

The Experiences of Death of loved ones and Bereavement amongst young Vhavenda Widows
of Tshikombani Village at Nzhelele, Vhembe District in Limpopo, South Africa.

by

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Declaration

I, **Pelewe Itsweni**, declare that this research proposal is my original work and has not been submitted for any degree at any other university or institution. The proposal does not contain other persons' writing unless specifically acknowledged and referenced accordingly.

Signed (Student).....Date.....

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Abstract

Death and bereavement are sensitive issues experienced by all mortal species across the world. When death occurs, some individual are left bereaved. However, all societies have established cultural ways of mourning the dead as a way of healing the bereaved; although it seems the bereavement rituals are decided and performed without the bereaves consent. The aim of the study was to explore the experiences of death and bereavement amongst the young Vhavenda widows. The primary objectives of the study were to identify the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during the time of death and bereavement; establish whether these women are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during the process of death and bereavement; understand the coping strategies they employed in dealing with death and bereavement and understand their expectations regarding the role to be played by the family and the community. Finally, the study sought to ascertain the overall impact of the process of death and bereavement on widow's future lives. A qualitative research method was used to collect in-depth data through unstructured interviews. The interviews were conducted using a purposeful sampling method among 13 young widows at Tshikombani village in Nzhelele in Vhembe District. Mbigi's five finger theory of Ubuntu was employed as the main theory aligning with the study. The research findings indicated that most young widows are coerced into performing bereavement rituals while elders made decisions for some. Only one young widow did not have bereavement rituals performed on her. The Findings also indicate that the participants are not fully aware of their rights as women, wives and citizens of South Africa. These raises need for government institutions to address issues concerning human, women and marital rights to the widows specifically in the rural areas of South Africa.

Key Words:

Experiences, death, bereavement, culture, respect, dignity, solidarity, compassion, survival.

CHAPTER 1

STUDY BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

Respect, dignity, solidarity, compassion and survival are the cornerstone of the African culture. They are the ties that bind and shape the African society, which is founded on the values of Ubuntu. In times of death and bereavement, these values are very important to the widowed, the family of the deceased and the community at large. Radzilani-Makatu (2015:1) defines death as an expected and irreversible part of life which occurs to all living species.

Death is a permanent loss of life; it is an elimination from the world of the living, once an individual dies, and the remaining closer people are left bereaved. It is a known fact that death occurs to every household, and the surviving family members are left bereaved. Despite the global knowledge and consciousness of dying, there is always a huge amount of grief among the surviving members of the family. According to Neimeyer, Burke, Mackay and van Dyke Stringer (2010), mourning the death of a loved one is a universal human experience. The study is a part of the broader study on death and bereavement currently being administrated by the University Of Limpopo, South Africa.

Yawa (2010: 20) opines that, like any other significant aspects that bring about permanent life changes, after the death of a loved one; the bereaved individuals should adjust and go back to their normal lives. He further highlighted that, although people are different in their own resemblance and preferences; the bereaved individuals have common intrapersonal experiences concerning grief and bereavement, and they all have a mutual feeling of enduring loss, regardless of the individual's wishes and preferences. Like any other South African sub-culture, young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District are also affected by death and bereavement. Hence, this study intended to understand how death and bereavement affect young Vhavenda widows.

Most cultures have prescribed traditional bereavement and mourning ritual processes, which they believe will simplify adjustment of life by the bereaved. Western countries' ways of mourning of the dead differ from those of African countries for instance, Western countries depend on aspects such as counselling, therapy and other social aspects for the healing of bereavement. Thus, western people focus on the intrapersonal process; they are trained to cut off the bond and dissolve the memories between the deceased and the bereaved in order to heal (Howarth, 2011:4 and Yawa, 2010: 25). Moreover, African cultures focus their bereavement on the interpersonal process; they believe in traditional rituals to be performed for physical and spiritual gain. The bereaved conform to the physical rituals performed, including shaving the head and wearing certain types of clothes for the duration of the mourning period (Radzilani-Makatu, 2015:2 and Yawa, 2010:19).

In terms of the South African cultural beliefs, members of every family are expected to observe the bereavement rituals. In paying respects to the deceased, the process of bereavement ought to be conducted with respect, dignity and compassion. Thus, community members are expected to provide emotional, financial and other support to the deceased's family and ensure that after the burial they assist the family. Notwithstanding this, due to the cultural differences embedded in the South African society, different sub-cultures in South Africa; namely, The Bapedi, Vhavenda, BaTswana, Tsongas, Zulus, Swatis, Ndebeles, Xhosas and Ba-Sotho, deal with the process of death and bereavement differently.

This study sought to understand the experiences of death and bereavement amongst young Vhavenda widows at Tshikombani Village in Nzhelele, Vhembe District in Limpopo, South Africa. The primary reason for focusing on young Vhavenda widows is that African culture treats young and old widows differently. In most African societies, family members and community at large, as opposed to old widows, subject young widows to what appears to be harsh treatment. The situation of young widows during bereavement is worsened by the cultural dictates of the society. This is because cultural practices elongate the bereavement period. According to Kang & Kang (2003) Widows, both young and old, have their bereavement extended. This is unbearable as a result of mourning rituals on what to eat, where to sleep, how many days to stay indoors, the

clothes worn, control over properties, ceremonies to attend, inheritance practices and caring for the livestock and properties of the deceased.

In extreme cases, young widows are stripped of their constitutional rights to land, property and forced to re-marry within the family. In African societies, meticulous care is taken to fulfill the funeral rites, to avoid causing any offence to the departed, also called the ancestors or the ‘living dead’ (Mbiti, 1975). As such, African cultures have come up with different ways of mourning a spouse. Thus far, researchers, in Vhembe, have conducted a number of studies on bereavement experiences without highlighting the actual bereavement processes and activities that the Vhavenda perform on the bereaved.

1.2 Problem Statement

The problem statement advanced is that young widows are not treated with respect, dignity and compassion during the time of death and bereavement. Traditional rituals seem to be usually performed without the bereaved’s consent and without character. Hence the objective of this study was to also explore the “living through” experiences of young rural widows in the new dispensation.

1.3 Significance of the study

Most studies conducted on death and bereavement in South Africa, particularly in the Province of Limpopo, have been in the field of psychology, for counselling purposes. As a result, these studies have failed to articulate the current perspective on Vhavenda customs regarding death and bereavement processes, particularly amongst widows in Vhembe district. The overall significance of the study is that it will contribute to the existing knowledge on the Vhavenda culture on death and bereavement in South Africa. The study will also assist in understanding the experiences of young Vhavenda widows during times of death and bereavement. Furthermore, the study highlighted the role that needs to be played by the family, health professionals and the community at large, during bereavement.

