polit and Hungler [15] state that purposive sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher's knowledge can be used to hand pick the samples to be included in the study. Thus widows were identified and hand-picked from their communities.

Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Duquesne Institutional Review Board (IRB) following the observance of all the necessary processes for working with human subjects; the Ministry of Labor and Home Affairs (Gaborone, Botswana): the two Chiefs in each of the villages. The purpose of the study was explained to the Chiefs, as well as the study participants. Those who agreed to participate signed a consent form as evidence of voluntary participation. All the materials used for the study were to be kept in a locked cabinet and all the information was to be used for research purposes only. The participants were made aware that there were no direct benefits from the study for them, except for those who might want to use the knowledge gained from the study. Since this an emotion-laden

topic, and could arouse latent emotions and memories, counselors were put in place to take care of those participants who might experience some emotional stuff during the interview.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two (2) focus group interviews and seven (7) key informant individual interviews. Focus Group I and II consisted of 5 and 12 participants respectively. Each focus group was two hours long and was video-recorded to capture individual transcriptions. Two interview protocols were developed—one for focus groups and another for individual interviews. These were open-ended questions. Open ended question "yield direct quotations from the people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge [16]. The individual interviews were one hour in length and conducted through telephone interviews for those participants who were not able to attend the focus group interviews.

The focus group approach was selected for this piece of research because the inquiry involved a highly sensitive issue of loss to death which Batswana do not discuss openly or freely. In a group participants drew support from one another. Support groups can be of advantage when interactions among interviewees will likely yield best information and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information [17]. According to Krueger [18] in a website article suggests that telephone interviews can be done when people are scattered all over the country—as was the case with participants for this study.

Data Analysis

The focus of the analysis was to capture units of meaning from the transcripts, and some transcripts were quoted verbatim [19]. The four (4) major steps in describing the units of meaning as postulated by Giorgi are: (i) reading through the entire description to get a sense of the whole; (ii) discrimination of meaning units within a psychological perspective and focus on the phenomenon of inquiry; (iii) transformation of the subject's everyday expression into psychological language with emphasis on the phenomenon being investigated; (iv) the final step is the synthesis of transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological structure of the event.

RESULTS

The results of the study yielded six (6) major themes which directly corresponded with the funeral stage processes in Botswana and the other two themes which are not part of the funeral process per se, but play a pivotal role in the lives of the widows during and after mourning. These are: (i) community gathering and soliciting for a lying-in space for the widow; (ii) lying-in; (iii) being garbed in morbid colors; (iv) the night vigil; (v) the burial; (vi) cleansing and "undressing." The last two themes are: (i) counseling intervention,

whether attended to or not; and (ii) recommendations on cultural tradition to policy makers.

All the twenty-four (24) widows who participated in this investigation reported that they observed all the laid down stages and processes set for mourning the passing away of a husband in Botswana. All the stages were observed meticulously, undertaken by designated elders and in a timely manner. The manner in which the rituals were undertaken by the widows, the person who performed them—the designated elder, and the timing for each ritual performance was described by widows as providing multiple sources of support and comfort; enhancing healing from their losses.

On the contrary, there were those widows who did not receive the care and warmth from their elders and expressed extreme hurt and neglect, describing the attitude of their elders as negligent and most uncaring. These behaviours of elders were continuously reported during between hysterical sobs as having caused the concerned widows to delay in coping and healing from the husband's loss. This implies the utmost importance of observing the laid down traditional protocol in mourning. Most widows who had a well-structured protocol were pleased with their treatment during the mourning period.

All the widows except one did not attend to any counselling intervention to deal with their loss, but appeared to be doing well in life generally despite their loss. Some reported other concerns which did not fall under the realm of the cultural rituals. These concerns specifically call for the utility of the counselling intervention. In addition there were those widows who expressed displeasure with performance of rituals, indicating their preference to mourn in their individual way. Regardless, they submitted to ritual performance for personal and communal reasons, they would have benefited from psychological empowerment if availed for use.

Regarding the recommendations to policy makers on the utility of cultural rituals during mourning, all the widows were on the affirmative that cultural rituals should be observed as they bring numerous sources of support and healing [20] to the widow and family.

Theme I-Community gathering and preparing place for lying-in

Traditionally in Botswana, as soon as the death of the husband is known, the new widow is immediately removed from the public eye by an elder and made to stay indoors and lie down continually until the burial. The lying-in space is prepared by some elderly widow or any designated elder in the community. The gathering community into the death

compound must in no way encounter the presence of the new widow; it is socially unacceptable—it is taboo!

