Exploration of cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture, Thulamela Municipality.

By

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Declaration

I, Dzhombere Faresani, hereby declare that the proposal submitted by me titled: **'Exploration of cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture,Thulamela Municipality',** *has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other university, that it is my work in design and execution, and that all reference material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.*

Signature: ……*faresani*..... Date:…20/08/2025……

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Dedication

I dedicate this study to my late mother who passed away in 2023, her funeral made me realise a lot of things I had never paid attention to. I got to see a different aspect of culture and got me thinking hard about it. May her soul rest in eternal peace.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

MHC - Mental health Care

SA - South Africa

UNIVEN - University of Venda

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TRANSLATION OF TSHIVENDA TERMS

BOPHA	**-** A tree that grows in the wild and wraps around other trees.
MULINDELO	-night vigil.
MUTHANZWA	**-** The name of a tree used in the rituals**.**
MUTHU	-person.
SWISWI	-darkness.
TSHIILA	**-** Contamination.
TSHIPUKU	**-** A ghost**.**
U- LUVHEDZA	**-** This is a ritual done by the Vha-Venda when they want to bring someone's spirit home.
U-PHASELA	- to speak with the ancestors, normally done by the aunt.
U-TOVHOWA	**-**viewing of a dead body in a formal manner.
VHULIVHADZA	- an herb that helps one forget.

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ABSTRACT

Vhavenda people, much like other Africans, have different cultural interventions in place to deal with the agony caused by losing their loved one or a member of the community. When there is little information about cultural interventions during bereavement, community members tend to lose their way and suffer the consequences of not upholding cultural activities. The purpose of the study was to explore the cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture in Thulamela Municipality. This study was guided by the theory of social support and cultural grief. The study used the qualitative approach because the researcher aimed to provide an in-depth description. The exploratory-descriptive research design was used to provide an in-depth description. The target population were Vhavenda individuals living in a selected village in Thulamela. Purposeful sampling was used to sample participants. A total number of 14 Tshivenda speaking participants were sampled. The researcher, in conjunction with the interview guide, was responsible for collecting data. In-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were held at Maungani village at a location agreed on by the researcher and the participants. Ethical considerations were implemented throughout the research. The key findings of the study are that these cultural interventions serve a psychosocial function among the Vhavenda community, that includes providing peace, healing and comforting the bereaved.

Keywords: Agony, Bereavement, Cultural interventions, Grief, Psychosocial, Vhavenda.

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1. CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Grief is a universal emotion. Everyone in different parts of the world, regardless of their background, experiences grief due to loss. This is because it affects everyone who has formed close relationships with other people (Wilson, 2023). Vhavenda people, like other Africans, also employ various cultural interventions to cope with the agony caused by losing friends, family, or community members (Kgatle & Segalo, 2021). The specific cultural interventions used to express grief highlight the diverse customs, values, and beliefs that shape the meaning of loss within a community (Franco, 2020). These cultural interventions hold psychosocial significance, as individuals need to understand them to find comfort and maintain functional human connections during times of sorrow (Andriessen et al., 2019).

Historically, theories related to mourning, grief, and bereavement in psychology have largely promoted a Eurocentric viewpoint. Psychiatrists and psychologists often focus on grief as an emotion primarily affecting an individual, treating it as "individual grief." This approach often overlooks and fails to acknowledge grief as a social phenomenon heavily influenced by an individual's community and culture (Kgatle & Segalo, 2021). While significant literature focusing on grief from an African perspective has emerged over the past few decades, it still does not encompass most cultures (Makgahlela et al., 2021), hence the present study focuses on the psychosocial functions of cultural interventions for the bereaved in the Vhavenda community.

1.2. Background of the Study.

In the African culture, death is a natural change that an individual undergoes from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology, Africans believe that the spirit does not get destroyed but moves from the living world to the land of ancestors (Cordeiro-Rodrigues & Agada, 2022). Cultures across Africa perform different rituals during bereavement, according to their specific beliefs and values. However, the above-mentioned concept of death is consistent with African cultural, methodological conceptions and historical epistemological of being-in-world (Makhutso, 2022). In the stream of psychology, death is seen as a crisis. This is because it is a stressor that encourages an individual to find ways to adapt or cope with the impact, the individuals who has passed away is seen as having ended their life journey.

In all African cultures, the death of an individual is followed by several customs and interventions, done to assist those who are grieving. These cultural interventions help people to express and process their feelings (Makgahlela, 2019). Franco (2020) states that these

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interventions play a significant role in the psychosocial aspect of the society because they provide a way for the community to support and assist those mourning the loss of a loved one. This is because death can cause confusion and chaos.

Hundzukani and Khosa-Nkatini (2022) observed that in the African cultures mourning rituals and funerals are focused on keeping the purity of mourners, rather than doing more harm. This in an African community and it holds much significance. Funerals in African communities are public events. A big audience is important, where everyone in the community is welcome to pay their last respects. This is not the case in Western communities because Westerners regard funerals as private events that only require close family members (Hilberdink *at el*., 2023). In African cultures, including the Vhavenda, the deceased is respected, regardless of how the person lived. This is because the departed are believed to guard the family when they become ancestors (Makaria & Mukaria, 2019) The living family is therefore responsible for making sure that all processes are undertaken when their loved one has died. If they do not perform these rituals, the deceased will not rest in peace but will end up being a lost spirit, stuck between the world of the living and the land of the dead (Wotjkowiak *et. al,* 2021)

The Eurocentric understanding views life as a process that has discrete stages that start when an individual is born and end when he/she dies. Death is seen as the last stage of an individual's life (Baloyi, 2014). When he/she dies, an individual ceases to exist. This is evident in the vow "until death do us part" (Hundzukani & Khosa-Nkatini, 2022). In Western cultures, mourning rituals are observed through the process of unveiling the tombstone, writing letters to the dead, memorial service and going to the gravesite (Makgahlela *et al.*, 2019). Westerners also take part in grief therapy (Franco, 2020.) However, it appears fictitious and strange to them when Africans perform their cultural interventions to assist the bereaved (Hilberdink et al., 2023).

Across African cultures, there are shared similarities in cultural interventions during times of grief (Hundzukani & Khosa-Nkatini, 2022). The African continent encompasses numerous ethnic groups and countries, leading to a variety of indigenous faiths, each with unique funeral rites and interventions. However, a common belief among Africans is the importance of showing respect to the dead and ancestors. Consequently, most of their grief interventions share similarities. The initial step typically involves preparing the home to accommodate guests who will arrive to pay homage and offer condolences (Makgahlela et al., 2019)

Following the initial preparations for a funeral, a specific process unfolds. This process starts with changing all the deceased's pictures in the house, turning them to face the wall. Items like mirrors, windows, or other reflective materials are covered to prevent the deceased from seeing themselves (Hundzukani & Khosa-Nkatini, 2022). The family also removes the

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deceased's body from the bedroom and organizes a night vigil that includes everyone in the community. During the vigil, there is typically loud sobbing and crying throughout the period leading to the burial (Kgatle & Segalo, 2021)

In Nigeria, they believe that it is extremely important to dress the corpse. This is because if the corpse looks good, the grief will be lessened. In addition. The corpse should be laid with the feet facing the door (Johnson, 2022).The bereaved are not allowed to take part in any household activities for a week, and the relatives and friends of the bereaved are supposed to assist them with chores during that period, to help the bereaved take some time to recover from the shock (Hundzukani & Khosa-Nkatini, 2022). In Igboland, relatives provide financial support. This is because funerals are costly, and if the bereaved must do it on their own, it will weigh them down (Adesoji, 2021).

South African mourning rituals commence immediately after an individual's death has been confirmed by their family members. At this stage, the family is considered 'polluted' ('swiswi' in Tshivenda), believed to carry a negative shadow (Makaria & Mukaria, 2019). Similarly, in Zulu culture, death is regarded as the highest form of contamination, and the deceased's family members are considered contaminated. Consequently, anyone who touches the corpse is also deemed 'polluted' (Dlamini-Myeni, 2022). During the period leading up to the funeral, additional rituals are performed, such as covering windows with ash (Hundzukani & Khosa-Nkatini, 2022).

When a family announces the death of a member, neighbours, community members, church leaders, and church members visit in large numbers to confirm the news and offer their support. Community members often assist with household chores, including cooking, baking, setting up tents, and grocery shopping, ensuring funeral preparations proceed smoothly. The community also provides psychosocial support, while traditional leaders offer psycho-spiritual guidance (Makgahlela, 2019). In their systematic review, Wotjkowiak et al. (2021) report that community support involves actively listening to the bereaved to help them remain calm, stay connected to society, and foster a sense of safety. In contemporary South Africa, burials are significantly influenced by both African tradition and Christian religion. For example, the deceased are separated from the living through a burial ritual (Hilberdink, Ghainder, Dubanchet, Hinton et al., 2023).

The Vhavenda people believe that when someone dies in the family, the family members have been crushed by a wall '*Vho weliwa*'. For that reason, they need to be removed from this wall. The Vhavenda also have their specific cultural interventions that assist the bereaved during times of loss, For example, they perform the final viewing of the corpse, called '*u tovhowa'*, which takes place during the '*mulindelo*', which is the overnight vigil (Nengovhela, Nethengwe

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& Dafuleya, 2024).This study sought to find more cultural interventions of the Vhavenda people and their psychosocial significance to those bereaved.

1.3. Problem statement

When there is little information about cultural interventions during bereavement, people tend to lose their way and suffer the consequences of not upholding cultural activities. The consequences include confusion, lack of social support, and loss of culture. Lack of social support leads to depression, PTSD and other mental health situations. A worst-case scenario can lead to a permanent case of mental health disorder or even suicide. Therefore, this study also looks at cultural interventions from the perspective of the Vhavenda people, to get rich in-depth descriptions of the interventions and their psychosocial significance.

A large body of studies indicates that cultural interventions provide continuity, balance, and healing (Reeves & Beaulie, 2022). According to Sharbanee and Greenberg (2023), this healing occurs only when the bereaved individual believes in the significance of these cultural interventions, suggesting that grief is a personal affair best addressed through person-centred interventions. The large number of studies currently available that approach grief within the African or South African context do not extensively cover the cultural interventions of the Vhavenda people or their psychosocial significance for the bereaved (Matsebula, 2021). This lack of documented sources on the topic has led many people to neglect their customs and traditions, resulting in contemporary society often diverging from cultural practices.

The grieving process profoundly affects the mental health of affected families. Furthermore, this impact on mental health is directly related to Sustainable Development Goal number 3: Good Health and Wellbeing. This study intended to address Goal 3 by providing information to grieving families and community members. The aim was to mitigate the adverse consequences that arise from a lack of information regarding cultural bereavement interventions.

1.4. Rationale of the study

Studies that were conducted in Africa and South Africa did not focus on the psychosocial significance of the cultural interventions of the Vhavenda people to assist the bereaved. Therefore, the uniqueness of this study is that it might address this shortfall in literature by contributing new information. Makaria and Mukaria (2019) suggested that rituals remove the “uncleanliness” of death and how these rituals brought peace and protection to the living. It was therefore paramount to conduct a study that would provide community members with

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information that would provide rich descriptions of these cultural interventions and provide their psychosocial significance. The Vhavenda people will also gain information on the best practices to provide psychosocial support during bereavement.

1.5. Purpose of the study.

The purpose of the study was to explore the cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture in Thulamela Municipality.

1.6. The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To explore the cultural practices on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture, Thulamela Municipality.
- To discover the psychosocial benefits of these cultural interventions.
- To recommend ways to preserve the cultural interventions in the Vhavenda community.

1.7. Research questions.

- What are the cultural practices on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture, Thulamela Municipality?
- What are the psychosocial benefits of these interventions?
- How can the Vhavenda community preserve these interventions?

1.8. Significance of the study.

The present study aims to provide the Vhavenda people with knowledge of their cultural interventions, potentially fostering a sense of cultural pride that could strengthen community unity. Traditional healers and traditional leaders, who assist the Vhavenda people during bereavement, may utilize this document as a source of information to be passed down to future generations of traditional healers and general community members. This research could contribute significantly to the documentation of the Vhavenda people's cultural interventions, thereby helping to prevent the loss of traditional bereavement rituals. The preservation of culture is crucial for maintaining the heritage and traditions of the Vhavenda culture. Effective assistance for the bereaved can be facilitated if this information is widely available and understood.

Health practitioners could utilize this study when working with Vhavenda people to include culturally sensitive interventions in grief therapy. This may enhance mental health support and allow healthcare practitioners to gain the trust of their clients. The underlying idea is for

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healthcare practitioners to approach client problems with a person-centred approach, free from their own biases, particularly when cultural contexts are involved. Academics and researchers studying psychology, anthropology, and other fields related to grief will have a valuable resource that provides information about grief from a cultural perspective.

1.9. Definitions of Key concept.

- **Cultural interventions**

Refers to a pattern of behaviours that have symbolic meaning attached to them in different cultures. These deep, meaningful behaviours assist in individuals making sense of tradition, connection and meaning to their lives (Makhaba *et al*., 2013).

In the present study, the word ritual is used interchangeable with the words 'cultural interventions. It will also refer to any ritual done by the Vhavenda people during bereavement.

- **Grief**

Grief is a universal emotion. Everyone from different parts of the world, no matter what they have been through, experience grief. This is because it affects everyone who has formed close relationships with other people (Wilson, 2023).

Grief in this study is used to refer to an emotion displayed after an individual who has lost a loved one. It will be used interchangeable with the word bereavement.

- **Vhavenda**

The VhaVenda (Venda or Vhangona) are a Southern African Bantu people situated relatively near the South African Zimbabwean border, who speak the Tshivenda language (Kugara & Sekgothe, 2022).

Vhavenda in the present research means all Tshivenda speaking individuals who live at Maungani village.

- **Culture**

The most common definition of culture is the one coined by an early anthropologist Edward (1877), who believes that culture is a unified totality of the habits of individuals in the society, and this include beliefs, art. morals, customs and all other capabilities.

Culture in this study refers to the Vhavenda ways of doing things.

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1.10. Theoretical framework

Social Support Theory

Social Support Theory, as proposed by Cullen, Wright, and Chamlin (1999), emphasizes the significance of social connections in helping individuals cope with stressors. This theory posits that social support can come in different forms: emotional, instrumental, and informational (Cohen & Wills, 2021). Emotional support, for instance, provides comfort, empathy, and validation, which can be especially crucial during grief (Thoits, 2022). When a person loses a loved one, emotional support helps mitigate feelings of loneliness and promotes a sense of belonging. Instrumental support, on the other hand, involves tangible assistance, such as help with daily tasks or financial support, which can be vital for those experiencing a loss (Cohen & Wills, 2021). The availability and quality of social support have been shown to be linked with better mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression.