1.4 Broad aim of the study

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences and challenges of young Vhavenda widows during times of death and bereavement. The study also sought to ascertain the support mechanisms at their disposal during these trying times.

1.4.1 Objectives

The aim of the study was guided by the following research objectives:

- To explore the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during times of death and bereavement;
- To find out whether young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during death and bereavement;
- To explore the coping strategies employed by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe in dealing with death and bereavement;
- To ascertain the overall impact of the process of death and bereavement on widows' future lives.

1.4.2 Research Questions

The key questions that this study sought to answer are as follows:

- What are the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during death and bereavement?
- Are young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during death and bereavement?
- What are the coping strategies employed by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District in dealing with death and bereavement?
- How do death and bereavement impact on the future lives of young Vhavenda women in Vhembe District?

1.5 Definition of Key terms

1.5.1 Death

Radzilani-Makatu (2015:1) defines death as an expected and irreversible part of life which occurs to all living species. Death is a permanent loss of life; it is an elimination from the world of the living, once an individual dies, the remaining closer people are left bereaved, and bereavement is the state of being deprived of a something.

1.5.2 Bereavement

Goldman (1992) postulates that bereavement is the state of losing something, or our own sense of self. He further argues that there are two emotional conditions associated with bereavement, which are, grief and mourning. When death occurs, the following process that the bereaved people goes through is bereavement. According to Corr (2003), bereavement has three levels named: (1) a valued relationship, (2) the loss of that relationship, and (3) a survivor deprived of a loved person assets or item (Corr, 2003). One cannot separate bereavement and grief, the bereaved and in this case the widows who have lost their husbands suffers the feelings of loss and emotionally respond to the situation. This is why, Stroebe, Stroebe and Hansson's (1993:5) poses that bereavement is the objective situation of having lost someone significant; while grief is the emotional response to one's loss. Marwit (1991: 76), describes bereavement as “an objective state of having experienced a loss”. Bereavement is a state in which a person may be expected to experience and display negative outcomes of having lost someone.

1.5.3 Grief

Corr (2003) views grief as the response to a loss, including physical sensations, feelings, thoughts, behaviours, social difficulties, and/or spiritual searching. For Brabant (2002), grieving is the process of coping with loss and grief; the attempt to manage these experiences or learn to live with them. Although grief is a difficult situation for all, it heals through time. The grieving members are expected to continue with their lives without the deceased. However, none of them are expected to forget the existence of their deceased loved ones.

1.5.4 Mourning

Mourning is the cultural process that grief and bereavement are expressed through (Brown and Goodman, 2005). This is a gentle process of accepting death, and drawing how a new family life or individual's life will be different without that person. Parkes, Despelder and Strickland define mourning as a socially or culturally defined behavioural demonstration of grief. Tshikombani Village is a culturally administered area, morning procedures for death of their loved ones are rigorously practiced by observing the Venda cultural mode.

1.5.5 Family

L'Abate, (1994: 5) defines family as a structure or system which consists of two or more people, living together in the same household, who are related by either blood, marriage, or adoption. However, Africans also refer to the wider circle of kin who do not necessarily share residence, such as cousins, grandparents, aunts, or other relatives (the extended family). In the Venda culture, extended family is more common as a definition of family. In addition to the above-mentioned types of families, there are single-parented families, where a parent and a child or children constitute a family. This is often due to factors such as death, divorce, being unmarried, etc. Mbizana (2007: 8).

1.5.6 Young Widow

The Youth Policy, including its National Youth Commission Act and its Combined Youth Development Strategy (draft 1, 2), defines a young person as 14 to 35 years of age. South Africa's National Youth Policy (2014). The Oxford Dictionary, (2011: 1700) defines a widow as a woman whose husband died and who has not married again. Therefore, a young widow is any woman of aged between 14 and 35, who lost her husband through death and has not married afterwards. Lillard & Waite, (1995) define the term *widow* as a woman who has lost her husband through death, who has been involved in a long-term and sometimes short-term legal relationship that was recognized by the law, community or family as marriage. This is explained to enable an easy drawing of attention to the unique nature of the marital bonds people develop and the intrapersonal understanding for loss of such a bond, not overlooking that there are husbands who outlive their wives, although this study is focused specifically on the young widows' experiences of death of their husbands, the treatment and type of support they receive, and bereavement processes.

1.5.7 Experience

This term experience implies a practical contact with facts or events (Branford, 1994:322). A person's, and in this case the widow's, practical contact with widowhood life and the mourning process of her culture, her discernments of her family and community's attitudes, form her experience of being a widow, allow her to have immediate information on the mourning processes.

1.5.8 Widowhood

This term refers to a state of mourning of a woman who has lost her husband through death and has not been re-married (Branford 1994:115). In the present study, widowhood is considered as a state of mourning among Vhavenda widows within the first few weeks after the loss of their husbands through death (Manyedi, 2007). There is no common period for mourning in the Vhavenda culture; as a result, it varies according to the family's judgment. A woman qualifies for widowhood when her husband passes away and she has not remarried. Once she re-marries, she is no longer a widow (Branford, 1994:1115). According to Mendes de Leon, Kasi and Jacobs

(1994:615) widowhood is a state resulting from the loss of a spouse. This implies that widowhood applies to both genders. However, in the study, the focus was precisely on widows.

1.5.9 Belief

Belief involves the meaning and purpose of rituals (Popenoe, 1995:365). Most rural villages observe cultural beliefs and of course with an observance of evolution of the recent centuries. An individual's beliefs still influence his/her attitude towards a situation. The present study, the focus is on the belief system of the Vhavenda community with regard to widows' experiences during bereavement and their cultural mourning process.

1.5.10 Coping

The way in which one thinks, behaves, feels, including the type of support they receive during a difficult situation, may determine whether one is coping or not. According to Lazarus (1993, p. 237), coping is a constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific external and internal demands that are considered to be demanding or exceeding the resources of an individual. In situations such as death and bereavement, a social, financial, psychological and emotional support is needed in order for one to cope and move on without the deceased. However, it is quite difficult to get all the latter mentioned support. These automatically imply that coping with death is neither quick nor serene.