Participants in this study described community gathering as a show of support and care to the family. Identifying space for lying-in by the widow was described as an arena for the elderly, displaying love; care and due respect the newly widowed. All the widows reported that they submitted to lying down until burial as prescribed by elders. It may be important to indicate that the widow has periods of moving about to exercise or to run some important errand.

One widow who was delighted by the elder treatment she enjoyed during the funeral ceremony said; “once people heard of my husband's passing away, they began pouring into the compound, my sister-in-law made a floor bed for me to lay down on and I was later assigned an elderly widow as my care giver during the this period.” Another elderly widow emphasized the importance of lying-in in this way; “it is taboo to be seen moving around when your other half is gone. It is just unheard of; it is tantamount to a bad omen.”

The gathering of the community [20, 21] is thoughtful support to the bereaved family; staying indoors by a new widow is to respect the social order and to pay tribute to the fallen husband. On the other hand the widow needs rest, grief is work and it saps energy [22]. Lying down is appropriate care to the widow to save and rejuvenate her energy. One widow confirmed this experience and related; “I did not even have the strength to move about; it was best for me to lie down and respect my fallen husband.”

Theme II-Lying-in

All the twenty-four (24) widows in this study reported that they lay down continuously immediately the death of their husbands was known, and maintained this position until the burial. Furthermore, widows described lying-in as a show of love and respect to the deceased himself, the family of the deceased and the community at large. In addition, widows reported that lying-in is a sign of being in mourning; a spiritual connection with the deceased; a cultural tradition as well as a community expectation. Passionately one widow described lying down in this way; “lying down is very important. Imagine—he is now sleeping, there is no breathe in him, he is a lump of flesh. I just needed to lie down to respect that he is gone, and for the community to acknowledge and endorse that I am in mourning.” A key informant interviewee reiterated on lying-in in this manner: “It is culture; it has always been done that way. It is *moila* (taboo) when your better half is gone to be seen to be moving around—it is tantamount to a bad omen.”

Widows reported that during the lying-in period a number of preliminary traditional treatments were initialed and this was to be completed during the

cleansing and “undressing” at the end of the set mourning period. All this treatment is intended to destroy the lethal forces that are believed to be responsible for the husband’s death.

Theme III-Night Vigil

The night vigil is preceded by the arrival of the deceased’s body into his homestead to spend the night in his house for the final time before the burial following morning. The widow lies adjacent to the deceased until next morning when he is taken for burial. The activities of the night vigil include but not limited to preaching and offering words of encouragement, singing of funeral dirges, mostly preferred by the family, and eulogies of the deceased. The night vigil is led by a Religious Minister; oftentimes he/she will be from the church organisation normally attended by the bereaved widow.

Widows described the night vigil as an activity which arose in them intense pain, intrusive thoughts, but—with tremendous soothing reflections. The heart wrenching pain was associated with the arrival of the deceased body for the burial, signaling the finality of life. The intrusive thoughts were concerns about the future of these widows without their husbands; one widow specifically stated “this day brought a lot of pain and suffering. I became very sad knowing that this was the last day with my husband - I kept on asking myself what will happen to me and my children beyond this day”. Another widow concurred with the former in this manner; “this is a day of pain, as the body arrived I asked myself what will become of me, who will be there for me when this congregation disperses?”

Despite the intensity of pain reportedly encountered by widows during the night vigil, they narrated positive experiences of the night vigil: one widow stated; “when the Ministers of Religion preached and talked on his (husband) behalf, I could hear some of their comforting words, and these made me feel stronger to face the future. Another widow testified on the calming effects of the night vigil and said, “the night vigil comforted me tremendously, I felt settled in my spirit. The eulogies, sermons and the singing of funeral dirges were to bid my husband farewell. I did not spend time thinking about my future at all; I told myself that my husband is being handed over to his father (Creator). I felt really comforted.”

The night vigil was also perceived as a necessary gathering where the community also joins in hands to support the bereaved family. This is the testimony of one widow regarding this support; “the night vigil is an important undertaking, it may not reduce pain, but it is vital to have—you cannot have people just deposit the body with you and go away—that would kill you. The community did the right thing to spend the whole night with me to support me and my family emotionally.”

More specifically, widows stated that the night vigil confirms the raw presence of death [23]. She said; “during the morning before burial, you would be thinking that maybe he did not really die; maybe someone will come and tell me that he is alive. But the night vigil confirms beyond doubt that he is dead.”