Moreover, the role of social support extends to the provision of informational support, which includes advice and guidance on how to navigate difficult situations (Lin, 2022). In the context of grief, this type of support can provide practical information about the grieving process or direct individuals to helpful resources (Cohen & Wills, 2021). Social support is most effective when it comes from a reliable network of individuals, such as family, friends, or community members, who offer consistent emotional and practical assistance (Barrera.,2020). The presence of these networks not only buffers against the emotional toll of loss, but also enhances resilience, helping individuals recover from grief more effectively (Thoits, 2022).

Cultural Grief Theory

Cultural Grief Theory highlights how grief and mourning are deeply influenced by cultural norms, values, and practices (Doka, 2021). According to this theory, grieving processes are not universally the same but are shaped by cultural expectations regarding how grief should be expressed and experienced (Kissane, 2022). In some cultures, grief is expressed publicly, and communal rituals provide the bereaved with an opportunity to mourn collectively (Mwaaura &Kimani, 2021). For instance, in many African and Latino cultures, extended family and community members come together to support the bereaved through shared ceremonies and rituals. These communal expressions of grief help individuals feel supported and connected to their cultural heritage (Nyirenda, 2020). In contrast, other cultures, such as those in parts of East Asia, emphasize more private mourning practices, where individuals may be encouraged to grieve quietly and privately.

Additionally, Cultural Grief Theory underscores the importance of cultural competency when providing support to grieving individuals (Kissane, 2022). Understanding and respecting the cultural context of grief allows for more effective support strategies that align with the needs

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of the bereaved (Smith & Thomas, 2024). In some cultures, mourning is seen as a communal process, and support systems may include ceremonies that bring together extended family and friends. However, in individualistic societies, grief may be expressed in a more personal manner, and support may focus on offering tailored emotional and instrumental assistance to the grieving person (Meyer, 2023). Cultural variations in the grieving process highlight the necessity of adapting support strategies to match the specific mourning traditions and needs of the individuals involved (Neimeyer *et al*., 2023).

Application of the Social Support Theory and Cultural Grief Theory

When combined, the Social Support Theory and Cultural Grief Theory offer a nuanced perspective on how grief is experienced and supported within different social and cultural contexts (Miller & Greer, 2022). While both theories emphasize the importance of social support in coping with loss, they differ in how this support is provided and received. The Social Support Theory primarily focuses on the emotional, instrumental, and informational types of support that individuals need during grief, whereas the Cultural Grief Theory highlights the ways cultural norms and practices influence how these forms of support are delivered (Doka, 2021). For example, in collectivist cultures, communal rituals may be central to the grieving process, with community members providing collective support, whereas in individualistic cultures, grief may be more private, and support may focus on individual needs (Meyer, 2023).

By integrating both theories, we can see that effective support during grief requires not only an understanding of the forms of social support but also an awareness of the cultural context in which the grieving process occurs (Kissane, 2022). Grief is not a one-size-fits-all experience, and understanding the cultural underpinnings of mourning can help tailor support to the bereaved's specific needs (Neimeyer *et al*., 2023). Whether through communal mourning practices or individualized forms of support, both theories highlight the necessity of adapting support to fit the cultural context of the bereaved, ensuring that they receive the most appropriate and effective assistance during their time of loss (Smith & Thomas, 2024).

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2. CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the existing literature on the exploration of cultural practices and their psychosocial functions in the context of bereavement. The purpose of this review is to situate the current study within the broader body of knowledge concerning cultural practices around death and mourning, and their impact on the psychosocial well-being of individuals in this specific cultural group. By examining relevant literature, this chapter aims to link theoretical perspectives with the practical aspects of bereavement as experienced within the Vhavenda culture.

To identify and gather relevant sources, the researcher utilized various academic search engines, including Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, Sabinet, and PubMed. Keywords such as "bereavement," "Vhavenda culture," "cultural practices in mourning," "psychosocial functions of grief," and "death rituals in Vhavenda culture", were employed in the search, to ensure a comprehensive and focused exploration of the topic. This chapter will review key themes and findings from the literature, including the specific customs, rituals, and social support structures associated with bereavement in the Vhavenda community, as well as how these practices fulfil important psychosocial functions during the mourning process.

2.2. Cultural Practices in Bereavement Across African Cultures.

Grief and mourning are universal experiences shaped by cultural, social, and psychological factors. In many societies, individuals rely on specific rituals and cultural practices to navigate the emotional challenges that follow the loss of a loved one. African communities, with their rich and diverse traditions, offer significant insight into the role of mourning rituals in grief processing. In particular, the Vhavenda community places great importance on communal support, healing ceremonies, and ancestral rites to help the bereaved manage their grief and reintegrate into social life. Social support networks, often central to African mourning practices, provide both emotional and practical assistance, helping individuals cope with their loss (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022).

Additionally, the stages of bereavement in the Vhavenda culture are deeply intertwined with traditional practices. These practices may both align with certain aspects of contemporary psychological models of grief, such as Kübler-Ross' five stages, and simultaneously challenge these models by offering alternative frameworks or highlighting their limitations in diverse cultural contexts (Baloyi, 2021). This chapter seeks to examine the role of mourning rituals in African communities, focusing on the Vhavenda culture, to explore how these rituals contribute

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to emotional recovery, community reintegration, and their relationship to broader psychological theories of grief.

in Affrica, death is seen as the continuation of life when an individual leaves the land of the living to become an ancestor and help those that are left behind. This is how the African perspective take the optimistic approach on death (Attoe, 2022). After the death of a loved one, overcoming grief in African culture involve the notion of Ubuntu, whereby everyone in the community must be part of the grieving process. This is to bring counselling and healing to the bereaved family, by taking part in cultural interventions (Mukaria and Mukaria, 2019). When the community members come together to take part in these cultural interventions that are specifically tailored to healing and bringing peace to the bereaved, it forms a sense of togetherness between the community members (Wajtkowiak, Lind & Smid, 2019).

In South Africa, culture plays a very important role when it comes to the way in which people grieve. This is because if they do not perform cultural interventions, it will lead to prolonged grief, and this will cause problems for the bereaved and the deceased (Sebola, 2021). In the Northern Sotho community, bereavement is managed through cultural interventions. Before it becomes prolonged, they have a number of cultural activities that they perform during and after the loss of a loved one (Makgahlela, Mokwena & Sodi, 2019). The Swati community believe that when a person dies, they do not cease to exist. Rather, they become spirits that will take care of those left behind and this idea brings them peace and healing (Shabangu, Tsabedze & Maotana, 2023).

Traditional healers play a significant role in supporting of bereaved individuals. They facilitate cultural interventions and direct on what needs to be done according to culture, beliefs and norms (Arslan & Buldukaglu, 2021). Traditional healers are the ones responsible for the communication between the community members during times of difficulty. Furthermore, the burial processes are conducted simultaneously with communication between the ancestors and the bereaved (Shange & Ross, 2022).

2.3. Psychosocial Benefits of Cultural Interventions

Cultural interventions in indigenous communities often serve as critical mechanisms for mental and social well-being. In the Vhavenda community, traditional cultural practices such as rituals, ceremonies, and communal gatherings play an essential role in promoting emotional and psychological health. Studies indicate that these practices foster a sense of belonging and identity, which can be instrumental in alleviating mental health issues, particularly in marginalized populations (Mokgothu, 2018). For instance, rites of passage or healing

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ceremonies may contribute to individual resilience and social cohesion, providing people with a supportive environment to cope with trauma or loss (Phaswana, 2021).

Additionally, these cultural interventions help maintain social harmony, by reinforcing values of respect, collective responsibility, and shared purpose. According to Makhubele and Mohlala (2020), the communal nature of these practices often strengthens intergenerational relationships and provides a collective space for processing grief, stress, and conflict, which benefits both individuals and the wider community.

2.4. Negative Implications of disregarding these cultural Interventions

The absence of cultural interventions in the Vhavenda community can have detrimental effects, particularly on mental health and community cohesion. The erosion of traditional practices, often due to modernization or external influences, has been linked to an increase in social isolation, mental health problems, and a breakdown in cultural identity (Tshidavhu & Nethengwe, 2022). Without these cultural frameworks, individuals may experience feelings of alienation and loss of purpose, which can contribute to a rise in anxiety, depression, and even substance abuse (Makamu, 2023).

Failure to participate in communal rituals can weaken the social fabric that traditionally helped individuals navigate challenges and transitions. As noted by Ramasodi (2019), when people no longer engage in practices that connect them with their history and ancestors, they may lose essential coping mechanisms and the sense of community support that is often necessary to deal with life's difficulties.

2.5 Recommendations for Preserving Cultural Interventions in the Vhavenda Community

To preserve these vital cultural interventions, several recommendations can be made. First, integrating cultural education into the formal education system could play a significant role in transmitting traditional practices to younger generations. According to Sibanda and Maphosa (2021), a renewed focus on cultural education at schools, particularly in rural areas, can help ensure that traditional knowledge and customs are passed down, thus fostering a strong cultural identity.

Additionally, community-based initiatives that encourage participation in cultural events, such as traditional ceremonies or festivals, could enhance the preservation of these practices. Local leaders and elders should be empowered to play a central role in organizing and safeguarding cultural rituals. Collaborative efforts between governmental and non-governmental organizations can also support the revitalization of these cultural interventions, by providing

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funding and creating platforms for the younger generation to actively engage in cultural preservation efforts (Mudau, 2020).

2.6. Psychosocial Functions of Cultural Bereavement Practices.

Cultural practices play a crucial role in the psychosocial and emotional wellbeing of the bereaved. This is because it provides the bereaved with a symbolic reality that moves the bereaved away from the actual reality but also provides them with a safe space to express the painful emotions of loss (Huibertha *et al*., 2019). Noskowiak, Lind and Smid (2021), in their systematic review, discussed that the social aspect of these cultural interventions is one of the most important purposes in the community and sharing bereavement creates a sense of unity and safety for those that are bereaved.

Death also disrupts the social connections that unify a society by removing its members. To restore balance, various rituals must be carried out, and physical objects created, to reintegrate both the deceased and the grieving individuals into the community. From the viewpoint of collective existence, grief is not just a personal emotional response to loss, but is also experienced communally, as the group collectively mourns the loss of its members (Wagoner & de Luna, 2021).

The compassionate community's framework offers a valuable shift in perspective for older adults living in community settings, by transforming how death and grief are understood. Rather than being seen solely as a medical event or an issue to be dealt with individually, death and grief are framed as processes that unfold within the wider context of family and community relationships. This shift helps to broaden the support system for older adults, emphasizing the role of community networks in both the grieving process and in providing comfort. By incorporating the principles of compassionate communities into various aspects of social services and community initiatives, the approach fosters an environment where older adults are not isolated in their grief but are empowered to seek and access help from those around them. This approach not only enhances the well-being of grieving individuals but also strengthens the social fabric of communities by fostering mutual support. By embracing this framework, communities can ensure that older adults are provided with the emotional and social resources they need, ultimately helping them navigate loss in a more collective and supportive way (Teichman *et al*., 2024; McKee *et al*., 2023).

2.7. Attending the funeral is a uniting factor, an obligation and in African tradition, failure to attend may cause prolonged grief.

The feeling of being a burden to the family prevents people from reaching out to certain individuals for conversation. This sense of isolation was compounded by their inability to

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engage in traditional mourning rituals, which are often central to the grieving process. The lack of opportunities to pay respects, commemorate the deceased, and share personal stories made the loss feel more "surreal." As a result, many mourners found it difficult to achieve a sense of "closure," and their grief experience was further complicated by these unmet emotional needs (Scheinfeld et al., 2021).

The absence of traditional mourning rituals has resulted in many individuals feeling detached from the communal aspects of grief, which are crucial for emotional comfort and support. Without these culturally significant practices, mourners have struggled to find peace, as they lack the usual social interactions and shared experiences that help facilitate healing. This disconnection from familiar grieving practices has emphasized the emotional difficulty of navigating loss, making it harder to process grief and gain emotional clarity (Mthembu & Ndlovu, 2022; Mbatha, 2023).

This experience aligns with Worden's grief model, which emphasizes the importance of religious and cultural rituals in aiding individuals' adjustment to loss. These rituals provide essential comfort and wisdom, encouraging people to accept suffering as an inherent part of life. By promoting mindfulness and compassion, such practices help individuals navigate their grief in a way that fosters healing and resilience (Punaglom & Dumrongpakapakorn, 2025).

2.8. The Role of Ancestors and Spirituality in Bereavement

Death is often seen as a transition to a different form of existence, and facilitating this transition involves a series of rituals performed by the family. These include preparing food, chanting, singing, and praying to ancestral spirits to guide the deceased into the spirit world. These practices are considered vital to ensure the peaceful passage of the deceased and their integration into the ancestral realm (Hidalgo *et al.*, 2021).

The Northern Sotho people, in particular, view these rituals as essential for helping the deceased rest in peace and successfully enter the ancestral spiritual community. The rituals emphasises the belief that the family must actively participate in assisting the spirit of the deceased in its journey to the afterlife. If these rituals are not performed properly, it is believed that the spirit may become trapped in the intermediate world, existing as a wandering spirit, which could cause spiritual unrest (Makgahlela *et al.*, 2019).

In this context, mourning rituals serve not only to honor the deceased but also as an essential component in the emotional adjustment following a loss. When the proper guidance of the deceased's spirit into the ancestral realm is neglected, it can disrupt the grieving process, leaving the living with lingering spiritual and emotional challenges (Dube, 2023). As such,

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these rituals are crucial in ensuring the peaceful transition of the departed and promoting the emotional recovery of those who mourn (Jabulani & Khumalo, 2022).

2.9. Gendered Experiences of Bereavement in African Cultures.

Gender differences in how grief is expressed are evident across various societies, with cultural expectations often dictating that men show greater restraint in displaying their pain than women. In certain communities, this gendered approach to grief reflects broader societal norms regarding emotional expression (Weaver *et al*., 2023).

Additionally, the gender of a deceased child can have specific cultural implications. In patriarchal societies, for example, the death of a male child can be economically significant, as male children are often expected to contribute to the family's financial well-being (Smith & Johnson, 2022). In contrast, in matriarchal societies, the loss of a female child may be particularly profound due to her anticipated role in providing care for aging family members (Chirwa & Moyo, 2023). These cultural perspectives highlight that the loss of a child is not merely a personal experience of grief but also carries considerable social and relational weight (Weaver *et al*., 2023).