1.6 The Structure of the thesis

This thesis comprises of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the background of this study and provides an overview of the mourning rituals with a brief overview of death and bereavement and the reasons for undertaking this study. The chapter further outlines the problem statement of the research, the aim of the research, the objectives and the specific questions asked to attain to research objectives.

Chapter two is devoted to the literature review. This chapter reflects as the central theme of the study, giving a comparative review of the context of the mourning rituals in various corners of the African continent, with a special focus on the South African context. It also raises issues surrounding the positive and negative connotations associated with mourning and bereavement rituals.

In chapter 3, the researcher introduces the theoretical framework that drives the study. This chapter gives a brief overview of the General and Specific Theories of coping with Loss. These theories include the following: Attribution theory, Attachment theory, Kubler's Model of Bereavement, theory of Attachment and Mbigi's "Five Finger Theory". These theories would be the main theoretical and analytical background upon which the research was carried out.

In chapter 4 the researcher discusses the research components used in carrying out the research. Here, qualitative research which was the main approach used in this study is discussed. Other aspects such as participant selection, methods of enquiry, data collection, data collection process, analysis approaches and ethical considerations are also highlighted.

Chapter five presents the data analysis and interpretation of the experiences of the young widows from Tshikombani Village during bereavement and mourning period. This chapter presents the results of the structured interviews of narratives given by the young widows during the interviews. The results were considered within the context of the manifestation of bereavement by the interviewed young widows, the experiences undergone during the mourning ritual procedures, widow's human rights as South African citizens, youth, and women. The support systems, principally from the deceased husband's family, Government, gender relationships, cultural and religious instructions are also included. These were done while taking the cultures and traditions of Vhavenda people in to consideration.

1.7 Limitations of the study

Firstly, Vhavenda people have got different way of approaching culture within themselves. Furthermore, there are different clans within the Vhavenda culture. The empirical study did not cover all the rituals and customs that are part of the bereavement process of the Vhavenda culture due to the complexity of these clans. These clans do things differently from other members of the same Vhavenda culture.

Secondly, most rituals require secrecy. Some participants could not reveal much of the important information and others suppressed the memories of the bereavement period and had forgotten the names of the herbs and other materials used during the mourning rituals. Although, the participants found it exciting and helpful to talk about their experiences of bereavement, others were still conservative and suspicious, believing that the researcher might put their information into “wrong hands”. Thirdly, culture has been evolving through times as a result; there were instances whereby a particular participant has mixed religions Christianity and non-believers of both culture and other religions, and provided different information from that supplied by other participants.

Lastly, some participants refused to participate, due to their knowledge of the funds given to previous researchers by the University of Venda (RPC funds). They complained that they give students information to help them receive funds while they do not get a cent from forming part of the study.

This qualitative study was thus conducted with a small sample size and was carried out in one village (Tshikombani) in Nzhelele. Thus, the results may not be generalised to more representative populations.

1.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter introduced the background on mourning and bereavement rituals and how these negatively affect many young widows worldwide. The statement of the problem portrays a situation in which information relating to the context of the bereavement rituals of exclusively young widows of South Africa and their overall experiences need to be apprehended, recorded and examined in full hence it seems unfair to young widows. The chapter also provides a clear motivation for conducting this study. The objectives and main questions of the study were set in order to guide the study to achieve its main aim, without overlooking the definition of key terms so as to assist the readers with the meanings of the terms used. Finally the study limitations are clearly and earnestly stated in this chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

“If man were immortal he could be perfectly sure of seeing the day when everything in which he had trusted should betray his trust, and, in short, of coming eventually to hopeless misery. He would break down, at last, as every good fortune, as every dynasty, as every civilization does. In place of this we have death”. ~Peters (2001)

2.1 Introduction

Peters’ words are full of wisdom; when a woman is married to a man, her closest family relatives become the in-laws. It is during the marriage process that a woman expects to be loved, idolised and cherished by the in-laws. When the moment of death strikes like lightning, often the love shown by family relatives to the wife evaporates into thin air. Hence, to the widow that is despondency. It is in the post-widowing period that the harsh reality of the real world becomes exposed to the widow. However, before getting too carried away by the conditions about the aftermath of bereavement, it is important to revisit and thoroughly examine the literature of death and bereavement, particularly the beliefs and customs, spiritual practices and certain expected behaviours, that are symbolic in the process of mourning a loved one.

Extensive literature on death and bereavement reveals that the process of mourning the dead is practiced worldwide and is mediated by religious and cultural practices in different societies (See, Radzilani-Makatu, 2015; Setsiba, 2012; Letsosa and Semanya 2011; Yawa, 2010; Radzilani, 2010; Dlukulu, 2010; Letsosa and Semanya 2011; Semanya, 2010; Selepe and Edwards, 2008; Bhana, 2008; Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007; Ngubane, 2004; Manyedi, Koen and Geef, 2003 and Maloka, 1995). When death occurs, there are prescribed behaviours and rituals performed, such as the clothing, how the bereaved are addressed, how feelings should be dealt with and what will be done to symbolize the separation of the deceased from the surviving family members (Parkes et al., 1997).

According to Kilonzo and Hogan (1999) some clearly prescribed and strict rituals exist in every tribe, determining for everyone the appropriate behaviour in the face of death. Despite the vast existing literature on death and bereavement, little research has been done on the experiences of young widows during death and bereavement. Thus, the primary focus of this investigation is on young widows because of their vulnerability to manipulation by in-laws when their husbands are dead, especially in a male-dominated African setting of patriarchy. In most cases, the process of bereavement is described as “grief work,” insinuating a number of tasks that must be systematically completed, in order to adapt to the situation (Stroebe, Hansson & Stroebe, 1993). Due to the patriarchal nature of society in Africa, women are at the receiving end during bereavement.

Stroebe *et.al*, (2001: 37) reflect that the romanticist views of grief date back approximately a century. In contrast to the modernist perspective, the concept of grief was far different for romanticists because close relationships were matters of bonding in depth. Thus, the death of an intimate other constituted a critical point of life’s definition. As a result, grieving signals the significance of the relationship, and the depth of one’s own spirit. Furthermore, valour was found in sustaining these bonds, despite a broken heart (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe 1992). Romanticists refused to dissolve bonds with the deceased because they did not want the relationship to be viewed as superficial. This way of viewing death and grief was expressed by some of the most famous poets of the 19th century, such as William Barnes and Emily Dickinson, who wrote often about being broken-hearted by a loved one’s death (Stroebe *et al*, 2001).