Theme IV-being garbed

On the early hours of the morning of the burial, the widow is dressed up by elders in dark colored (black, navy blue, green or grey depending on religious affiliation) mourning garb; some traditional treatment is offered to the widow give her strength to be able to withstand the burial of her husband.

Widows recounted that being dressed up mourning garb is maintaining a spiritual connection with their deceased husbands. Twenty-two (22) of the widows reported that they were garbed in (different) morbid colors. The other two (2) widows related that they did not dress in dark colors, but wore the same dress they had on the day their husbands died—for the entire mourning period. This dress was washed only at night for it to be ready for use the following day, since no other dress could be used, lest the cultural norm is broken.

Being garbed was also described as a community expectation and a traditional protocol; beyond this the participants reported that dressing up for their deceased husbands portrayed the deep love, respect and honor to their husbands [24, 23]. Widows stated that being dressed up in mourning attire was sign of widowhood and that it also enhances the acceptance of loss. A younger widow who wholly embraced being garbed said; “it is important to be dressed in dark colors; my friends would not play or joke around with me as they would normally do. If I were not dressed in these distinctive colors, my friends who may have not known of the death and would behave towards me as they would each day, whilst I am feeling very low and hurting in spirit. Conversely, when they see me from a distance in this garb, the kind of dress I have on says it all, and they will be more sympathetic towards me than they had been at other times. This black dress communicates the death of your husband instantly.”

Another widow who testified on the appropriateness of the mourning garb added; “I put on a blue dress on the morning of the burial. I found it proper to mourn my husband in this attire as well as it being a sign of widowhood. Still another younger widow in support of being garbed emphasized in this way,” it is culture, it commands respect from the public. For example, if a widowed woman came in here (the meeting room) all dressed in black, our demeanor would change immediately, because we all know that it is not well with her.”

Theme V-The burial

Participants in this research described the burial of their husbands with deep passion stating that it was time to face up to the rawness of death and come to terms with the loss. They narrated that it was a moment that reality struck them and aroused excruciating pain in them. One of the widows sorrowfully shared; “the burial ceremony was the most painful part, it was as if my husband had just died”. Another widow confirmed the unbearable pain at burial-stated; “As I kicked in the portion of earth, I felt weak- I felt as if I would fall into the grave, especially as I saw his coffin lying down... down there. It was one of the most hurtful and disturbing sights for me!”

Despite the huge and agonizing pain widows expressed regarding the burial ceremony, they also cherished that indeed it marked the final end. One widow commented helplessly; “there was nothing else to do... it was the end”. One more widow concurred, “there is nothing else to do, just to say this is it - this is the end”. Yet another widow added; “it is as if one is in a dream, it hurts. However you hurt - however you dream, there is nothing else to do; this is reality. From the above verbatim excerpts, it is evident that widows excruciatingly accepted the burial ceremony as bringing acceptance and emotional disconnection (Worden, 2014) which is an important step towards healing in grief.

Theme-VI-cleansing and “undressing”

Undertaken at the end of the set mourning period, cleansing and “undressing” marks the end of all mourning rites. This is permanent removal of the mourning garb, termed *go-apolwa*- literally translated connotes being undressed. The widow then is dressed up in all-new garb, which would have been purchased by elders in her honor. Some traditional treatment is undertaken at this stage for protecting the widow against the lethal ailments believed to have killed her husband. The deceased’ estate is also distributed on this day and the room in which the deceased belongings were stored is opened and “lit” traditionally to remove *senyama* (blackness associated with death).

Widows described cleansing and “undressing” as another area for the elderly, specifically that the widow is attended by the same elderly caregiver as was during the lying-in period. In very incontestable terms, widows mentioned that cleansing and “undressing” is a crucial part of the mourning rites as it marks the end of the set mourning period. Actually, this undertaking was described by widows as a “life saver.” This is what one widow said, “As I told you before, mine was not a smooth process, but I did all that I had to do in the traditional manner, all that my elders prescribed for me. I was told that if I did not do it, I would die. I followed every step of the cultural ritual process. This is the reason I am here today (alive) and still able to talk to

you. I would have otherwise died sooner after my husband.

Unanimously, widow mentioned that cleansing removes *senyama*, and is it intended to appease the ancestors; it also prevents lethal ailments that are believed to be emitted by the widow, and confirms the state of widowhood. Cleansing is thus intended to not only protect the widow, but also the neighboring community-especially prospective sexual partner(s).