Thus, the grief process surrounding the death of a child can be shaped by both societal values and gender roles, highlighting the complex interplay between personal loss and cultural expectations. This broader social context can deeply influence how individuals and communities mourn, as well as the support systems available to them during bereavement.

According to Khosa-Nkatini et al. (2020), women are often socialized to be submissive and reserved in various aspects of their marriage and womanhood. This socialization influences how widows respond when faced with culturally prescribed ceremonies that can be potentially harmful. While different cultural groups share practices for conducting these rites, variations also exist. Mabunda and Ross (2023) highlight that these South African widows face significant restrictions on their freedom, including limitations on their movement, participation in activities, dress codes, seating arrangements, the use of specific utensils, and participation in cleansing rituals**.** In a study of Tsonga widows in South Africa, Khosa-Nkatini et al. (2020) found that these widows often carry out the rites out of fear of the consequences of non-compliance. This fear can result in psychosomatic issues, reflecting the emotional toll of such practices.

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While not all Tsonga widows undergo these rituals, many do, influenced by factors such as taboos, patriarchal structures, pressure from the husband's family, financial dependency, and the belief that failure to adhere to these customs may bring misfortune, including mental illness for the widow and her children. Additionally, widow inheritance practices are sometimes motivated by the family's desire for material gain, such as securing the deceased's property or the payment of bride price (Baloyi, Nene, & Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022). Furthermore, some believe that the socialization of women encourages them to endure difficult situations within marriage without protest, which perpetuates these rituals.

In African cultures, widowhood is often accompanied by feelings of shame and pity, influenced by the woman's social status, age, ethnicity, and other factors (Fasanmi & Ayivor, 2019). Widows may feel embarrassed by their new status and may become the subject of pity from their communities. Many African cultures have prescribed mourning periods, during which widows are expected to mourn their husbands, with the length of this period varying by culture (Bauta, 2022). During this time, widows may be required to alter their appearance, such as by shaving their heads or wearing specific garments. In some cultures, widows are also expected to live in seclusion during the mourning period, both to grieve privately and to prevent any perceived negative spiritual consequences for the community.

2.10. Psychological Model of Grief and Bereavement

One of the most widely recognized models of grief is Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief, initially developed to describe the emotional responses of terminally ill patients confronting their own death. These stages include: 1) Denial, where individuals may refuse to accept the reality of their diagnosis or situation; 2) Anger, often expressed as misplaced frustration toward others or a sense of unfairness; 3) Bargaining, in which individuals may make internal or verbal negotiations, sometimes with a religious focus, in an attempt to reverse or delay their circumstances; 4) Depression, characterized by deep sadness and a sense of hopelessness; and 5) Acceptance, where individuals come to terms with the reality of their situation, reflecting on their life and preparing for death (Kübler-Ross, 1970).

Over time, Kübler-Ross' model has been adapted to describe grief reactions following the death of a loved one. The stages—often thought to reflect the emotional journey many individuals experience in response to loss (Kübler-Ross, 1970), include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, recent research has highlighted that these stages are not necessarily experienced in a fixed or linear order. Grieving individuals may move through these stages in a non-sequential manner, or revisit certain stages multiple times, depending on their personal experiences and emotional needs (Warden et al., 2020).

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Furthermore, recent critiques argue that applying Kübler-Ross' stages to the grieving process may not adequately capture the complexity of bereavement. Studies suggest that grief can be far more individualized and dynamic than the model implies. In particular, the emotional responses of the bereaved may not always fit neatly into the categories of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Researchers have noted that the grief process is influenced by a variety of factors, such as cultural context, personal coping mechanisms, and the nature of the relationship with the deceased (Neimeyer, 2020). These critiques emphasize the importance of viewing grief as a multifaceted experience that cannot always be neatly categorized or followed in a prescribed order.

Social Support theory, which emphasize the importance of emotional, informational, and instrumental support from friends, family, and community, during times of distress, have been widely applied to understand how individuals cope with grief and loss. These theories suggest that the presence of supportive relationships can help individuals process their emotions, regain a sense of control, and ultimately adjust to life after loss (Thoits, 2019). In the context of grief, social support is seen as a critical resource that aids in emotional regulation and provides individuals with a sense of belonging and understanding during a painful and vulnerable time.

The Vhavenda culture, a South African ethnic group, has its own unique understandings and practices surrounding grief and mourning, which often emphasize the importance of community and familial involvement. In the Vhavenda culture, grieving is typically communal, with family members, friends, and neighbours coming together to support the bereaved through mourning rituals, such as offering food, prayers, and participating in ceremonies. These communal practices align closely with social support theories, as they underscore the belief that grief is not solely an individual experience but one that involves a collective effort to help the grieving person heal (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2021).

However, there are some cultural differences that may conflict with the general social support theories. For example, Vhavenda culture places a strong emphasis on the importance of traditional rites and spiritual practices during the mourning period. These rituals, which may include specific clothing, fasting, or performing cleansing ceremonies, can sometimes limit the forms of support that are available or culturally acceptable. The focus on traditional practices may result in less emphasis on modern forms of emotional support, such as talking about grief or seeking professional counselling, which are often highlighted in social support models (Pukuda, 2020). This cultural difference may present a challenge in integrating Western social support models into Vhavenda mourning practices, as they prioritize rituals and spiritual processes that may not align with conventional therapeutic approaches.

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2.11. Rituals, Healing, and Post-Bereavement Reintegration

Mourning rituals play an essential role in the reintegration of the bereaved into social life after a loss, providing a structured path for individuals to process their grief within the context of their community. In many African societies, including the Vhavenda community, mourning rituals are not just acts of remembrance but serve as a vital mechanism for restoring emotional balance and re-establishing one's place within the social structure (Baloyi, 2021). These rituals, which may include funeral rites, communal gatherings, and shared expressions of grief, allow individuals to openly mourn and express their sorrow in a socially acceptable manner. Through collective participation in these rituals, the bereaved are supported by their community, which helps to alleviate feelings of isolation and allows for a gradual reintegration into daily life. The shared experience of mourning and the solidarity shown by others enable the bereaved to feel understood, validated, and connected, facilitating the emotional recovery process (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022).

In many African cultures, including the Vhavenda community, mourning rituals, such as healing ceremonies, purification rites, and ancestral offerings, are vital to emotional healing after a loss. These practices are seen as key to alleviating the sorrow of the bereaved, as they are believed to cleanse the soul of negativity and restore spiritual equilibrium. For instance, purification rituals might include bathing in specific waters, making offerings to the spirits, or engaging in prayers to honour the deceased and appease ancestral spirits (Nyathi, 2021). These traditions are not only significant for honouring the departed but also for supporting the emotional recovery of those left behind. By facilitating the deceased’s smooth transition into the afterlife, these ceremonies provide a spiritual foundation for those mourning, allowing them to heal and reconnect with their roots. The spiritual dimension of these practices fosters a sense of continuity, strengthening the connection between the living and their ancestors, which is essential for navigating grief and restoring emotional stability (Chabangu, 2023).

In analysing the stages of bereavement within the Vhavenda community, it is evident that their grieving process closely aligns with broader psychological theories of grief, such as Kübler-Ross’ stages of grief. However, in the Vhavenda culture, these stages are not always linear but are shaped by specific cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. For instance, the community recognizes the importance of denial and anger during mourning, where individuals may initially resist the reality of the loss and express frustration (Pukuda, 2020). Bargaining and depression are also observed, often through spiritual negotiations or rituals designed to appease the ancestors and mitigate the perceived negative consequences of the death. Acceptance, the final stage, is marked by the reintegration of the bereaved into the social fold, often after completing necessary rituals, purification, and ancestral rites (Mavhandu-Mudzusi, 2022). While these stages bear resemblance to Western psychological models, the Vhavenda

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community's mourning process is deeply interwoven with spiritual, social, and cultural practices, offering a more holistic understanding of grief and healing.

2.12. Social Support Networks and Their Role in Grief in African Communities

Social support networks play a crucial role in helping the bereaved manage emotional and psychological distress, by providing both practical and emotional resources. Research has shown that having a strong social support system can significantly alleviate the feelings of isolation and despair that often accompany grief (Barrera et al., 2020). In African communities, these networks typically extend beyond immediate family to include friends, neighbours, and religious or community groups. These collective support systems allow for the sharing of emotional burdens, offering comfort, and creating spaces for individuals to process their grief in the presence of others who understand and empathize with their loss. In this sense, the emotional resilience of the bereaved is often strengthened by their social ties, which act as a buffer against the psychological toll of mourning (Mwaura & Kimani, 2021).

Community involvement is particularly significant in African grief practices, where the community actively participates in supporting the bereaved family through both emotional and practical means. African cultural practices often involve the community in funeral arrangements, helping with the preparation of food, assisting with burial rites, and providing financial support to cover the costs associated with death. This practical assistance allows the family to focus on emotional healing while ensuring that the necessary rituals and customs are respected. Additionally, emotional support is provided through the communal act of mourning, where group gatherings offer an opportunity to share memories, express sorrow, and receive collective comfort (Nyirenda, 2020). This shared responsibility in the mourning process helps to lessen the burden on the immediate family, reinforcing the importance of social connections in navigating grief.

The role of solidarity, empathy, and collective mourning is also central to the grieving process in many African communities. Solidarity and empathy allow individuals to express their grief openly without fear of judgment, knowing that their community supports them. Collective mourning, through communal rituals, not only strengthens bonds within the family but also unites the wider community, fostering a sense of belonging and shared grief. These practices are essential in helping individuals process their emotions in a socially acceptable and healing manner. By participating in rituals such as group prayers, singing, and collective ceremonies, the bereaved experience the healing power of being understood and supported by their community, which facilitates emotional recovery and psychological well-being (Mwaura & Kimani, 2021). This collective approach to mourning highlights the communal nature of grief

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in African cultures and the importance of social support networks in helping individuals cope with the distress of loss.

2.13 Conclusion

Bereavement rituals in African communities, particularly in the Vhavenda culture, play a crucial role in helping the bereaved navigate the complex emotions associated with grief. These cultural practices provide essential social support, emotional healing, and spiritual connection, which contribute to both individual recovery and community reintegration. By exploring the intersection of these traditions with psychological theories of grief, it becomes clear that the Vhavenda's approach to mourning offers a holistic understanding of bereavement, emphasizing the importance of communal solidarity, ancestral rites, and the healing power of ritual. Further research into these practices can enhance our understanding of culturally specific grief processes and their impact on psychological well-being.

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3.CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The chapter consists of the design, setting, population, sampling methods, ethical considerations, measures to ensure trustworthiness, analysis, derivation, and synthesizing. A thematic analysis was used to provide an in-depth description of the cultural interventions performed by the Vhavenda in Maungani village for those bereaved and their psychosocial function.

3.2 Study Paradigm

A research paradigm is essentially a framework that guides how research is conducted, comprising a set of assumptions and practices that inform the research process (Creswell, 2014). In the present study, the interpretivist paradigm was adopted, with a primary focus on understanding the lived experiences of individuals and how they make sense of these experiences. Interpretivism highlights the importance of comprehending social phenomena from the perspective of those who are directly affected, emphasizing the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and experiences within a given cultural context (Schwandt, 2014).

To apply this paradigm, the researcher utilized the three key pillars: ontology, epistemology, and methodology. From an ontological perspective, the researcher acknowledged that reality is not objective but socially constructed, particularly when examining cultural practices related to grief. Epistemologically, the study emphasized the importance of understanding the ways in which the Vhavenda people interpret their experiences of mourning and grief. Methodologically, a qualitative approach was chosen to provide an in-depth examination of participants' experiences and the cultural interventions associated with bereavement. This approach allowed the researcher to gather detailed insights into how grief is experienced and managed within the Vhavenda community of Maungani.

- **Ontological assumptions of the paradigm.**

Ontology answers the question of 'what is reality?' because it is concerned with the nature of reality (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The reality in this study is that Vhavenda experience grief and deal with it differently compared to other ethnic groups, the researcher has tried to

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uncover the realities and truths in relation to grief and cultural interventions in the community of the selected village.

- **Epistemological assumptions of the paradigm.**

Epistemology answers the question of 'how can we know reality?' because it is concerned with the ways of acquiring knowledge (Botma *et al*., 2010). In the present study the researcher has focused on understanding cultural context, meanings, and interpretations of bereavement interventions in the selected village. Therefore, in-depth interviews were utilised to acquire information from those involved.

- **Methodological assumptions of the paradigm.**

Methodology answers the question of 'How to go about discovering the reality?' because it is concerned with how best knowledge will be acquired (Schwandt, 2014). This study utilised qualitative methods to report on the interpretations of cultural intervention because they cannot be quantified.

3.3. Research Study approach.

This study employed a qualitative approach, specifically utilizing an exploratory-descriptive design, to gain an in-depth understanding of the cultural practices and interventions related to bereavement within the Vhavenda community in the selected village. The focus was on how these practices influenced the psychosocial well-being of individuals experiencing grief. The qualitative methodology was chosen because it allowed participants to share detailed narratives about how they perceived and described cultural practices and interventions surrounding bereavement. This approach was particularly suited to the study's objectives, as it aligned with the application of the Social Support Theory and the Cultural Grief Theory, which sought to explore how cultural interventions during bereavement affected the psychosocial functioning of those involved (Thoits, 2019). By focusing on participants' narratives, the study captured the nuances of their emotional and social responses to grief, providing valuable data for understanding the broader psychosocial implications of bereavement rituals within this cultural context.

The exploratory-descriptive design was particularly effective in capturing how social interactions and cultural support systems during bereavement influenced participants' emotional and psychological well-being. The design allowed the researcher to explore firsthand accounts of how these cultural interventions impacted participants' coping strategies and emotional responses to loss (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). This qualitative approach provided a comprehensive view of the bereavement process, capturing the intricacies of grief

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management within the Vhavenda community and underscoring the importance of social support structures in the psychosocial adaptation of individuals coping with loss.

3.4. Study design.

The following study design was used: exploratory-descriptive design. It was used to provide an in-depth description of the cultural interventions performed by the Vhavenda in Maungani for those bereaved, as well as their psychosocial function. Qualitative research has different designs which are useful for getting rich meaning from the data collected (Fossey, 2002).

An exploratory-descriptive research design was suitable for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of the cultural interventions performed by the Vhavenda in Maungani village during mourning and their psychosocial functions. This design is particularly useful when there is limited prior information on the subject, as noted by Stebbins (2001), which was the case for this study. According to de Vos *et al*. (2018), exploratory research design facilitates a clearer understanding of a topic, by uncovering key aspects that may not be well-documented. Given the limited information available on mourning rituals in the Vhavenda culture, the researcher employed an exploratory approach to investigate these practices. Once the cultural interventions were explored, a descriptive research design was then used to detail and present findings on their psychosocial significance, highlighting the role these rituals play in the emotional and spiritual well-being of the bereaved. This approach was crucial in providing valuable insights into the Vhavenda's unique practices and their broader implications for psychological healing in the context of loss.