The postmodern perspective encourages a blurring of the rigid lines set forth by both modernist and romanticist perspectives. The postmodernist might profitably be concerned with the enormous variations in forms of bereavement. Rather than attempting to generalize, they would search for an appreciative understanding of grief in all its varieties (Stroebe *et al*, 2001:42). Stroebe and his colleagues further highlighted that bereavement might prove desirable on the therapeutic level to teach people that there are many goals that can be set, many ways to feel, and no set series of stages that they must pass through, and that there are many forms of expression and behavioral patterns that are acceptable reaction to loss.

A study conducted by Manyedi, Koen & Greef (2003: 40-57) explored the widowhood experiences and beliefs on the mourning process of the Batswana people. The findings indicated that among the Batswana people widowhood is conducted through cultural beliefs and customs, which may be a stressful event for the widows. Similar studies were conducted from different contexts by Bhana, (2008); Magudu, (2004) & Rosenblatt & Nkosi, (2007). The latter is findings on South African Zulu widows from poor households also outlined that, among other findings, the mourning rituals stretched over a year. In some ways mourning alienated widows from the entire society for the entire year, hence they are not supposed to resume their normal life, as well as participate in the social gatherings of the community and relatives, attend weddings or visit friends while still wearing the mourning garments. Ngubane's (2004) findings on the traditional burial practices of Zulu people revealed that most Zulu people are unable to perform their traditional custom due to the changed nature of environments that they live in. For example, the Zulu death rituals stipulate that the grave of a loved one needs to be within a homestead. However, dealing with bereavement is dreadful, and dealing with bereavement while the grave is in the yard could surely double the healing and forgetting period.

Radzilani (2010) also conducted a study on bereavement rituals in the Venda culture, with specific focus on African traditional versus African Christian perceptions. Another study conducted by Selepe & Edwards (2008) explored the intervention model of grief counselling by the African Indigenous churches (Mapostola) in Venda. The findings of the study stressed the way in which social support for the bereaved is valued within the Vhavenda communities. On hearing of the death a loved one, the bereaved expect support from families, friends and the entire community. The performance of death rituals is believed to bring the community together.

Dlukulu (2010) conducted a study which focused on the rituals performed after death of a loved one in the Black urban townships. A particular point of focus was on how widows in transitional societies experience bereavement and the bereavement rituals of loss and change. The findings of this study highlighted that bereavement in transitional societies is complicated by factors such as inability to perform all the prescribed traditional rituals, some of them being adapted. There could be other recent studies conducted on mourning in South African urban and rural contexts, however,

given the rapid number of deaths still occurring, research is imperative in order to explore the experiences of the people residing in Venda on how they deal with the death of a loved one. The preceding literature highlights the enormous work that has been done on bereavement and mourning within the South African context.

Letsosa & Semanya (2011: 1-7) conducted a study on the mourning processes of Basotho tribes with the aim of investigating and providing Biblical guidelines or perspectives regarding the perceptions that Basotho have on the issue of *go tloša setšhila* [traditional purification], which is the last phase of mourning. Basotho people believe that death occurs due to a specific cause. In many instances witchcraft and ancestors are seen as the main causes of death. Letsosa & Semanya (2011: 4) revealed that amongst the Basotho people there is still some misunderstanding and confusion regarding *go tloša setšhila* [traditional purification] and the rituals which accompany it.

2.2 History of Vhavenda people

The history of Vhavenda people has very little literature documented to the public. Moreover, the little that has been written, is believed to contain superficial and unreliable information (Ralushai. 1977:22). The history of the Vhavenda has fascinated generations of academics ever since missionaries like Beuster published works on the Venda people (Loubser 1988:2). Conventional perspectives vary with respect to the source of the Venda. History, as indicated by a few customs, the Venda are said to have begun from different ranges, for instance, from Egypt, Lower Congo, the Great Lakes zone, Vhukalanga, lastly the Northern Transvaal (Ralushai 1977:22). Another perspective is that the Venda started in Egypt from whence they cleared out on account of common wars following progression.

Duggan-Cronin (1928:13) posits that Vhavenda people came from central Africa and settled in the area in South Africa currently called Venda in the Limpopo province.

Luvenda currently known as Tshivenda, emerged as a distinct dialect in the 16th Century, While the history of the Venda started from the Mapungubwe Kingdom (9th Century) with king Shiriya-denga as the first king of Venda and Mapungubwe. Mapungubwe Kingdom developed,

extending from the Soutpansberg in the south, over the Limpopo River to the Matopos in the north. The Vhavenda are generally regarded as one of the last black groups to have entered the area south of the Limpopo River. Vhavenda people can be divided into 2 groups, namely a western group, primarily of Singo origin and descended from the followers of leaders such as Mphephu, Senthumule and Kutama; and an eastern group who regarded themselves as descendants of Lwamonde, Rambuda, Tshivashe and Mphapuli. (www.krugerpark.co.za/africa_venda.html)

During the Apartheid period, a homeland was set aside for the Venda people which was named “Thohoyandou” in honour of the great Venda chief of the same name. It became independent in the 1970’s. Today, the area is once again part of South Africa; located in the Limpopo Province. (www.krugerpark.co.za/africa_venda.html)

2.3 Experiences of young widows

Young widows are more vulnerable to certain challenges such as remarrying and caring for the family after losing their husbands. The focus of this research is the lived experiences of young women during bereavement. However, the grief experiences of older women will only be presented to provide a contrast to the findings related to younger women. An issue that arises in the study of widowhood is that of the physical, social and psychological health of widows. In their quantitative, exploratory study, Kirschling & McBride (1989) identified physical health changes with 72 widowed persons between the ages of 24 and 83 and found that the young widows experienced the highest degree of difficulty with physical symptoms, such as loss of sleep and fatigue. Parkes (1964) reviewed the health records of widows young, middle and old ages, investigating the effects of bereavement on the physical and mental health of widows. Parkes’ study shows that participants experienced depression, anxiety, and insomnia. Klass, Silverman & Nickman (2014) completed a qualitative study in Boston in which they interviewed a sample of 49 widows and 19 widowers who were under the age of 45.