Cleansing also meant that the widows are liberated from the restricted life they lived while in mourning and were now declared free to join mainstream society in all aspects of life [25]. However a number of widows emphasized that even though the mourning period was over and they had been cleansed and “undressed”, being a widow is a mark for a lifetime. This is how one widow related her experience “...it only means that you are now allowed to pursue your personal business and that the scheduled mourning period is over, but you will always be a widow.”

Participants in the investigation also highlighted that the undertaking of the cleansing and “undressing” also revealed a harmonious relationship and support from elders. One widow actually stated that at least there was no witch hunting (which characterizes most funerals in Botswana). She further mentioned that she enjoyed tremendous support from her elders. Even though they left for their respective home after the burial, they came back frequently to find out how she was coping with the loss of her husband. She says: “even though I suffered the pain of loss, their support kept me going, for this reason I endured lesser pain.” Another elderly widow added on the relationship and support-she stated; “what was helpful for me was that my elders supported me from the beginning to the end. Just performing all the rites with me from the time my husband died till the cleansing and” undressing” was great support. Up to today my in-laws are still supportive to me with whatever concerns I have. I feel this is the most tangible part of the cultural tradition...the support.” One widow reminded the participants of the supportive and helpful aspect of the cultural tradition by stating in this manner: “Imagine the old folk running up and down on your behalf from the time they make a bed for you to lie on; it is tremendous help and support. They (elders) continue to take care of you from the time of death through the burial to the cleansing day. I could not be more grateful.”

While cleansing has many functions, most importantly this part of the mourning process depicts the amount of help and support the widow enjoys from her elders and community. Without such support the healing from grief can be delayed as indicated by some participants during this investigation. A good example is a widow who wept hysterically throughout the

interview citing lack of support from her elders as dictated by the traditionally laid out protocol for mourning a husband. Another widow also expressed that some disharmony which ensued between her and her in-laws over her husband's estate, resulted in her not completing the mourning rites with her elders and eloped to her parent's home - she said "they did not care what happened to me afterwards—even if I had died soon afterwards."

Theme VII-counseling attended or not

All the widows in this study, except one indicated that counseling was unknown to them. This exceptional widow said she was attended by some social work for her grief counseling and it was only one session, which she could not define as counseling per se. It was clear that the widows had no idea what counselling entailed; actually they spoke of a councilor (a political representative) whom they turned to when they needed any kind of help or support. One participant commented that if counseling felt like the group discussion felt, then it must be effective.

Another interesting phenomenon that emerged during discussions is that the newly widowed found solace in sharing their dilemmas with older widows. The insight drawn from this communication has implications for a widow-to-widow program which can be helpful in assisting the newly widowed cope with their loss. The opinionated and powerful widows in the village could be trained to lead these groups, since the limited number of counselors in Botswana cannot cover the rest of the country.

Theme VII-Recommendations to policy makers regarding the utility of cultural tradition

Most widows in this study presented uncompromisingly strong statements regarding the observance of traditional culture and keeping it alive across generations. The also suggested that any form of traditional healing must be heeded to, not only in death but throughout the life of an indigenous Motswana.

In delivering their recommendations, participants indicated that cultural traditional must be kept alive, and passed future generations. Strong beliefs regarding the protection of rituals on the widow and community were unwaveringly expressed by study participants, indicating the need for their continued use during mourning. One elderly key informant emphasized that cultural rituals should be undertaken as a *modus operandi* and should never be questioned. She went onto say; "it has always been done that way—it is our culture." Widows went on to further suggest that cultural tradition should be transmitted through the local media national radio and television stations for information access countrywide.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study provided insights about the manner in which widows unquestionably submitted and viewed the performance of cultural rituals of death and the multiple supports which they reported to have enjoyed from the elders and the community at large. In essence the performance of cultural rituals during mourning garners support for the bereaved family as people gather at the death homestead and offer the assistance and help in the preparations for the burial.

Specifically, the support in terms of preparing a place for the widow to lie down in was strongly appreciated and described by widows as a show of love and respect for the hurting widow displayed by elders. Those widows who did not get this support struggled through their grief. Thus, a smooth, meticulous and timely performance of rituals by a designated elder was associated with comfort and healing. Lying in ensured that the widow is taking care of herself, to avoid both physical and psychological exhaustion commonly associated with grief. Many other benefits of lying in were unquestionably presented by participants.