3.5 Study setting.

Maungani village is a rural village situated near the University of Venda in Limpopo province, South Africa. The current study was conducted at Maungani, which falls under Thulamela municipality, one of the four local municipalities. There other three local municipalities are Makhado, Musina, and Collins Chabane. Vhembe district consists of the Thulamela municipallity, under which Maungani falls. Thulamela is found on the eastern side of the district. The Municipality has borders along the Makhado Municipality and Mutale Municipality in the southern side. Almost half of the Vhembe’s population is situated in the Thulamela Municipality. More than 85% of people in Thulamela Municipality live in areas that are led by tribal leaders, Maungani also falls under tribal areas. Maungani is located 4km from Thohoyandou town and 2 km away from Tshilidzini Hospital, which is the closest public hospital.

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Maungani is 7.48 km² with the number of people residing there close to 7,271 (972.19 km²) and houses of about 2,264 (302.71 km²). The population comprises of 46% males and 54% females. The population group is 100% African people. Most people that stay at Maungani are the Vhavenda (92%), Tsonga people make 3% of the population, while other ethnic groups make up 5% of the population (StatsSa Community Survey, 2016). Maungani, at the time of the study, was under the Traditional leadership of Vho Masiagwala. The study used Maungani village as a study location because it is near the University of Venda and once information was gathered, it could be repeated elsewhere.



3.6. Study population.

The target population were Vhavenda individuals living at Maungani village. According to Bloemberg (2017), a target population are all the individuals who have common characteristics that are required in the study. The population in this study were all the people living at Maungani village during the time of data collection for the research. The target population were older individuals in the Maungani village who were 50-80 years of age. These individuals needed to be the hosts of the cultural practices or be individuals rooted in culture. The target population was made up of the people who participated in the research.

3.7. Sampling.

Sampling is the process of selecting participants from the overall target population for inclusion in a research study (Vehovar, 2016). For the present study, the researcher employed non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling, as the research followed a qualitative

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approach. In non-probability sampling, not all individuals in the target population have equal chances of being selected to participate, and the researcher intentionally selects participants who are deemed relevant to the study (Palinkas *et al*., 2015).

Purposive sampling was chosen because the researcher aimed to gather specific insights from individuals who were likely to provide valuable information about the cultural practices surrounding bereavement in the Vhavenda community. This method was particularly relevant, given the nature of the study, where finding participants with specific knowledge or experience related to cultural interventions for grief was not expected to be easy. Thus, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to efficiently identify and select participants who were best suited to provide the desired data, helping to manage time and resources effectively (Frey *et al.*, 2018).

The researcher also sought participants who were referred by the Chief of the community. The Chief's knowledge of the community and its members ensured that participants who were well-versed in or actively involved with cultural bereavement practices were selected. A total of 14 Tshivenda-speaking individuals were sampled. Participants ranged in age from 50 and above years at the time of data collection. All participants had experienced at least one personal loss during their lives, which was a requirement for inclusion in the study, as the focus was on individuals who had firsthand experience with bereavement.

Data collection began with 12 participants, and during the analysis, the researcher found that themes were emerging consistently across the interviews. The point of data saturation was reached after 12 interviews, meaning that no new significant information or themes were emerging from the data. However, the researcher chose to continue data collection with two additional participants, bringing the total number to 14, in order to ensure that a sufficiently diverse range of perspectives was captured. This approach not only confirmed the saturation of the data but also allowed for a more robust analysis of the cultural interventions related to bereavement.

3.7.1. Inclusion criteria.

- Only females and males between the ages of 50-80 who had lived in Maungani for more than 10 years.
- Individuals who had experienced the loss of a loved one, which was crucial for understanding firsthand experiences with bereavement and cultural interventions.
- Only Maungani residents who spoke Tshivenda
- Individuals rooted in culture

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3.7.2. Exclusion criteria

- People below the age of 50 and those above the age of 80.
- Older people who could not speak Tshivenda properly.
- Older people with hearing problems.

3.8. Data collection instrument.

The researcher, in conjunction with the interview guide, was responsible for collecting data through in-depth, one-on-one interviews using semi-structured questions. This approach was selected because it allowed participants to express their experiences in detail, while also addressing the core themes of the study. The interviews were conducted in Maungani, primarily at the participants' homes, which were mutually agreed upon by the researcher and the participants. The chosen settings ensured that participants felt comfortable and safe, promoting open and honest communication, which is essential in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

The interview guide was structured into two sections: Section 1 gathered demographic information, while Section 2 focused on questions specifically related to the study's core research topic. The primary question posed in Section 2 was: "What cultural interventions are done during bereavement, and who takes part in these cultural interventions?" This question aimed to elicit detailed responses regarding the cultural practices around bereavement within the Vhavenda community, as well as the roles of different community members in these rituals. Follow-up questions were used to probe deeper into areas that required clarification or further explanation, ensuring that the data captured reflected the participants' full experiences (Al-Busaidi, 2020).

Given that the research was conducted in a Tshivenda-speaking community, it was crucial that the interview guide was translated accurately from English to Tshivenda, to ensure that participants could fully comprehend the questions. Translation is an integral aspect of qualitative research, particularly when working with non-English-speaking populations, as it ensures that the participants' responses are captured accurately and without distortion (Moser & Korstjens, 2020). For this purpose, an expert translator was employed, to ensure that the interview guide was translated in a culturally appropriate manner. This process is essential in maintaining the trustworthiness and validity of the research, as it helps to minimize the risks of misinterpretation or loss of meaning during the translation process (Squires, 2019).

The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes. This was a significant factor in establishing a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants. Qualitative research emphasizes the importance of building rapport to ensure that participants feel

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comfortable sharing sensitive information (Green & Thorogood, 2020). The participants were welcoming and receptive, which facilitated an open dialogue and allowed the researcher to gather rich, detailed insights into the cultural interventions and their psychosocial impact during bereavement.

By using these methods, the study was able to capture nuanced, culturally specific data, which is vital for understanding the role of cultural practices in the grieving process. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how bereavement rituals function within the Vhavenda community and their psychosocial implications.

3.9. Pre-testing.

The researcher conducted pre-testing, to assess the effectiveness of the interview guide, before using it in the main study. The pre-testing aimed to ensure that the interview questions were clear, understandable, and effective in eliciting the necessary responses. Two individuals from Maungani village, who were not part of the study, participated in the pre-test. They provided valuable feedback, revealing that some of the questions were too broad or unclear, making it difficult for participants to provide focused and detailed responses. As a result, some questions were reworded for clarity, while additional follow-up questions were incorporated to probe deeper into the participants' responses. This process allowed the researcher to refine the interview guide and ensure it was more effective for the main study.

The findings from the pre-test highlighted that some questions required further simplification and focus, ensuring participants could respond more directly to the study's key themes. The researcher was also able to identify and adjust areas where the questions might not lead to the intended depth of responses. Pre-testing also revealed that the original estimated time of 30 minutes per interview was not sufficient, as the simplified questions required less probing. Based on the pre-test experience, the researcher extended the interview duration to allow for more in-depth exploration. Overall, the pre-testing was instrumental in refining the interview guide, ensuring that the final version was more precise, effective, and aligned with the research objectives, thus improving the overall data collection process for the main study.

3.10. Data collection process.

Data collection was a critical step in addressing the research questions and ultimately resolving the research problem (Polit & Beck, 2017). In the present study, the researcher employed semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview guide, as the primary method for collecting data. The semi-structured interview was chosen for its flexibility, allowing the researcher to probe deeper into specific topics and engage in dynamic interactions with

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participants. This approach enabled the researcher to gather rich, detailed insights from participants, while also maintaining focus on the research objectives. The semi-structured format was particularly suitable for exploring the cultural practices and psychosocial functions of bereavement interventions within the Vhavenda community, where understanding participants' personal experiences was key.

Once the participants were identified through purposive sampling, the researcher made arrangements to conduct the interviews in the participants' homes in Maungani village, which provided a comfortable and familiar setting for the participants. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the local traditional leader, the Vhakoma, who provided consent for the researcher to engage with community members. In preparation for the interviews, participants were given an information sheet that outlined the study's purpose, objectives, and ethical considerations, along with a consent form to ensure informed participation. The researcher also explained the study's objectives and processes to participants, beforehand, to ensure clarity and transparency. To confirm participants' availability, the researcher contacted them by phone ahead of the scheduled interview date, allowing for any necessary adjustments.

The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, ensuring that they felt at ease and comfortable in a familiar environment. The conversations were audio-recorded, to ensure the accuracy and validity of the data, as this allowed the researcher to capture every detail of the interview without the distraction of taking extensive notes during the session. The audio recording also enabled the researcher to revisit the content later, ensuring that no details were missed and providing a reliable account of the participants' responses (Rutakumwa, 2019). The interviews typically lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, providing ample time for the researcher to explore the participants' perspectives in depth. While conducting the interviews, the researcher also took brief notes to highlight any key moments or insights for later reflection.

As the interviews were conducted in Tshivenda, a language spoken by the participants, translation became an essential part of the data collection process. To ensure the accurate transfer of meaning from Tshivenda to English, a language expert was enlisted to assist with translation of transcripts. This process was critical in preserving the integrity of participants' perspectives, as it allowed for the accurate conveyance of cultural nuances and ensured that participants' voices were faithfully represented in the final analysis (Grawlewics, 2020). The translation process contributed significantly to the trustworthiness of the findings, as it ensured that the essence of the participants' responses was maintained throughout the research process.

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In summary, the data collection process was carefully planned and executed, with attention to the cultural context of the participants and the need for linguistic accuracy. By conducting interviews in a familiar and comfortable setting, utilizing a semi-structured approach, and employing a language expert for translation, the researcher was able to gather valuable insights into the cultural interventions related to bereavement and their psychosocial impacts within the Vhavenda community.

3.11. Plan for data management.

The information collected, in the form of transcripts and audio recordings, was stored securely to ensure confidentiality and protect the participants' privacy. All data was kept in a safe location, inaccessible to unauthorized individuals. The researcher engaged an expert to transcribe all recorded material, and participants were duly informed about this arrangement as part of the informed consent process, ensuring clarity on who would access their information. Digital files containing computerized information were stored in a password-protected format, accessible only to the researcher and the supervisors. Strict measures were taken to prevent unauthorized access to sensitive data. Furthermore, the identities of the participants were kept confidential at all times, with no information being disclosed that could reveal their identities, in line with ethical research standards.

3.12. Plan for data management and analysis.

According to Tustin et al. (2005), data analysis is the systematic process of using collected data to interpret and draw conclusions for a research study, with data management ensuring the fulfilment of objectives relevant to the research. This research study primarily employed thematic analysis to interpret the collected data.

The collected data was analysed and presented narratively. Since the interview guide included open-ended questions, the researcher interpreted the data and explained some of the insights obtained from the interviews. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the information, a widely recognized qualitative method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. This analysis primarily followed the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021).

The process involved the following steps:

Step 1: Familiarizing with Data The researcher familiarized themselves with the transcribed data, which was provided by the expert transcriber. This involved listening to the original audio recordings while re-reading the transcripts multiple times to ensure accuracy and gain a deep understanding of the participants' narratives.

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Step 2: Organizing the Data / Generating Initial Codes As the researcher worked through the data, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful segments of text. These codes focused specifically on aspects within the data that were significant or relevant to the research question.

Step 3: Coding.

Coding is a systematic way of organizing and understanding data (Tracy, 2013). Codes were used to label important elements of the transcribed data. The researcher highlighted points that were significant and relevant to the research objectives, capturing key concepts and recurring patterns within the narratives.

Step 4: Searching for themes.

The coded data was divided and sorted into themes.

Step 5: Reviewing the themes.

The researcher reviewed the themes at a deeper level to determine which themes to use and which ones to exclude.

Step 6: Defining and naming themes.

In this step, the researcher refined and defined the themes. The researcher provided names for the themes and clear, useful meanings for each theme.

Step 7: Producing the report.

This final step involved the researcher compiling a document that included the themes, research questions, and literature.

3.13. Measures to ensure trustworthiness.

Trustworthiness, according to Novell (2017), is a crucial tool used to measure confidence in the qualitative data collected and how that data was analyzed. The criteria for trustworthiness typically include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

3.13.1. Credibility

Scruggs (2020) defines credibility as the measure to which data and interpretations are truthful in the research study, asserting that findings must be believable for the researcher to report accurately on the research topic. The researcher employed multiple strategies to enhance the credibility of the findings:

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- Member Checking: Feedback was sought from participants to ensure their experiences were correctly reported and interpreted in the research study.
- Researcher Reflexivity: The researcher actively reflected on their own biases and acknowledged them, taking steps to ensure these were not unduly reflected in the research findings. This included being mindful of potential subjective interpretations, such as what might be perceived as "significant" during coding, and ensuring these interpretations were grounded in the data and research objectives.
- Establishing Rapport: The researcher maintained a focus on building trust and rapport with participants during the interview process and interactions, which was vital for capturing rich and nuanced data within the interview duration.

3.13.2. Authenticity.

According to Botma *et al*. (2010) authenticity is the degree to which the researcher manages to maintain fairness and faithfulness, by showing different realities. The participants' information on the research topic was reported using direct quotations, to maintain the authenticity of the research study. This was also noted when the researcher recorded the findings of the study in the final research report.

3.13.3. Transferability.

Williams (2018) notes that transferability is the degree to which study findings can be applied to other contexts, settings, or groups. To facilitate this, the researcher has provided a comprehensive description of the participants, research setting, and cultural context. This detailed account allows readers to assess the potential applicability of this research to similar populations, environments, or situations. The researcher also consistently maintained the application of the theoretical framework throughout the research process, which further enhances the relevance of the findings to similar contexts.

Additionally, as an exploratory step to gauge broader applicability, the researcher also engaged with individuals in a nearby village to informally discuss whether the research findings resonated with their experiences.

3.13.4. Confirmability.

Confirmability is focused on ensuring that the data provided is grounded in the research participants' accounts, rather than reflecting the researcher's preconceptions. This assesses

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the degree to which the research findings are objective and not unduly influenced by the researcher's own biases (Scruggs, 2020). The researcher-maintained confirmability by striving for neutrality and minimizing the impact of personal understanding during data collection, analysis, and interpretation. This was achieved through clear and detailed reporting on all data collection methods, data analysis methods (including systematic coding of themes relevant to research objectives), and the interpretation of findings used in the research study. This systematic approach, combined with the researcher's commitment to reflexivity as detailed under credibility, ensured that interpretations were grounded in the raw data.