Three interviews were conducted with each participant over the first year of bereavement. According to Parkes and Brown, younger widows reported sleep disturbances, socio-economic problems and changes in appetite and weight, as well as an increased use of alcohol, cigarettes,

and sedatives. Blanchard in Lang Bradley & Cuthbert (1997) made use of a semi-structured interview to study the health of 30 women widowed before the age of 45 years. The results of the study were centered on the fact that these young widows experienced both physiological and psychological responses to the shock of the death of their husbands. Hopelessness, worthlessness, depression, anger, restlessness, and fatigue were all present for these participants, with the most significant rise in these symptoms being reported around the beginning of the second year of bereavement.

2.4 Challenges experienced by Young widows

The most important issue arising in the study of widowhood is that of the physical, emotional and psychological health of widows. Physical health changes were identified in a quantitative, exploratory study done by Kirschling & McBride (1989). Thus, young widows were found to have experienced the highest degree of difficulty with physical symptoms, such as loss of sleep and fatigue, and increasingly, not coping in raising their children and taking full responsibility of managing the family. Zisook & Schuchter (1991) studied the adaptation of 350 widowed women between the ages of 26 and 85, who had been widowed for at least seven months. Their study focused on mental and physical health, and the findings confirmed that younger widows experience more negative consequences of bereavement than the older women. To some extent, young widows still have a need for companion and romantic involvement. All the interviewed widows expressed some degree of depression and anxiety, as well as a longing for the presence of, or connection with, the deceased husband. The younger widows were also found to be more likely to feel helpless in their situation and to react emotionally to the changes they go through.

According to Pearlin's theory in Norris & Murrell (1990) of how individuals handle stress, one explanation is offered for the effects of widowhood at a young age, events that are scheduled or expected have much less influence on our lives than the unexpected events. He further elaborates that the impact of an experience is most clearly identified by the way it is integrated into the individual's daily life. Hence, death does not result only from long diseases but also sudden illnesses, accidents and other mysterious life shut down. Kaltman & Bonanno (2003) postulates

that since “sudden death would be an instance where anticipatory grief would have been absent, then sudden death would be associated with stronger, more intense grief”.

Ball’s study found that for younger widows whose husbands died suddenly, grief came as a surprise. Thus, they displayed a more severe grief reaction than any other group of widows. Part of the foremost pain for young widows, is a feeling of losing a companionship at an earlier age. This is attested by the study conducted by Akinlabi (2013), investigating the differences that existed between young and old widows and their amenability to coping mechanisms and resources. The study revealed that older widows adjusted to resources (emotions, social, economic and job role) than young widows. This may be due to the fact that older widows have enough experiences, social networking and elongated or elastic coping mechanisms than the younger widows. The study further confirms that young widows frequently conflict more with their in-laws.

2.4.1 Economical challenges faced by young widows

Young widows are among the poorest subpopulations (Administration on Ageing, 2013; Munnell, 2004; Weaver, 2010; Wilmoth & Koso, 2002). Widows of all ages are more commonly living at or below the poverty edge, and more often require social programme assistance (Munnell, 2004; Weaver, 2010). Sossou (2002), highlighted that widow's monetary difficulties are of the view that the impacts of widowhood are related with the financial difficulties that incorporate the loss of the provider or co-provider. This automatically results in poverty, wellbeing challenges related with poor sustenance, deficient or no safe house, absence of access to human services and powerlessness to violence. It has also been suggested that financial hardship or stress corresponding with or following death of a partner may hamper coping responses, increase the likelihood of depressive symptoms and complicate adjustment to bereavement (Keene and Prokos, 2008; Baarsen and van Groenou, 2001; Byrne and Raphael, 1994.; Keene and Prokos, 2008). If bereavement is accompanied by reduced economic resources or insufficient income, grieving can be prolonged or intensified (Hansson and Stroebe, 2006; Murdoch et al., 1998).

On the other hand, economic and financial possessions might help protect against depression and the psychological stress of grieving, and reduce the risk of mortality following the death of a

partner (Hansson & Stroebe, 2006; Martikainen & Valkonen, 1998; and Lillard & Waite, 1995). Thus, economic and material resources are able to protect some people from extra stress of bereavement, limit or prevent poor health outcomes. Henceforth, respondents in Carton's (2003) study according to Anderson, (2009) shared their encounters of agony from "grieving weakness" and getting to be "poorer with every entombment," as a result of the quantity of funerals and the monetary weight this achieves. Rosenblatt & Nkosi (2007) demonstrate how the financial setting shapes bereavement practices, as many young widows do not have sufficient energy to mourn.

As a way of dealing with stress for widowers, sorrow and misfortune are pushed aside as individuals attempt to discover important methods for surviving. In a few groups, lamenting is translated as an "extravagance" (Demmer & Fall (2007). Also, to intensify their predicament, the dowagers are denied access to their significant other's real estate parcel to homestead, houses and creatures, and they are without a voice in such manner. In case of them endeavoring to respond, they are whipped, criticized, manhandled, and alienated (Ewelukwa, 2002).

Woolard & Leibbrandt (2010) mention that widows in South Africa currently do not receive any financial provision from government, but have to apply for disability grants or old age pensions when they reach the required age. Research has showed that 45% of the widows receive no financial or material support from children, family or church: 80% of widows within the geographical area researched are unemployed, they are aged 36 or older and have been widowed for more than six years. These women support (alone) on average three to five children each, as well as their immediate family and, very often, five or six grandchildren, too (Dunn *et al*, 2015).

Mallan (1975) researched on the needs of young widows and determined that much of what widows reported as "helpful" came in the form of financial resources and even temporary housing. Circumstances before and after the loss of a spouse can have a significant impact on the economic wellbeing of widows and their households (Smith & Zick, 1986). This is because the death of a husband may also involve losing a portion or even all of the household income and benefits for young widows. Longer widowhood, therefore, becomes an important factor associated with the elevated risk for living in poverty during early to middle adulthood (Berkman, 1988). For this reason, most young widows resort to re-marrying, and this is where the late husband's family in

most cultures organise a new husband for the young from one of his brothers. According to the findings in the research conducted by TWR-SA (2013), a widow cannot even be sure that she will be allowed to keep the money and property that she herself worked for and earned. If an inheritance is available, such as a household, cars, cattle or money, the widow's family-in-law often lays claim to it.

TWR-SA (2013) classify this in two ways; the widow herself can be inherited by a male member of her dead husband's family, forcing her to marry him. In addition, the family-in-law gains control of the property and children. In many cases with the absence of a 'will', especially in the rural areas, the family in-laws may simply take everything, and let the widow take care of herself and her children, if available. The society expects that the widow to cover all the funeral expenses, more especially if the husband was employed or if the widow has a job. The in-laws also fold their hands, expecting the widow to cover all the costs. This continues even after the funeral. Thus, the widow is expected to organize a cleansing ceremony for her husband, erect and pay for the tombstone and other things required for the success of the ceremony (also see De Witte, 2003).