The night vigil as another stage process and within the traditional protocol was greatly valued by widows describing it as fully confirming the presence of death and allowing them to accept and cope with the loss, even though it caused them excruciating pain. Multiple sources of support [20] were drawn for this activity, through words of comfort and encouragement, the preaching, and paying tributes of the deceased; the singing of funeral dirges especially those chosen by the family or were favoured by the deceased. All these activities were described as pacifying and most consoling to the pain-stricken widows. Thus the night vigil was the major marker of the reality of the loss [26] and closure of a life chapter, simultaneously providing solace.

Widows implied that cleansing and "undressing" resembled a new dawn into their lives. The house that had been closed since their husbands died was opened and lit; the mourning garb removed, destroyed, and the widow dressed up in all-new clothes by elders. The deceased estate is also distributed on this day and all the family members have their hair shaved. All these activities are intended to enhance disconnection with the deceased and help the bereaved family move on with life in the absence of the deceased [22]. Specifically widows reminded that even though they had been cleansed and "undressed," this will not change their widowhood state; one widow emphasized that they will be widows for the rest of their lives.

Another empowering feeling described by widows was that having been cleansed and "undressed," they were free to mingle with the rest of the society and resume their livelihood activities they

had been constrained from, even getting into an intimate relationship. Furthermore once the entire mourning rites have been undertaken, the widow is wholly accepted by her community as she considered safe from lethal ailments associated with widowhood [25].

The results of this research also revealed that the state of the counseling service in Botswana-an unknown phenomenon to many indigenous masses. Participants in this investigation are average citizens living at the periphery of the country and are deprived by distance and physically isolated from getting basic amenities and vital information. These revelations imply that counselors need to market the counseling services aggressively by reaching-out deeper into the remote areas of the country to offer education on these essential psychological services.

Throughout the discussions by both focus groups and individual interviews, it was evident that these widows would have never mourned their husbands without attending to ritual performances. They described some of the rituals as “life savers,” emphasizing that if they had not heeded to them, they would have lost their lives.

Widows thus strongly recommended that ritual undertaking must always be observed and respect in the lives of Botswana and during a funeral ceremony and many other day to day events. Participants called for transmission of cultural information to the younger generations through all the possible modes of information--the media, radio and national television stations, Kgotla (Traditional Court) meeting, the Full Council meeting and any appropriate gathering. This can ensure sustenance of our cultural tradition. Furthermore widows emphasized that culture defines a given people and must be applied as a *modus operandi* and never to be questioned. This communication and information related by widows is fundamental for counselors to understand, value, and apply during client intervention for better acceptability and effective implementation.

CONCLUSION

The performance of cultural rituals of death can be described as a life blood for most indigenous people. Rituals may or are the primary way indigenous people deal with issues in their lives. These populations hold strong and deeply buried beliefs regarding traditional treatment and the protection therein. Their beliefs need to be understood from their world view, respected and appreciated by counselors in order to be able to offer clients the help they need. Counseling is an invaluable service that most people need in Botswana given the unprecedented and gruesome occurrences seemingly engulfing the country and stealing away the peace that Botswana enjoyed in the past 3-4 decades post independence. In addition, both the traditional

approaches to grief and the counseling interventions need to be combined in the care of the grieving widow to ensure wholistic care and healing.

Suggestions for Recognition of Cultural Tradition and Future Research

A number of suggestions emerged from the discussions with widows. These are described below.

Since the study results revealed that amidst the support they enjoyed during mourning, they encountered other issues for which they needed more information in terms of legal and social supports, which can be availed through counseling. A combination of both the traditional and professional counselling approaches can be an invaluable benefit for the grieving widow.

A culturally oriented curriculum was suggested for both counselor education program and in basic education. This approach can encourage students to understand and appreciate their cultural identity. Enforcement of the already existing policy [27] on culture in Botswana can ensure recognition and value of culture by the education system and individual citizens.

Research studies on more diverse populations can yield different and more variables regarding traditional culture and counseling as well. This study was conducted with women who had attended school up to the elementary level except one who had a high school diploma. It would be interesting to find out how the elite view the performance of cultural rituals during mourning.

Since mourning a wife is not conducted as vigorously as it is with losing a husband, there may be need to find out how widowers deal with the loss of their wives.

It may be beneficial to uncover the counsellors beliefs, values and biases regarding the utility of cultural ritual and how they are open to recognizing and appreciating these during their service provision.

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