3.13.5. Dependability.

Creswell (2013) defines dependability as the level of stability and consistency in a research study, allowing for the possibility of future replication or application in different settings. To maintain dependability, the researcher meticulously documented all data generation and analysis processes. This comprehensive documentation ensures transparency and auditability, enabling future researchers to trace the research path and assess the consistency of the methods. The researcher also actively sought feedback from both the supervisor and co-supervisor throughout the research process to validate research interpretations and the overall research process, further contributing to the study's consistency and rigor.

3.14. Ethical considerations.

Ethics are very essential when conducting the research because they protect both the participants and the researcher. Ethical considerations in research are a system of moral values highly concerned with the extent to which the research processes of a study conformed to the legal, social, and professional obligations designed to protect the participants and the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2014). The study considered the following ethical principles, to ensure that the participants were protected and the researcher was responsible:

3.14.1 Permission to conduct research.

The researcher initially presented the proposal at the University of Venda's Psychology Department, Faculty of Health. It was then reviewed at the FRIIC level within the Faculty of Health Sciences. Afterwards, the proposal was submitted to the University Higher Degrees Committee, where it was approved and assigned the ethical number FHS/24/PSYCH/07/2910. Additionally, approval was obtained from the chief's office at Maungani, to conduct the research in Maungani village.

3.14.2. Informed consent and voluntary participation.

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According to Polit and Beck (2014), informed consent refers to the process where the researcher fully informs participants about the risks and benefits of the research. Participants were provided with a document that contained all the necessary information about the study. This information was presented in clear, accessible language, and for Tshivenda-speaking participants, it was provided and explained in Tshivenda. They were given ample time to read, ask questions, and fully understand this information, with explanations provided as needed to ensure comprehension given their age range. Participants were not forced or coerced in any way to participate in the research. All participants signed a consent form to formally acknowledge their voluntary participation in the research study. They were also clearly informed that they had the right to withdraw from the research study at any point during the data collection process without penalty.

3.14.3. Avoid harm.

A researcher should refrain from harming the participants, including any emotional discomfort that might arise during the data collection process (Scruggs, 2020). As death is a very sensitive topic, the researcher ensured that the research questions were constructed in a way that did not put emotional strain on the participants. The researcher briefed the participants before the interview on the types of questions that would be asked, to avoid overwhelming them.

3.14.4. Confidentiality.

Confidentiality refers to the handling of information discreetly. The researcher-maintained confidentiality throughout the data collection process, to respect the participants' privacy (De Vos *et al.*, 2018). The researcher ensured confidentiality by interviewing participants at their homes, ensuring that the information they shared could not be traced back to them.

Anonymity was an ethical consideration that enforced the confidentiality of participants by ensuring that their identities were not known to the public throughout the data collection and data analysis processes (Polit & Beck, 2014). The researcher used pseudonyms instead of participants' real names to ensure that anonymity was maintained throughout the research study.

3.15. Conclusion

This chapter provides information about the research methodology that was used in the research. This ranged from sampling, research design, research approach, data collection methods, ethical considerations and other relevant research methodology aspe

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4. CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF DATA FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

Chapter four presents the data findings gathered from fourteen members at a selected village in Thulamela Municipality, all of whom were well-acquainted with Venda culture when the research was conducted. The researcher conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews to explore participants' knowledge and experiences regarding cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement. The participants' profiles and demographic information are presented in the following order.

Regarding the language of data collection and analysis, which is crucial for transparency and trustworthiness:

- **Language of Data Collection:** All interviews were conducted in Tshivenda, the native language of the participants, to ensure comfort, facilitate nuanced expression, and accurately capture their experiences without linguistic barriers.
- **Language of Transcription and Analysis:** The interviews were first transcribed verbatim from Tshivenda. The initial coding and thematic analysis were conducted on the Tshivenda transcripts to preserve the original meaning, cultural nuances, and idiomatic expressions, thereby minimizing loss of meaning that could occur with immediate translation.
- **Translation for Reporting:** Key quotes and findings were subsequently translated from Tshivenda into English for presentation in this report. This translation process aimed to accurately convey the participants' voices while maintaining the academic standard of the dissertation.

This approach aligns with qualitative research best practices in cross-cultural settings, which advocate for analysis in the original language to maintain data integrity before translation for wider dissemination. The collected data is categorized into themes and sub-themes that emerged during analysis based on the objectives of the study.

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4.2 Participants in the study

The participants of this study were members from a selected village in Thulamela Municipality, aged between 50 and above, who were hosts of cultural practices or rooted in Venda culture during the time of interviews.

- Participant one

Participant one was an 81-year-old woman who had been staying in the village since 1992. She had lost man family members during her time; she focused on the burial of her mother because she believed that most Tshivenda traditions were observed during one's mother's funeral. Throughout the interview, she showcased a very good understanding of culture and the purpose of every little thing that had to be done. She was living with her grandchildren and children and had been trying to teach them the Tshivenda ways of conducting a funeral, but they could not give her a specific time. She believed that if this generation would just listen to the elders, they would not have so many problems when it comes to grieving their loved ones.

- Participant two

Participant two was a 70-year-old man who had been living in the selected village for more than ten years before the time of the interview. He had lost his two sons in one weekend and this was the burial he kept referencing during the interview because he believed those had "hit him hard". However, the cultural ways had helped him to cope effectively with this loss because he believed that not so many people would have gone through that and remain sane. He was part of the chief's council of elders, and this provided an indication that he was well-versed with the Venda cultural ways of conducting a burial. As an elder of the council, he mentioned that one of his duties was to make sure that people maintained their cultural ways of doing things.

- Participant three

Participant three was a 78-year-old male who had been staying at the selected village for almost 30 years. He had attended all the male Tshivenda initiation schools and had been part of people in his family to do 'u-Mala' for many years. His family always approached to him to ask for guidance when it came to traditional ways of conducting ceremonies, like weddings, funerals and initiations. He had lost his wife when he was young but he maintained that he still remembered her funeral very well and how they observed the Tshivenda ways of doing funerals.

- Participant four

Participant four was a 50-year-old female who had been staying in the selected village for 25 years. The participant was a traditional healer during the time of the interview and explained

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that she had helped many people go through grief using traditional ways. The participant constantly referenced the loss of her mother during the interview because she was also a traditional healer and had to be buried according to the Venda culture. The participant believed she had followed all the cultural interventions of dealing with grief. For that reason, she believed that culture was not going to lead anyone astray.

- Participant five

Participant five was a 67-year-old male who had been living in the selected village for more than 10 years; he was not sure about the exact years. The participant believed that he was very much rooted in the Venda culture because he did not go to church or even pray. The participant was also part of the chief's council of elders and maintained very strict rules when it came to enforcing culture. The participant had been part of so many funeral proceedings and planning. He was also one of the individuals chosen to speak on behalf of the chief during funerals.

- Participant six

Participant six was a 63-year-old male who had been staying in the selected village since he was born. The participant went to work in Joburg but returned to Venda when he lost his father because he had to take care of the family. The participant referenced his father's burial throughout the interview because his father's death changed many things for him. He believed that the community's support was very helpful during his bereavement, and he also tried his best to support other people when they had lost a loved one. The participant indicated that he had attended many funerals in the village and believed that he had a clear understanding of how funerals should be culturally conducted and how much things have changed overtime.

- Participant 7

The seventh participant was a female who did not know how old she was during the time of the interview but said that she believed that she was over 50 years because she was receiving the old-age grant. The participant had been living in the village for so long that she did not even remember the exact number of years. The participant had been part of the rituals done during funerals because she was an aunt in her family and guided the young ones on how to properly conduct a funeral.

- Participant eight

Participant eight was a 60-year-old female who had been staying in the village since 1993. She had lost several people throughout her life, including her parents, spouse and children. The participant believed that most rituals done during bereavement required the guidance of a traditional healer and kept referencing their importance throughout the interview. The

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participant put much value on traditional healers and did not understand why people were not willing to seek help from traditional healers. The participant lived with her grandchildren and tried to teach them about the Venda culture.

- Participant nine

Participant nine was a female born in 1951 and had been staying in the village for more than 10 years. The participant was very eager to share the information about Tshivenda cultural interventions during bereavement because she believed that Venda people are slowly losing their ways. She lived with her mother and acknowledged how most of what she knew was from her mother. The participant's mother was 103 years old. The participant had buried her father, siblings and children and believed that she was very much rooted in culture.

- Participant ten

Participant ten was a 68-year-old female who had been staying in the village since 1994. The participant was a traditional healer. She guided members of the community on what needed to be done during bereavement and helped those that were grieving to cope with the loss. She was very knowledgeable about the different herbs needed to help the bereaved cope and forget about the loss. Participant ten had some initiates that she was teaching these cultural interventions; this was to uphold the cultural interventions.

- Participant eleven

The eleventh participant did not know her exact age but knew that she was over 50 years. The participant had been staying in the village for more than 10 years because she had arrived before she had her first-born child. The participant noted that she can talk about the way her parents were buried because when she lost her husband, she did not see much. Participant eleven was part of the chief's council of elders. This indicated that he was well-accustomed with the Venda cultural ways of conducting a burial and was obligated to share this information with the future generation.

- Participant twelve

Participant 12 was a 67-year-old male who had been living in the village for more than 20 years. The participant did not have much of an education but had managed to learn farming and traditional practices from older members of the community. He also wanted to share his knowledge and experience of cultural practices and the significance of bereavement rituals, to aid the younger generation who were slowly moving away from cultural interventions. He wanted to share the information about Vhavenda cultural interventions during bereavement, to make sure that this information was preserved for future generations.

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- Participant thirteen

Participant thirteen was an 88-year-old male who had been living in the village for more than 20 years. The participant was no longer physically fit due to old age but found peace in being an active member of the selected village and was taking part in spiritual practices. The participant sometimes used to get very emotional from the thought of all the people he had lost but found comfort in the idea that he had performed all the cultural traditions required. He believed that cultural practices are significant in the healing process, once someone is bereaved.

- Participant fourteen

Participant 14 is a 74-year-old male who had been living in the village for more than 40 years. He was still affected by the death of his family and friends but found strength in the cultural interventions, which helped him cope with the grief. The participant played an important role in providing guidance to the younger generations, making sure that they followed the appropriate cultural interventions. He was the head of the family and young family members approached him for clarity regarding cultural interventions and family matters.

4.3 Description of the Participants

Demographic information of the participants is presented on the table below. The table provides a detailed description of the participants. The description includes aspects like age, marital status, number of years living in the village, gender and religious affiliation. This data was compiled to offer a comprehensive understanding of the social context of the participants involved in the study.

4.3 Presentation of themes and sub-themes

NO	AGE	GENDER	NO. OF STAYING IN THE VILLAGE	MARITAL STATUS	RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION
Participant 1	81	Female	32	Widowed	Christianity
Participant 2	70	Male	+10	Married	Christianity
Participant 3	78	Male	30	Widowed	African religion
Participant 4	50	Female	25	Married	African religion
Participant 5	67	Male	+10	Widowed	African religion

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Participant 6	63	Female	63	Married	African religion
Participant 7	+50	Female	-	Widowed	African religion
Participant 8	60	Female	31	Widowed	African religion/Christianity
Participant 9	73	Female	+10	Widowed	African religion
Participant 10	68	Female	30	Widowed	African religion
Participant 11	+50	Female	+10	Widowed	African religion
Participant 12	67	Male	20	Widowed	African religion
Participant 13	88	Male	20	Widowed	African religion
Participant 14	74	Male	40	Widowed	African religion

Table 1: Demographic information of participants

4.4 PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES AND SUB-THEMES.

The section below presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants after sharing their knowledge and experiences on cultural interventions during bereavement. Thematic analysis was conducted, and its processes were followed according to the standpoint. The themes and subthemes are presented in this manner to extract important elements of the findings and to also clarify the findings. The main themes are categorized into cultural interventions during bereavement, gender and age significance in performing cultural interventions and psychosocial functions during bereavement.

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
Cultural interventions during bereavement	• **Protection rituals** • **Emotional healing interventions**

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	• **Spiritual transitioning rituals** • **Cleansing rituals**
Gender and age significance in performing cultural interventions during bereavement.	• **Gender specific bereavement interventions** • **Age specific bereavement interventions** • **Burial differences**
Psychosocial functions of bereavement	• **Emotional healing and coping.** • **Shared bereavement /collective mourning** • **Ancestral connection**
Preservation of cultural interventions	• **Oral transmission of traditional practices** • **Documentation of cultural practices** • **Education and cultural programmes**

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

4.4.1. THEME 1: Cultural interventions during bereavement.

The Venda culture has various cultural interventions that are conducted during bereavement.

Participants were asked about these interventions. The findings are categorised into 4 categories, according to their functions. The participants mentioned different types of cultural interventions and their roles. The roles of these interventions made up the following sub-themes.

- **Sub-theme 1 - Protection rituals**

All the participants mentioned at least one cultural intervention that was done to protect the surviving family members from evil spirits, misfortune and illnesses. These rituals assure the living of their safety during the time of loss.

"These days because children refuse to do these things. The grandmothers would take a piece of clothing and pass it around twice, under the coffin. This was done to remove the 'shadow' of the deceased from the children, so that they did not lose weight after the burial" (participant 1, female, 81 years).

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"They do that so that you can continue to have kids, because if you don't, you might not give birth again" (participant 3, male, 78 years).

"……. they must cut me with razors on all my joints, so that when the body is starting to rot and the bones are starting to move away from each other, I don't get joint pains. When two people are married, they become one, so when one has passed away, they need to be separated" (participant 10, female, 68 years).

"If the goat makes a sound during u-luvhedza, the spirit of the deceased person is believed to be complaining and the remaining family members might see their spirits hovering above their heads, the spirit can go to what we call tshipuku (ghost)" (participant 8, female, 60 years).

- **Sub-theme 2: Emotional healing interventions**

Most of the participants reported on cultural interventions done to assist the bereaved with emotional healing. These interventions are done to reduce worry and stress to those who have lost a loved one, so that they can continue their lives with the needed closure. This is confirmed by the following statements from some of the participants.

"U-tovhowa is when they allow the bereaved to view the corpse, to confirm that indeed this person has passed away. The bereaved will not be in any doubt that this person has left the land of the living…" (participant 14, male, 74 years).

"Vhulivhadza is an herb that is given to deceased children to help them forget about the loss and to say our hearts are at peace" (participant 2, male, 70 years).

"…. the bones of the goat are then placed on a riverbank where the water is cold, to cool down the hearts of the bereaved" (participant 12, male, 67 years).