2.4.2 Social Challenges Faced by Widows

The bereaved may face different challenges stimulated by death. The challenges may differ according to age, gender and socio-economic class. Khosravan *et al*, (2013) mentions that the role of transformation from a wife to widow position is a stressful event, especially for young single-widows who experience many social problems. The young widow is likely unable to survive the trauma, due to lack essential support. Therefore, young widows require more careful attention from families and community members. Fazoranti & Aruna (2007) conducted a Cross-Cultural comparison of practices relating to widowhood and widow-inheritance among the Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria. The study explored the differences and similarities in the matters relating to the death of a woman's husband among two cultures selected in Nigeria. Purposive sampling was practiced in choosing respondents of both widows and non-widows. Age, sex, economic class and experience of the widowhood was considered. Data was collected and recorded using interviews. The findings showed that most of the rites have found their way to the modern day, some being practiced only technically. Furthermore, because most widows suffered exclusions and emotional

abuse from the in-laws family, religious needs and practices, modernization, education and ownership of personal properties and lucrative employment by women, the mass media is abound with the outcry against dehumanizing treatment of widows, voluntary associations that support and defend the widows among others have brought about changes in the lives of widows in Nigeria. (Mwagi, 2015).

The current research focuses on experiences of death and bereavement faced by widows, coping strategies and adjustment after they lost their partners. But Fazoranti & Arunas' findings could inform the present study, to some extent, on the social and economic challenges experienced by widows, such as property ownership, education, employment and dehumanizing treatment of the widows under investigation. Kadoya (2015) studied widow discrimination and family care-giving in India at the home of 42 million widows, which is a group that represents the most unreached persons in the world (Anthony, 2013). Moreover, those widows lived under appalling conditions suffering due to starvation and lack basic needs (Punnoose, Khattab & Al-Tamimi, 2013). The study analyzed the household data collected through in-depth interviews of individuals and households in six major Indian cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata and Hyderabad. The target populations were adults aged 20 to 70 years. Multi-stage sampling was used. Responses were randomly collected within each stratum. From the data set, the research chose 794 observations from participants who had re-married. The results from the six cities indicated that overall, there was no evidence that widow discrimination prevailed nationally. However, there were some regional differences, but these were not significant (Mwangi, 2014).

“In other to face all these arduous challenges the bereaved widows appears to result to coping mechanisms like adaptive mechanisms, that offers positive help, attack mechanisms, avoidance mechanisms, behavioural mechanisms, cognitive mechanisms, conversion mechanisms, defense mechanisms, self-harm mechanisms, crying, denial, compensation, displacement, dissociation, emotionality, fantasy help rejecting complaining (sic) , idealisation, identification, intellectualisation, introjection, passive aggression performing rituals, post traumatic growth projection, provocation, rationalization, reaction formation, regression, repression, self-harming somatization, sublimation, substitution suppression symbolization and trivializing undoing.” (Akinlabi, 2013).

2.5 Ubuntu

South African cultures revolve around Ubuntu in order for individuals to survive various circumstances, to respect and help other fellow citizens, where necessary. Thus, the spirit of Ubuntu is important in the African culture during times of death and bereavement. The aspects of Ubuntu which are extracted from Mbigi's collective five finger theory for the construct alignment with this study are compassion, respect and dignity.

2.6 Compassion

Compassion is the value that illustrates the quality of understanding of the other one's problems and feelings, with an aim and urge for helping them (Sigger, Polak & Pennink, 2010). When Africans grow up, they learn that they are all interconnected to one another and only by sharing and giving they can eventually receive (Mbigi, 1997 and Broodryk 2006). 'Sorrow shared is half sorrow', therefore people have to practice sincere sympathy for one another (Broodryk, 2006). According to Mangaliso & Mangaliso (2001) members of a family or a society can create a shared vision through personal understanding and caring for each other. This personal understanding and caring will eventually lead to the feeling of belonging to the society. Also Poovan *et al.* (2006) posits that the dimension of Compassion is about a deep caring and understanding of each other. Through this caring and understanding, members of society can strive towards a shared vision. During hard times for the families within the society, all the members share the burden. Africans believe that "Two hands are better one", therefore, the bereaved and in this case, the young widows are not unaided during the whole bereavement process. In this study, findings will depict the practice of compassion under the umbrella of Ubuntu as practiced by Vhavenda society during death and bereavement.

2.7 Respect and Dignity

Since the dimensions Respect and Dignity are closely related, the two concepts are used interchangeably in this research as one dimension. Previous studies of Poovan *et al.* (2006) and Broodryk, (2006) do not make a distinction between Respect and Dignity. Thus, they describe them as one dimension. In the African culture, those dimensions are considered as one of its building blocks and in the collective five fingers theory they are seen as the cardinal social values (Sigger, Polak & Pennink, 2010).Therefore, Respect can be defined as objectives, unbiased consideration and regard for rights, values, beliefs and property (Yukl, Gordon & Taber, 2002 & Poovan *et al.*, 2006). When Africans grow up, they learn to respect the elders and other members of their community and in this way, they receive dignity. According to Mbigi & Maree (1995), unconditional respect is the foundation of effective performance. High levels of Respect and Dignity in a society, will lead to high levels of mutual trust, which in turn will lead to a great societal performance. Respect can be perceived as the foundation of Ubuntu. According to Mangaliso (2001) and Broodryk (2006), decision-making under Ubuntu is harmony seeking. Different perspectives are seen as interesting and as providing new valuable insights to the societies. The diversity of vision is encouraged and protected and is based on Ubuntu values. It also demands that the human dignity of all people should be respected and protected (Sigger, Polak & Pennink, 2010). This is exactly in line with the conception that all people are important and equal, disregarding the age, gender, race and culture. The skill of love and empathy in African cultures is also highly honoured (Sigger, Polak & Pennink, 2010).

2.8 Coping strategies of young Widows

Losing a loved is one of the most difficult and traumatic experiences to live through (Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). Although individuals and families can be affected in different ways, the elements of grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance always remain in full force (Hashim, Mei Li, & Guan, 2013; Sullivan, da Rosa Silva & Meeker, 2015). In many developing countries, widows' coping strategies with loss involve exploitative informal segment work, putting children into child labour to earn money for survival, begging for money, food and other things in the streets in town. Some encourage their children to engage in commercial sex and illicit liquor due to lack

of finances (Punnose, 2013). He adds that some widows, despite the death of partners have been able to use determination and courage in the face of the death and calamity, others individually or in collaboration with other widow recovery support. The findings revealed that, a natural resilience is the main constituent of grief and traumatic reactions.

Mwangi (2014) added that grief responses can take many forms, including what Bonanno called the “coping ugly”. In her studies on grief, Kubler-Ross (2012) asserts that, mourning time depends on the nature of loss experienced and differs from person to person and therefore no fixed amount of time for grieving. For a young widow to engage in the coping process, she should first acknowledge the bereavement processes. This is because it is natural at the time of loss. The loss of a loved one go hand in hand with the bereaved’s responses, which necessitate coping. Blyth (in Baumann, 1998:123) emphasizes that this adaptation is necessary because, in South Africa with its high levels of political, criminal and domestic violence, many people face extremely traumatic losses.

Browning & Kendig (2016) conducted a Longitudinal Studies on Health Ageing (MELSHA) from 2013 and argued that dealing with widowhood has remained largely in the private domain. Many widows and their families are usually left to cope by their own means, with little attention from governments or other service providers. Further, widowhood could also be experienced by the affected as a positive change, and if a marriage was unhappy or burdensome, it may even come as a relief, as expressed by widows who experienced less strain and greater capability to make plans and implement them after the loss (Colette *et al*, 2013). According to Patterson (1996) widows adjust to life after their husband’s death better if they were involved in physical activities, obtained support from the family members and community and when they developed new interests.

George, & Chukwuedozie, (2013) mention that widows in South-West Nigeria are responsible for people who depended on their late husband before they died, as well as close or extended family members. Thus, the widows resume all the responsibilities from their husbands and become the heads of their families. They become the breadwinners even for the relatives that they took care of. For the widow who has not acquired enough education to have a career, this is a very difficult

task to carry out. Additionally, the widow will not be given a chance to further their studies and become successful. Akinlabi (2013) adds that the customary law in the Nigerian culture restricts women from having the right to own land and property. Without land or ownership of any property, widows are bound to be poor. This will result in pretty much mischievous behaviours from both the widows, particularly the young widows and children from those widows.

The main purpose of the current study was to explore the experiences, challenges faced by young widows of Tshikombani and the coping strategies. The respondents reported a change in association, loneliness, and the violation of their rights as women and as humans by the in-laws.

2.8.1 Cultural Coping Strategies and grief therapy

Culture in both western and African countries is defined, described, and understood in many different ways. Furthermore, the understanding of what culture means fluctuates according to, ironically, various cultural understandings. In essence, culture plays a role in shaping how a society understands death. In addition, the way death is observed through a specific cultural eye has a significance impact on how death is understood and responded to. “Whether people die according to a certain religious or cultural prescriptions, will surely shape the grieving process” (Anderson, 2010, p. 134). All cultures have a certain and different approach or response to grief and loss; the precise cultural beliefs, values, expressions, expectations, ceremonies, and rituals also give certain meaning to loss in different ways (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Anderson, 2010). In addition, examining the prominence of recognizing potential cultural factors when dealing with someone experiencing grief and loss, and to take into account that the cultural prospect through which they understand and cope with the loss is imperative. “Appreciation of cultural assortment and norms regarding loss, sacraments, and cultural constructions of grieving is important in order for professionals to understand the meaning of loss for different groups of people across the life span” (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 11).

Even though cultures can vary dramatically, some general definitions fit most accepted understandings about what culture is. The Dictionary of Modern Thought defines culture as

simply, “the social heritage of a community”, which is pertinent but vague (Dictionary of Modern Thought, as cited in Parkes, *et al.*, 1997). A more comprehensive description of culture can be understood as, “The sum total of the possessions, ways of thinking, and behavior which distinguish one group of people from another and which tend to be passed down from generation to generation” (Parkes, Laungani, & Young, 1997, p. 10). Another core feature of all cultures is that they maintain their own values and traditions although the values and traditions of each culture differs with other culture. The last core feature of cultures is that they are structured and maintained based on an evolving system of social norms and communication networks that set personal, familial, and social conduct standards (Parkes, *et al.*, 1997). Secondary features of all cultures include things like “a common language or group of languages”, typical housing or living arrangements, and a shared and agreed upon “moral and legislative system” (Parkes, *et al.*, 1997, p. 15).

The members of every society are well aware of the cultural norms, values and traditions. Therefore there are very clear social norms and expectations for responding to big life events, including a death of a loved one. “Societies in which there are a clearly defined rituals and etiquettes for people to follow in dealing with a bereaved person like Africa, may have few problems with the feelings of being abandoned that many bereaved in other countries such as America report” (Rosenblatt, 1997, p. 47).

Culture plays a significant role in the way an individual understands and responds to grief and loss and can be a significant factor in an individual’s capability to cope with loss and become resilient even in spite of that loss (Kuehn, 2013). Although death and bereavement are experiences that affect everyone in the world, they are “culturally embedded” and perceived according to that culture’s norms, values, beliefs and traditions (Anderson, 2010, p. 134; Rosenblatt, 1997, p. 31). Furthermore, overlooking the cultural involvement could increase the chances of miscommunication when counselling someone regarding their grief and loss. There is an expectation that individuals get over a loss quickly, stay strong and move on. Culture in bereavement and loss plays a significant role on the way an individual understands and responds

to grief and loss, and can be an influential factor on an individual's ability to cope with loss and become resilient, regardless of that loss (Kuehn, 2013).

Blyth (in Manyedi, 2007:44-48) stated the following process that people go through when dealing with loss: Feelings of: sadness, loneliness, anger; guilt, frustration, anxiety; shock, helplessness, numbness; Behaviours: sleep disorders and appetite disorders, dreams about the late; social withdrawal, avoiding or seeking out reminders of the deceased person; restlessness and over activity, crying. Thoughts: failure to think clearly, concentrate or remember things which had happened; obsession with the thoughts of the deceased. Physical sensations: a hollow feeling in the ditch of the stomach, tightness in the throat or chest; oversensitivity to noise; and muscle weakness, loss of energy and shortness of breath. These symptoms are normal and expect reactions which may be reassuring to the widow. Although, If they exceed the acceptable severity and period, and coping is not forthcoming, then these symptoms are denoted as disordered mourning, pathological grief, or morbid or complicated grief as described by Blyth (in Baumann, 1998:123), these are also observed in a variety of study findings, such as the study conducted by Cebekhulu (2015), who found that women who did not wholly deal with their loss reported to have physical sicknesses and mixed emotions. Kleinke in Manyedi (2007) recommends the following coping skills that the widows may take advantage of: accepting her loss as commendable for grief work; being open to the mourning experience; adapting to the new life after losing a loved one; finding a meaning for death; letting go; recognizing our individuality; and understanding how to offer support.