- **Sub-theme 3 – Spiritual transitioning rituals.**

Spiritual transition rituals are very important to the Vhavenda community members because they aid the spirit of the dead to move from the world of the living to the spiritual realm. The spirit then becomes an ancestor and watches over the remaining family members. The rituals are performed to ask the ancestors to welcome the deceased spirit. The participants pointed out the following to support this claim.

"This is when the family gathers and speaks with the ancestors, they would make traditional beer and gather around the designated area for the process. They invited the ancestors to guide the spirit of the deceased to the spiritual land" (participant 13, male, 88 years)

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"A traditional healer has to be present, in order to communicate with the ancestors on the loss in the family, the traditional healer needs to be present throughout the burial process" (participant 11, female, older than 50 years).

- **Sub-theme 4- Cleansing rituals.**

There are some rituals performed when there is a funeral in the family, to purify those the surviving members and the surroundings because -after the death of a family member- it is believed that there is *"tshila"* (spiritual contamination) and negative energies in the household of the deceased or in the community at large. These rituals are performed to bring back order and peace in the household, by cleansing the family and surroundings, some participants pointed out the following to support this claim:

"*…muthanzwa is a plant that must be added in the water that everyone will use to wash their hands to remove makuma, makuma is the contamination that one gets from burying someone or coming from a funeral" (participant 5, 67 years, male).*

"The clothes and all belongings of the deceased have to be cleansed by a traditional healer, so that the surviving family members can use them. However, they have to wait for a year to elapse before they can use them" (participant 6, 63 years, male).

"The following day, here in the family, they should prepare bopha, you don't even know it …(pause) and other plants that the whole family will have to be cleansed with, near the family gate. They then cut up the bopha and use it ..." (participant 4, female, 50 years)

4.4.2. THEME 2- Gender and age significance in performing cultural interventions during bereavement.

Gender and age have been shown to be some of the factors to be considered during burials, as well as the cultural interventions to be carried out. The old do not go through the same cultural interventions as the young ones when they are bereaved; the same goes for males and females. This is also the case when it comes to how these people are buried: there are differences in burial rituals, based on gender and age.

- **Sub-theme 1- Gender specific bereavement interventions**

Women and males undergo different cultural interventions when they are bereaved, and this is mostly when they have lost a spouse. When a woman has lost her husband, she is treated delicately and the role she plays is very different from when a husband has lost a wife. The following sentiments shared by the participants support these claims.

"…the wife stays inside the house and doesn't come out until the day of the burial; she stays inside the house with other women who have also lost their husbands. The day she comes

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out she must be covered by a blanket so that she is not seen by anyone. She must wear a black cloth to show that she is in morning her husband" (participant 2, male, 70 years)

"Let's say I died. My wife would remain in that house for three days, not going out, always covered in a blanket and everything handed to her while she sits down there until all those three days have passed. After those days have passed, she will then come out and clean the surrounding with cow dung everywhere, even in the house and keep it clean while wearing blankets" (participant 3, male, 78 years).

"When the funeral has ended, there will be older women, who will stay behind and spend some time. After a year, they will say they are 'removing the blankets'… (pause). Let's say I am a woman who has lost her husband. The following year to the day, when my husband died, they have to remove the blankets. They remove the clothes I was wearing for the past year, and this is done for females only because I have never seen a man go through this" (participant 8, female, 60 years).

"If there is a pregnant woman in the family of the deceased, she has to leave the house and go stay somewhere. This was done to protect the mother and child from everything that was going on" (participant 11, female, 50+ years),

- **Sub-theme 2- Age specific interventions during bereavement**

Children and older people go through different cultural interventions. For example, the children are not made aware of the situation and the cultural interventions that are carried out are to make sure that children have little to no idea of what is going on in the family. This was done because culturally it is believed that children cannot handle the situation. All the participants described different ways how this was done, and the following statement is from a participant, to support these claims.

"If the deceased has left a young child behind, at night someone will whisper in the child's ear that someone passed away and the child will never see them again. This is done for three days also. It was believed that in that way the child would no longer ask about the deceased, and the child will just wake up and play with others. Also, the child would no longer cry or think of the person who has passed way because they have been told and given those herbs to forget" (participant 1, female, 81 years)

"In the morning, the root that was found would be placed in a clay pot and boiled, then taken out. The water remaining in the pot would be used to make porridge that would be given to the deceased's children. They would eat that porridge, which would also have herbs called vhulivhadza added to it." (participant 9, female, 88 years).

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Children and pregnant women were not allowed to attend a funeral. Theseays things are different, young children are shown people in caskets (showing how a child tilts the casket to view the corpse). The child would just view the corpse because they are yet to understand that this person has died. The death of a family member was a sacred thing and rituals were performed with the utmost respect" (participant 10, female, 68 years)

The burials were also conducted without the children attending. The children were told about it … Because they were not supposed to witness that at all. It was called uila (it's a taboo) (participant 13, male, 88 years).

Sub-theme 3- Burial differences

In the Venda culture, children and adults are buried differently, although they are all buried by placing their bodies in a grave, the placement is different. All participants pointed out that children are buried differently from older people and the following statements confirm these views:

"There's a burial of an infant and a burial of a child that's lived six weeks. The one who has lived for six weeks can no longer be buried behind the house, but at the burial grounds, with the older people. And the infant, they first find people who are knowledgeable about child burial, so that they can bury the infant. They didn't just put it in a bag it had to be standing up., They first covered it with blankets because if they do not cover it, it would be wrong." (participant 4, female, 50 years).

"Then they went to the grave and placed it upright, in the grave. They did not dig, so that the mother of the child can make new ''eggs'. The mother had to walk on the grave and sit on it and push the soil inside using her palms. Pushing the soil inside going left, right, left, right" (participant 5, male, 67 years).

"When it came to burying, that's that. When it came to children, they had to be buried upright (showing with hands how they need to be placed). Children were not supposed to be buried laying down because the mother might not get pregnant again. The little body had to be rolled up with fabric and buried next to wall of the house or hut" (participant 7, female, +50 years).

4.4.3. THEME 3- Psychosocial functions of bereavement

Cultural interventions during bereavement play significant psychosocial functions, by offering structured ways for individuals to express their emotions, receive support, and heal psychologically. These rituals allow people to openly display their grief in a manner that is accepted within their society, affirm their emotional responses, and gain comfort from the collective support of the community.

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- **Sub-theme 1 - Emotional healing and coping.**

Cultural interventions curing bereavement play a significant role in the psychological healing of the bereaved through cultural interventions that focus on the emotional healing and coping mechanisms of the bereaved. These interventions aim to provide a sense of peace and closure by giving the bereaved a framework on how to deal with death, to avoid chaos. All the participants mentioned that knowing that the deceased is still available in spirit gave them peace. The following sentiments were shared on this point:

"Yes, because people didn't have a lot of stress when it came to loss because they had interventions in place to avoid such. These days people go to funerals and it is busy during the week but once everyone is gone, the family members start thinking and worrying about their loss. These cultural interventions helped people avoid just randomly crying when they remembered the deceased" (participant 1, female. 81 years).

"The viewing of the body was done to give the family assurance that the member had truly passed away. If one did not view the body, one would still have lingering doubts in one's heart and still hear and 'see' the deceased around" (participant 2, male, 70 years).

"It warms our hearts to know that the deceased is well taken care of by the ancestors, it makes us worry less because if the deceased is at peace, so should we. These days people get buried and we don't even know where their spirits are going" (participant 5, male, 67 years)

Sub-theme 2 - Shared bereavement /collective mourning

Vha-Venda people come together to share bereavement. When a family member has died, all members of the family are required to come to the house and pay condolences. The community at large also comes to the household to help, where they help the bereaved family and make sure that the family members are at peace. The following sentiments were shared by some of the participants regarding the above statements:

"It's just to come to pay your respects or condolences from morning to night, sitting there supporting however you can, or maybe perform…" (participant 9, female, 88 years).

"The family will have an old family grandparent, a family aunt or any member of the family who knows about these things and what they are used for. "(participant 12, male, 67 years).

"All the family members will come to the house, and they will help with the burial preparations, because most people stayed close, we didn't have to wait for those coming from Joburg. These days we wait for people who are not even going to come and help but just watch and leave the following day" (participant 14, male, 74 years).

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Sub-theme 3 – Ancestral connection

There are cultural interventions that are performed to mostly keep an ancestral connection with the deceased. In the Venda culture, the deceased is believed to become an ancestor once they are buried. The interventions are performed to also maintain a connection with the ones that are already buried. This was confirmed by the following statements from the participants:

"The aunt will communicate with the ancestors on the passing of the deceased and tell them what those left behind want, this could be protections or healing. They gather around a tree and talk to the ancestors" (participant 3, male, 78 years).

"Then the year after the burial, the family will come together so that they do u-phasa. This is when the family gathers and speak with the ancestors, they will make traditional beer and gather around the designated area for the ritual. They invite the ancestors to protect the deceased's children and ask for favours, depending on what they want." (participant 11, female, older than 50 years).

4.4.4 THEME 4 - Preservation of cultural interventions

It is very important that the Vhavenda people preserve their culture, as they believe that these cultural interventions do more good than harm. However, these are changing times and culture is one of the things that is changing. One of the objectives of this research was to help preserve the culture and the participants provided information that showed how important these cultural interventions are to the Vhavenda people. Therefore, it will be of no use to get rid of them at any point. The participants also pointed out how the Western ways have infiltrated the community and people are slowly adopting Western ways of life.

- **Sub-theme 1 – Oral transmission of cultural practices.**

The study showed that cultural interventions are very important to the Vhavenda community. Therefore, it is very important that they continue with them; with the changing times, it is very important to come up with ways that can be implemented for these cultural interventions to remain in place, for the sake of maintain the rituals of the Vhavenda people. The participants shared the following ideas on ways that these cultural interventions can be preserved:

"Where there are young people, they should teach them what needs to be done and show the young ones how this is supposed to be done" (participant 2, male, 70 years).

"It is just that these days there are people that do not want to follow these traditions, but there are some people who do follow these traditions. So, in order to preserve these traditions, those

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who are knowledgeable about them should educate those who do not know much." (participant 5, male, 67 years)

"The young generation should listen to us when we talk about how things are supposed to be done. The problem is that when we tell this younger generation, they do not listen. If I tell you to not sit by the door, you will not understand because young ones need to know the reason. The reason is that the dead body needs to move out of the door and the first and last born need to crawl under the coffin" (participant 7, female, +50 years).

- **Sub-theme 2 – Adding cultural knowledge to the curriculum.**

Western culture has infiltrated the Vhavenda community and is slowly taking over. The participants acknowledged that to some degree things have changed and future generations will not follow the Vhavenda cultural interventions that we have today. The best way was to add this knowledge to the school curriculum and make it easy for everyone to know. The following are some of the sentiments of the participants:

"Children should be taught about their roots at school. Tshivenda teachers shouldn't only teach language but also add something about our culture" (participant 4, female, 50 years).

"Teachers should make it their responsibility to make sure that every learner in the class doesn't only learn the Western culture but also their own personal culture because we will lose it forever and the consequences are serious" (participant 8, female, 60 years)

- ***Sub-theme 3*- Documentation.**

Most of the participants wanted to share this information, to share their knowledge and experience with other people and to reinforce the importance of these cultural interventions. They mentioned why it is very important to document the Venda cultural interventions during bereavement, while some participants shared by stating the following:

"Let us document our songs, our rituals, and our stories, so that the future generation doesn't get lost but always has something to refer to." (participant 10, female, 68 years)

"University students should also take their time and document what needs to be done because most Tshivenda books do not focus on traditions but rather put their focus on language, even at school." (participant 6, 63 years, male).

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4.4 Conclusions.

The chapter presented, analyzed, and interpreted the data gathered from older members in the selected village in Thulamela. This chapter presented the themes and sub-themes based on the objectives of the study. From the findings, it became evident that social support is essential in the management of grief. The next chapter will outline the discussion and analysis of the research findings.

5.CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents a discussion of the study findings. The themes and primary data which were identified are discussed by linking the findings to relevant literature and adding the researcher's perspective or voice.

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5.2. Study findings

5.2.1. Bereavement Cultural interventions

The study found that the Vhavenda people's bereavement rituals serve as cultural interventions that provide essential support during the mourning process. These interventions are deeply embedded in the community's cultural fabric, with rituals such as u-*tovhowa*, *u-luvhedza*, and *u-phasela* facilitating the bereaved's reintegration into social life. According to Makhutso (2022), such cultural practices are central to African communities, as they do not only mark the end of a life but also ensure that the living are supported and guided through the grief process. These rituals help to preserve the cultural identity of the community and reinforce social cohesion, offering the bereaved a sense of continuity with their heritage and ancestral traditions (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2021).

Protection rituals are another key aspect of Vhavenda bereavement practices. These rituals are believed to shield the living from spiritual harm or misfortune following a death, ensuring that the deceased's spirit peacefully transitions to the afterlife, while safeguarding the wellbeing of the survivors. Makhutso (2022) notes that ancestral beliefs play a pivotal role in African death rituals, providing a sense of spiritual protection for the living. Similar protection practices have been observed in other African cultures, where rituals are designed to ensure that the community is not left vulnerable to harmful spiritual influences after a loss (Tshandama, 2021).

In addition to protection, emotional healing interventions form a significant part of the Vhavenda mourning process. These interventions aim to help the bereaved manage their emotional distress and begin the process of recovery. Rituals that involve communal mourning, sharing of memories, and expressions of sorrow create a supportive environment where individuals can express their grief openly, surrounded by a caring community. As noted by Makaria and Mukaria (2019), such interventions help reduce the psychological burden of grief and encourage emotional release, providing the bereaved with a sense of understanding and validation during a difficult time (Mwangi, 2020).

Spiritual transitioning rituals are crucial in ensuring the deceased's spirit transitions peacefully to the afterlife. These rituals help both the deceased and the bereaved navigate the spiritual aspects of death, offering the deceased guidance as they cross over to the ancestral realm. In African cultures, these spiritual practices are viewed as necessary for restoring harmony between the living and the spirits of the deceased. Makhutso (2022) highlights that spiritual transitioning is integral to maintaining balance in the community and honoring the deceased's role within the broader spiritual framework of African beliefs (Nyambura & Mwaura, 2022).

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Cleansing rituals play an important role in the mourning process by purifying the bereaved from the negative spiritual energy associated with death. These rituals also help to remove the perceived "uncleanness" that death brings, ensuring that the bereaved can re-enter the community without the fear of spiritual contamination. According to Makaria and Mukaria (2019), such cleansing practices are common in African societies, where they are believed to restore the living to a state of spiritual purity, thus promoting healing and emotional stability (Kamau, 2020). These practices help individuals navigate the psychological and spiritual implications of loss, fostering emotional and spiritual recovery.

5.2.2. Gender and age significance in performing cultural interventions during bereavement.

The study findings highlight the role of gender and age in shaping bereavement interventions within African communities, particularly in the Vhavenda culture. Gender-specific bereavement interventions are a prominent aspect of the mourning process, with distinct cultural practices assigned to men and women. Women, upon losing their husbands, undergo a variety of cultural rituals, including cleansing ceremonies and public displays of grief. This is rooted in the cultural belief that a woman who loses her husband is considered spiritually "unclean" and must show visible grief to avoid suspicions regarding her involvement in her husband's death, which is often tied to inheritance or other cultural taboos (Makhutso, 2022). These cultural interventions highlight the pressure on women to adhere to strict mourning norms. On the other hand, men who lose their wives generally do not face the same ritualistic demands or public expectations, illustrating a clear gender divide in how grief is expressed and managed in the community.

Age-specific bereavement interventions are also a significant aspect of mourning practices in the Vhavenda culture. The burial and mourning processes differ for children and adults, reflecting the cultural value placed on the emotional and spiritual needs of the bereaved. When a child dies, particular attention is given to the mother’s emotional wellbeing, as she undergoes special rituals designed to address her grief and help her heal. These practices ensure that the emotional needs of the mother are recognized and supported by the community during such a painful loss. Ameru made similar findings among the people of Kenya. These age-specific rituals not only offer emotional support but also serve spiritual functions, assisting both the deceased and the family members in transitioning through the grief process (Makaria & Mukaria, 2019). The culturally responsive interventions highlight the importance of considering both age and gender in bereavement practices, to ensure the emotional healing of all members of the grieving family.

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Burial practices and rituals further reflect both age and gender-specific mourning requirements. In the Vhavenda community, the burial rituals for children and adults are conducted differently, with each serving its own cultural and emotional purposes. For instance, the mother's grief is given particular attention during a child's burial, as her loss is considered unique and in need of special care. In contrast, adult mourning rituals emphasize different gender expectations, as women are encouraged to express their grief through visible signs of mourning, while men are typically expected to maintain emotional restraint (Pukuda, 2020). These gendered and age-specific mourning rituals not only help facilitate the bereavement process but also reinforce societal norms and expectations regarding emotional expression, ensuring that cultural practices remain central to the mourning experience. The study revealed how these distinct interventions are deeply embedded in cultural values, offering protection, healing, and spiritual transition for those affected by loss.

5.2.3. Psychosocial functions of bereavement.

The study findings indicate that the cultural interventions conducted during bereavement in the Vhavenda culture also serve a psychosocial function. Psychosocial functions stemmed from how the Vhavenda people come together to assist the bereaved to heal emotionally and cope with the loss *"muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu* "(a Tshivenda proverb advocating for oneness). These studies are supported by a cross-sectional study which found that people with high existential isolation are not able to heal and cope well with loss when compared to those who share their worries with the rest of the community. There are cultural interventions done from the date of death up to a year after, these rituals assist the bereaved to cope and adjust to the new change (Huibertha *et al.*, 2019). The findings also suggested that the Vhavenda people practice collective grief practices because when someone has lost a loved one, the whole community gets involved. Wotjkowiak, Lind and Smid (2021) in their systematic review discussed that the social aspect of these cultural interventions is one of the most important purposes in the community and sharing bereavement creates a sense of unity and safety for the bereaved.

The study findings also revealed that when the Vhavenda people conduct rituals during bereavement, they get to experience a connection with their ancestors, and this came up from the common understanding that most of the rituals that are done have to include some sort of communication between the living and the ancestors.

The Social Support Theory highlights the importance of interpersonal relationships and community engagement in managing the emotional and psychological challenges of bereavement. In the context of the Vhavenda culture, this theory aligns with the practice of collective mourning, where the whole community actively participates in the grieving process.

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This communal approach provides individuals with a network of emotional support, reinforcing feelings of belonging and reducing the risk of isolation. Social support is crucial in mitigating the negative effects of grief, as it fosters resilience, by encouraging open emotional expression and the sharing of distressing experiences. According to the theory, when bereaved individuals are surrounded by a supportive social network, they are better able to cope with the pain of loss, gain comfort, and feel less overwhelmed by the emotional burden of grief. The Vhavenda people's emphasis on collective participation in mourning rituals can be seen as a practical application of this theory, where the grief process is not solitary but shared, offering the bereaved both emotional relief and the strength of community.

The Social Support Theory suggests that such community-based interventions not only help individuals manage the immediate distress of grief, but also contribute to long-term emotional healing, by facilitating the reintegration of the bereaved into social life. By engaging in these collective rituals, the Vhavenda people create opportunities for healing and adjustment that align with broader psychological theories of grief, which emphasize the importance of social bonds in the recovery process (Huibertha *et al*., 2019). The shared experience of loss, coupled with the supportive network of family and community, allows individuals to process their grief within a safe and understanding environment, ultimately helping them navigate the difficult transition of life after loss.

5.2.4. Preservation of cultural interventions

The study findings underscore the critical importance of preserving cultural interventions, particularly in the context of bereavement rituals in the Vhavenda community, as these practices face the risk of fading due to the influence of Western ways. One of the main strategies identified for preserving these cultural practices is the oral transmission of knowledge. In many African communities, including the Vhavenda, elders traditionally pass down cultural wisdom and practices verbally to younger generations. This method of transmission ensures that the community's customs, beliefs, and rituals are maintained, even as generations change. However, the study also highlighted the need to adapt this transmission method to contemporary practices, recognizing that modern influences threaten to erode these valuable traditions. As Hiswara, Mohammad, and Pujowati (2023) suggested in their research, that community involvement in cultural preservation, particularly through oral storytelling and teachings, plays a crucial role in sustaining cultural heritage and maintaining the continuity of these practices.

In addition to oral transmission, the study revealed that documentation of cultural practices is increasingly being seen as a vital tool for cultural preservation. Documenting the traditions, rituals, and beliefs allows for the safeguarding of this knowledge, ensuring that it can be

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passed on to future generations even if oral transmission becomes less effective over time. This documentation strategy helps mitigate the risk of losing important cultural practices due to generational gaps or the dominance of outside cultural influences. Malopane, Chanza, and Musakwa (2024) further emphasize that without active documentation and archiving of cultural practices, future generations may be disconnected from their cultural roots, resulting in the gradual loss of community identity. This archival approach, when coupled with community involvement, supports a more robust preservation of cultural heritage.

Implementation of education and cultural programs is another essential strategy for preserving traditional practices. These programs offer structured opportunities for younger community members to learn about their cultural heritage, ensuring that they are prepared to carry forward the values, rituals, and customs central to their identity. The study recommends that these educational programs be integrated into both formal and informal settings, such as schools and community gatherings, to effectively transmit cultural knowledge. By embedding cultural education in everyday life, the continuity of traditional practices is strengthened while simultaneously nurturing a sense of pride and identity among the younger generation. Through educational initiatives, documentation, and oral transmission, the Vhavenda community can preserve its cultural interventions and ensure their relevance and vitality amidst modernizing influences (Njiru & Kamau, 2021; Nkiwane, 2022).

Kumar *et al.* (2023) suggest that community involvement, particularly through oral storytelling, plays an essential role in maintaining cultural heritage and ensuring the survival of such practices. This perspective aligns with the Cultural Grief Theory, which asserts that grief is not merely an individual emotional experience but is deeply embedded in cultural rituals that help the living cope with loss. According to Moyo and Chirwa (2022), these cultural practices serve not only to honor the deceased but also to support the emotional and psychological healing of the bereaved. Among the Vhavenda, preserving mourning rituals through oral transmission helps safeguard both cultural identity and the emotional well-being of the community.

5.2.5. Conclusion

The Chapter showed how the preservation of Vhavenda bereavement rituals is essential, as they face the challenge of being overshadowed by Western influences. The chapter emphasized the importance of using strategies such as oral transmission, documentation of cultural practices, and the implementation of cultural education programs to safeguard these rituals for future generations. These methods ensure that the community's rich cultural heritage is maintained, fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of collective mourning, healing, and spiritual connections in the grieving process. Through these efforts,

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the Vhavenda people can continue to pass down their traditions and maintain cultural continuity.

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6. CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINDINGS.

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture in Thulamela Municipality. Using a semi-structured interview guide and probing, the researcher provided valuable insights into how cultural practices have functions during the process of grieving among the Vhavenda community.

6.2 Conclusion

The findings of this research indicated that cultural practices have a significant impact on how individuals are able to heal, accept, and cope with the loss of a loved one. The study found that community members are more likely to cope effectively with death when they have the support of other community members, primarily because many cultural practices necessitate communal assistance. Furthermore, findings revealed that members of the community navigate different rituals based on their gender or age, with specific cultural practices tailored for young people and women**.** The burial process also differs across genders and age groups, reflecting nuanced societal perceptions of men, women, and children within the community.

The study revealed that older people desire to preserve cultural practices related to bereavement for the benefit of future generations. The documentation of traditional knowledge, oral transmissions, and integrating traditional knowledge into the curriculum were some of the ways suggested to prevent the disappearance of cultural practices. This preservation is very important, considering the significant psychosocial functions that these cultural practices hold within the Vhavenda community. Emotional healing and coping, shared bereavement/collective mourning, and ancestral connection were identified as crucial psychosocial functions that need to be maintained in the community.

The research overall underscores the influence of Westernization on African burial and mourning processes as a key factor shaping modern bereavement practices. As community members increasingly adopt Western ways, they risk losing the community bonds that were traditionally forged during shared bereavement. It was evident that social support is essential in the management of grief within the selected village.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the cultural practices performed during bereavement, providing insights into the types of cultural practices observed

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and practical ways to ensure their continuity. The findings provide an important direction for future research that will explore diverse cultures in relation to grieving and bereavement.

6.3. Limitations

The study successfully provided valuable information on the importance of culture during bereavement, aligning with its primary purpose to explore cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement in the Vhavenda culture in Thulamela Municipality. While significant insights were gained, certain limitations should be noted so that the findings are interpreted with appropriate caution.

A key consideration in interpreting the findings is the qualitative nature of the study, which employed a small, purposive sample from a single community. While this approach was highly effective for obtaining rich, in-depth information about specific cultural practices and experiences, it inherently limits the transferability of findings to broader Vhavenda populations or other cultural contexts. The participants shared communal background likely contributed to similar insights into their culture.

The engagement with older participants in this study, while crucial for capturing invaluable intergenerational knowledge, presented some practical challenges during data collection. For instance, instances of participant unavailability due to illness or occasional forgetfulness regarding interview appointments necessitated flexible scheduling and follow-ups. While these situations required adapting the planned timeline, the researcher maintained a commitment to thorough data collection, ensuring that the valuable perspectives of this key demographic were captured.

Furthermore, the study relied on participants' self-reported experiences regarding cultural practices and their recall of past events. This approach is inherent to qualitative interviews and, while providing direct insights, can be subject to recall bias, where memories of past events may be incomplete or altered over time. Additionally, there is a potential for social desirability bias, where participants might have presented information in a way they perceived as favorable to the researcher, particularly concerning adherence to cultural norms.

The study primarily focused on cultural practices observed within the Thulamela Municipality. While this specific focus allowed for an in-depth exploration within a defined context, it means that the diversity of cultural practices across other parts of the Vhavenda communities remains largely undocumented by this study. Therefore, the findings should not be broadly generalized to the entire Vhavenda group, as cultural bereavement practices can vary significantly across different geographical areas. While an informal exploratory step was taken in a nearby village

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to gauge the resonance of findings, the formal scope and sample of this study remained centered on the Thulamela Municipality.

6.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from the overall study's findings and acknowledge the limitations discussed above. These recommendations aim to address identified gaps and provide a clear direction for future research related to bereavement and cultural practices:

- Future research should broaden its scope by including participants from different geographic parts of Venda and also incorporate diverse age groups to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the psychosocial functions of bereavement across the Vhavenda communities. Researchers engaging with older participants should plan for potential scheduling challenges, allowing ample flexibility and implementing consistent, gentle reminders to accommodate their needs and ensure successful data collection.
- Future research should expand beyond the Thulamela Municipality to explore cultural practices in other Vhavenda regions, potentially employing varied data collection methods such as participant observation. For a broader and deeper understanding, ethnographic studies could be particularly useful in gaining richer insights into the complexities of cultural practices performed during bereavement in the Vhavenda community.
- Future studies should specifically investigate the impact of Westernization on traditional bereavement practices, further exploring the observed loss of community bonds and identifying effective strategies to maintain collective mourning support in modern contexts. This could also delve into the implications of gender and age-specific ritual variations on the healing process.
- Given the reliance on self-reported data in this study, future research could benefit from triangulating data with other methods, such as observations of rituals where ethically appropriate, or incorporating perspectives from key cultural informants beyond individual interviews, to cross-validate reported practices and minimize recall and social desirability biases.
- Recommendations for the practical preservation of cultural practices should focus on developing structured community-led initiatives for documentation and oral transmission of knowledge, rather than relying solely on informal methods. Research could explore the most effective educational models (formal and informal) for embedding traditional knowledge within younger generations

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ANNEXURE1: WORK PLAN

Research Activity																						
	Apr 2024	May 2024	May 2024	june 2024	July 2024	Aug 2024	Sept 2024	oct 2024	Nov 2024	Dec 2024	Jan 2025	Feb 2025	Feb 2025	MAR 2025	APR 2025	MAY 2025	JUN 2025	JULY 2025	AUG 2025	SEP 2025	OCT 2025
Proposal Development																					
Final submission to higher degree committee																					
Submission for ESHDC																					
Submission for UHDC and																					

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Ethical clearance																					
Sorting permission from Department of Health, Limpopo and District																					
Data collection																					
Data analysis and interpretation																					
Write up of draft Thesis																					
Supervisors input																					
Proof Reading																					
External Examination (Evaluation)																					
Correction																					
Submission of final Research																					
Graduation																					

ANNEXURE 2: LETTER OF INFORMATION.

Title of the Research Study : "The psychosocial functions of cultural interventions on bereavement across the Vhavenda tribe in Maungani, Thulamela Municipality"

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : Miss F Dzhombere

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : Dr MD Mushwana (Phd)

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : Dr K Mphephu (Phd)

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: I Dzhombere Faresani, a Master of Psychology student in Psychology at the University of Venda school of Health sciences, conducting a

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study titled 'The psychosocial functions of cultural interventions on bereavement across the Vhavenda tribe in Maungani, Thulamela Municipality'. The purpose of the study is to provide an in-depth description of the cultural interventions performed by the Vhavenda in Maungani for those bereaved and their psychosocial function.

Outline of the Procedures: (*In this study, participants will be given information on the purpose of the study, the benefits of the participants, collection of data and the identity of the researcher. It would be done so that the participants would have information regarding what they are consenting. The participants would be requested to give consent through signing the consent form*).

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: There are no risks which are anticipated as a result of participating in this study. The district management has assured us that no punitive measures will be taken against you based on the information you provide and you will not be judged or penalised for the diagnosis of the child.

Benefits: Your participation will help the researcher acquire information that will be used to preserve tradition related to your culture.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can stop participating any time without a reason. You can withdraw from the study if you consider it not to be in your best interest. You can be withdrawn from the study without providing the reasons for doing so.

Remuneration: (*In this study the researcher will provide all necessary information about the purpose of the study and the procedure to be followed without deceiving them into participating to the study. No money will be paid to them).*

Costs of the Study: (*the participant will not be expected to cover any costs towards the study)*

Confidentiality: The information gathered will be treated confidentially and your identity will not be revealed only codes will be used to maintain anonymity.

Research-related Injury: (*Participants will be protected from harm)*

Persons to Contact in the Event of Any Problems or Queries:

(Supervisor : Dr MD Mushwana (0724741399), Dr K Mphephu (0681562587)). Please contact the researcher (076 8910 745) or the University Research Ethics Committee

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Secretariat on 015 962 9058. Complaints can be reported to the Director: Research and Innovation, Prof GE Ekosse on 015 962 8313 or Georges Ivo.Ekosse@univen.ac.za

ANNEXURE 3: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- **I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, (*Miss F Dzhombere)*, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: FHS/24/PSYCH/072910**
- **I have also received, read and understood the above written information (*Participant Letter of Information*) regarding the study.**

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- **I am aware that the results of the study, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials and diagnosis will be anonymously processed into a study report.**
- **In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.**
- **I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.**
- **I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.**
- **I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.**

Full Name of Participant	**Date**	**Time**	**Signature**
I, ……	**……**	**…..……**	**……..**

(*Miss F Dzhombere)* herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher……Date…… Signature……

Full Name of Witness (If applicable) ……Date…… Signature……

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable) ……Date……Signature……

Please note the following:

Research details must be provided in a clear, simple and culturally appropriate manner and prospective participants should be helped to arrive at an informed decision by use of appropriate language (grade 10 level- use Flesch Reading Ease Scores on Microsoft Word), selecting of a non-threatening environment for interaction and the availability of peer counseling (Department of Health, 2004)

If the potential participant is unable to read/illiterate, then a right thumb print is required and an impartial witness, who is literate and knows the participant e.g. parent, sibling, friend, pastor, etc. should verify in writing, duly signed that informed verbal consent was obtained (Department of Health, 2004).

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If anyone makes a mistake completing this document e.g. a wrong date or spelling mistake, a new document has to be completed. The incomplete original document has to be kept in the participant's file and not thrown away, and copies thereof must be issued to the participant.

References:

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http://www.doh.gov.za/docs/factsheets/guidelines/ethnics/

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ANNEXURE 4: INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A: Demographic information

1. Demographic Questions

2. Age:

3. Gender:

5. Religious Affiliation:

6. Length of residency in Maungani:

SECTION B: EXPERIENCES

1. What are the cultural practices on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture, in the Thulamela Municipality?

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2. What are the psychosocial benefits of these cultural interventions?
3. What are the consequences of disregarding these cultural interventions?
4. What can be done to preserve these cultural interventions by the Vhavenda community?

ANNEXURE 5: BUDGET

BUDGET ITEMS	MOTIVATION	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL
Printing	Printing consent forms and other letters, interview guides, and copies of final document	Printing in black ink per page @ R2.00 x 100	R200.00
Independent Coder	Coding and re-coding of research document	@R500.00 per hour x 20 hours	R10 000.00
Voice recorder	Data collection process	Voice recorder @ R1500.00 Batteries @ R60 of 2 x 6 packets	R1500.00 R360.00
Proof reading and editing	Proof reading of the proposal Proof reading of final copy	65 pages x R25 per page 120 pages x R25.00 per page	R1625.00 R3000.00
Consumables	For the storage of information For the storage of information For consent forms and other letters	Memory sticks 8GB x2 External hard drive 8GB x2 15 Envelopes @ R6 Writing pens @R10.00 x 10 Writing note pads @ R36 x2 Highlighters Pens @ R21 x4 Pencil @ R2.40	R400.00 R2800.00 R90.00 R100.00 R72.00 R84.00 R40.00

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Total			R20, 271

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ANNEXURE 6: EDITORS LETTER

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

11 February 2025

Department of Psychology
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Venda
Thohoyandou
0950

Sir/madam

This serves to certify that I have proof-read Ms F. Dzhombere's mini-dissertation titled, "Exploration of Cultural Practices and their Psychosocial Functions on Bereavement across the Vhavenda Culture: Thulamela Municipality".

The proof-reading entailed editing some parts from it; for example, to avoid wordiness, redundancy; sub-dividing sentences, and so on, to make the document more understandable. However, I have not tampered with the content of the document, except where this constituted repetition or made the document confusing.

The mini-dissertation is presently ready for examination.

Sincerely

.....
V.T. Bvuma
083 423 9227

University of Venda

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E-mail: Vincent.Bvuma@univen.ac.za
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ANNEXURE 7: TURNITIN REPORT

final grief document

ORIGINALITY REPORT

6%	4%	4%	5%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	Submitted to University of Venda Student Paper	5%
2	Ratidzai Shoko, Sizakele Danke. "The Violent Aspect of Widowhood Rites in the South African Context", Social Sciences, 2024 Publication	<1%
3	univendspace.univen.ac.za Internet Source	<1%
4	eprints.soton.ac.uk Internet Source	<1%
5	Mngomezulu, Kesetseng Maria | Mulaudzi, F. M.. "The Lived Experiences of Nurses in Specialized Areas During Strike Actions at a Tertiary Hospital in Emalahleni District in Mpumalanga", University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2023 Publication	<1%

Exclude quotes	On	Exclude matches	< 30 words
Exclude bibliography	On		

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ANNEXURE 8: ETHICAL CLEARENCE

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Ms F Dzhombere

STUDENT NO:
22020843

PROJECT TITLE: **Exploration of cultural practices and their psychosocial functions on bereavement across the Vhavenda culture in a selected village, Thulamela Municipality.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHS/24/PSYCH/07/2910**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr MD Mushwana	UNIVEN, Psychology	Supervisor
Dr K Mphephu	UNIVEN, Psychology	Co – Supervisor
Ms F Dzhombere	UNIVEN, Psychology	Investigator – Student

Type: **Master's Research**
Risk: ***Minimal risk to humans, animals, or environment*** **(Category 2)**
Approval Period: **October 2024 – October 2025**

The Human and Clinical Trials Research Ethics Committee (HCTREC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following.

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
  - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
  - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
  - Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
  - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
  - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
  - withdraw or postpone approval if:
  - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
  - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
  - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately,
  - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions deem it necessary.

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: October 2024

Name of the HCTREC Chairperson of the Committee: Prof NS Mashau

Signature:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
2024 -10- 29
Private Bag X5050
Thohoyandou 0950

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ANNEXURE 9: TRANSCRIPT

Interview- participant 1

SECTION A: Demographic information

1. Age: 81

2. Gender: female

3. Ethnicity: Muvenda

4. Religious Affiliation: African tradition

5. Length of residency in Maungani: since 1992

SECTION B: EXPERIENCES

Research questions.

Interviewer: What cultural interventions are done during bereavement and who takes part in these cultural interventions?

The cultural interventions that were done (pause to think), I will start with what was done when my mother passed away. She passed away during this time (it was around 14:00) in the afternoon. They went to the river and got sand to pour on the floor where she died, with poured water on top. They took the body and placed it on the sand that was sprinkled in the house. When we woke up early in the morning around 06:00 or 07:00 the people were leaving to prepare the grave and look for *bopha.*

Interviewer: what is *bopha*?

Bopha is a tree that goes around… (takes a pause and shows by hands how the tree wraps around other trees), when it grows it wraps itself around other trees; so, we call it *bopha*. They will take a blanket and wrap around the deceased (demonstrated the process using her shoes and her small blanket, she wrapped the shoe with the blanket). They would I wrap every part of the deceased with the blanket, including the head. They would use the *bopha* on the feet, knees, waist, shoulders, and on top of the head, to avoid the body showing because this tree is like a rope.

They would then carry the corpse and take it to the hole that had been dug, they would remove the traditional beads that the person was wearing and put them next on the deceased's head. They would then cover the body with soil, when they were done, they would plant the *mukonde or moswoswo*

Interviewer: Are those Tshivenda trees?

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Yes, the tree will flourish on the grave, it doesn't die. This tree will be a symbol to show the Vho Mutshekwa has been buried here.

Interviewer: so, when all of this is happening, where are the people?

Only three men would go out to dig the grave, depending on how many men are available.

Interviewer: so, someone would pass away today and be buried tomorow?

Yes, they pass away today and get buried tomorrow and if you pass away in the morning, by nighttime you can already be buried. When they are digging up the hole, there is a root that is taken and in any grave that is dug, they find a root. They take the root and some soil from the hole back home. That root would be brought back home. They would also take some stones and place on the side of the grave and that stick I told you about that acts as a mark to show who was buried here.

In the morning, that root would be placed in a clay pot and boiled and taken out. The water from the pot would be used to make porridge that would be given to the deceased's children. They would eat that porridge that would also have *vhulivhadza* added to it.

Interviewer: what is *vhulivhadza?*

Vhulivhadza is an herb that is given to the deceased's children to help them forget about the loss and that our hearts are at peace.

Interviewer: where does the family get these herbs?

The family will have an elderly family member, a family aunt or any member of the family who knows about these things and what they are used for.

Interviewer: the root that is found when the grave, does it matter what type of a root it is?

It doesn't matter, any root that they getp can be used. They always find a root in all graves that they dig. This is done for the children; they must eat with their left hand and they cannot add sugar to it because there was no sugar at the time. They would also have water mixed with some herds to avoid having children becoming sleepy. I might be speaking with you here and feeling sleepy because maybe I was not treated or given this porridge when my parents passed away. The children had to eat it for three consecutive days.

When all that had been done, the left-over roots would be collected and placed on the riverbanks, where it is cold, to make sure that our hearts are relieved.

Interviewer: what happens at night?

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If the deceased had left a young child, at night someone would whisper in the child's ear that so -and -so had passed away and the child would never see them again. This was done for three consecutive days, too. The child would no longer ask about that person and would just wake up and go to play with other children. The child would no longer cry or ask about the deceased because they would have been told and given those herbs to forget.

Interviewer: when it comes these cultural interventions, does it matter who has passed away? Whether it is a child or an adult.

There is a difference. When a woman passes away, they are supposed to *u-luvhedza.* They must get a goat, and the goat will be slaughtered and cooed. When they killed the goat, they had to put it in a *mutuli* that would be filled with water and the goat would have its mouth and nose put inside, to make it die of suffocation. You do not slaughter it while it is bleating because this might cause the children of the family to fight. The goat meat has to be well-cooked with bones falling off because these bones have to all be collected and some herbs mixed with them. They would dig a small hole and put the bones inside, like they are burying someone. This was done to bring someone home. A traditional healer had to be present during this process. If this was not done, the people in the family would see the deceased's shadow roaming around their heads naked. This ritual was only performed when the deceased was an older person.

This was done to prevent bad luck for the children, who could just be walking around and something comes and hits them or they would be at school and the teacher would just hate them for no reason.

Interviewer: what else can you share about these cultural interventions during bereavement.

When it comes to burying, that's that. When it comes to children, they had to be buried stand upright (showing with hands how they need to be placed). Children were not supposed to be buried lying down on their sides because the mother might not end up getting pregnant again. The little body had to be rolled up with fabric and buried next to wall of the house or hut. The mother would not get pregnant again if the child was buried lying down. If the child was buried properly, it wouldn't take long for the mother to get pregnant again.

I wanted to also talk about *u-tovhowa.* This is when a person goes to view the body of the deceased. In our culture, young girls were not allowed to view the corpse. If there is a pregnant person in the family, they were also not allowed to see the dead body. The pregnant woman would be taken away to stay with the neighbours for the duration of the burial process to avoid stressing her out and the baby. A pregnant woman was also not allowed to go to the burial site. Children and pregnant women were not allowed to attend a funeral. These days things

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are different, young children are shown people in caskets (showing how a child is tilted in the caskets to see the dead body). The child will just look because they are yet to understand that this person has died. The death of a family member was a sacred thing and it was done with the utmost respect.

The viewing of the body is done to give the family the assurance that this person has truly passed away. If you do not view that body, you might still have doubts in your heart and still hear and see this person around.

Interviewer: what are the psychosocial benefits of these cultural interventions?

When it comes to burying a child, I know it helps the mother heal and have hope that she will get another child. When it comes to an older person, we get the chance to accept that they have passed away. Then a year after the burial, the family would come together to do the *do u-phasa*. This is where the family gathers and speaks with the ancestors. They would make traditional beer and gather around the designate area for the process. They would invite the ancestors to protect the deceased children and ask for favours, depending on what they want.

Interviewer: do you think these cultural interventions were useful?

I think these cultural interventions are very important, the problem is that when we talk to the younger generation, they do not listen. If I tell you to not sit by the door, you will not understand because the younger generation wants to know the reason. The reason is that the dead body needs to move out of the door and the first and last born need to crawl under the dead body.

Interviewer: Why do they do that?

They need to crawl under the body to avoid having skinny children because their parent's body will still be rotting. These days because children refuse to do those things. The grandmothers will take a piece of clothing and pass it around twice, under the coffin. This was done to remove the shadow of the deceased from the children, they would not lose weight after the burial process.

Interviewer: so, things would be better if we followed our cultural interventions?

Yes, because people didn't have a lot of stress when it came to loss because they had interventions in place to avoid such. These days people go to funerals and it is because they are busy during the week. But once everyone is gone, the surviving members start thinking and worrying about their loss. These cultural interventions aided in helping people, to avoiding randomly weeping when they thought about the deceased.

Interviewer: how do you think we can preserve these cultural interventions?

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Where there is someone my age, they should inform people on what needs to be done and show the young ones how this is supposed to be done. The problem is that these days most people keep quiet about our cultural interventions. The other problem is that the younger generation lack respect. So, they do not ask for advice from the old generation. There are people who are going through a lot because they didn't do the proper processes when burying their loved ones.

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