2.9 Bereavement rituals in the South African Culture

African mourning rituals have very few similarities; they mostly differ according to the social status, gender and age of the deceased. Rituals reflect the beliefs and attitudes towards death. However, in almost all societies the mourning rituals begin immediately after a family member has been confirmed as dead (Mkhize, 2008). The period preceding the burial is always accompanied by certain rituals that will be performed. These include the smearing of the windows with ashes, to reflect a low-spirited atmosphere turning wall pictures from sight, switching off radios and television sets, to avoid any form of entertainment (Bopape, 1995). It appears that

culture may influence the experience of grief and that there is diversity in the inner personal experience that follows the death of a loved one (Appel, 2011). The justification behind all these efforts is to demonstrate openly the intensity of their deep sorrow and remorse. Again, the rationale would be to signify death to the whole community. Apple further explains that in most African societies, when a death is announced, the family is immediately regarded as ‘polluted’ (isinyama’) or ‘sefifi’ in Setswana, which implies a negative shadow or cloud (Zulus) consider a family death to have contaminated the remaining family members and relatives of the deceased.

In Zulu culture, death is perceived as a highly strengthened form of contamination or pollution. The closest family of the departed will be contaminated and anyone who touches the corpse will also be regarded as such (Setsiba, 2012: 21). In addition, it is also believed that when a death occurs in a Vhavenda family, the family members have been symbolically crushed by a mud wall and need to be released. This imaginary wall surrounding the survivors symbolizes their bereavement (Radzilani, 2010; Selepe & Edwards, 2008). As a result, they may not take part in normal life activities of the society until they have been purified or cleansed through the performance of a ritual. There is a mourning, period which usually takes longer for the family of the deceased. This mourning period prescribes to the family what acceptable behaviours are and what are not until the stipulated end of the mourning period. As an example, Gumede (1990) highlighted the behaviours that are regarded as taboo in traditional African societies during the mourning period, such as overeating, losing one’s temper, talking loud or laughing. All things were to be done in moderation.

Ngubane (1977) poses that the central role of a married woman whose husband had died is designated as the principal mourner. The beginning of the mourning period in the Bapedi culture, will include the chief mourner occupying a sacred mourning physical space. This could also mean being isolated from the community for the period of mourning. The chief mourner, whether a male or female, will usually be in the main bedroom on a mattress or floor or on the traditional mat, called ‘legogo’ (recently, because of the scarcity of traditional mats, a mattress will be used which will be un-mounted from the stand) where he or she will be spending most of the time (Bopape, 1995; Mkhize, 2008). The chief mourner will be covered with a blanket and she fasts and only married women will be allowed to sit with her. The widow will wear a black clothing or mourning

attire 'inzila' (Mbizana, 2007), which is a dress precisely designed for mourning. In other traditions, such as but not limited to Tswanas, the children of the deceased will also wear small black pin on the calf of the hand to show that they are observing the mourning period of (Setsiba, 2012: 21).

The members of every society are expected to conform to the bereavement rituals and South Africa is no exception to this case, as mentioned in the background. However, there are different sub-cultures in South Africa, namely, the Bapedi, Vhavenda, Batswana, Tsongas, Zulus, Swatis, Ndebeles, Xhosas and Ba Sotho, each dealing differently with bereavement and mourning rituals. Literature shows that there are minor similarities in the performance of bereavement rituals of African cultures and specifically the South African cultures, such as shaving of the head, slaughtering of an animal and widows wearing black or blue clothes for a mourning period. Xhosa people are found in the eastern and western part of South Africa. In Xhosa culture, a deceased is not regarded as dead but alive in another world, that is believed to be the "*abaPhanzi*", the ancestral world. They maintain the bond of the dead and those who are alive. When a woman loses her husband, the elders shave the hair on her head and burn it with the clothes of her husband. They also give her black loose garments to wear for 12 months and slaughter a beast because the man was a head of a family. Xhosas slaughter a blemish-less goat for the death of other members but a beast for specifically "important" people or leaders, and for a period of about two weeks the elderly women stay with the widow to provide emotional and physical support (Yawa, 2010:24).

The Zulu culture is similar to the Xhosa, by virtue of them both originating in the Nguni tribe. However, Yawa (2010:24) states that apart from widows shaving of hair and wearing black garments, Zulus deal with death through funeral rituals. They wash hands by the grave side, as a symbol of washing away death and the widow is ordered by the elders to confine at her home in order not to spread bad luck until the bereavement period elapses. Then the maternal uncles will cleanse her with herbs and allow her to wear normal clothes (Manyedi, 2003: 78)

The Tswana people's perception of bereavement differs profoundly with the Xhosa and Zulu, each process has a meaning, Batswana people slaughter an ox and only at dawn. The bereaved relative hold the chime of the ox and throw it with one hand inside the grave saying incantations. The ox

meat will then be cooked and eaten without salt, as a sign of unhappiness. Besides shaving their heads, the bereaved wear a handmade necklace while waiting for the uncles to bring new clothes for the cleansing ceremony. A similar process of bereavement procedures are followed by Bapedi culture. However, the Pedi widow is forbidden from visiting neighbours arriving home after sunset, attending family and community functions while still wearing black mourning garments for a period of a year. The black garments are believed to symbolize the dark cloud which must be prevented from people (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata, 2014:232). Immediately after the burial, the widow participates in the rituals of washing the hands and the feet, and the grave is sprinkled with water treated with *leilane* (*Pelargonium* sp.), which is a plant used extensively to neutralise the effects of the widow's body and traditional attire, consisting of the back and front skin aprons which are normally white in colour. The aprons are blackened with a mixture of fat, earth and the baked or scorched kernel of the *motšhidi* (*Ximenia caffra*) fruit whilst the tips of her double-pointed back apron are cut off.

The Pedi widow is also given a black head cloth and dress, and wears a special headband made of python skin (for a woman of *mošate*) or cow skin (for common women), all of which are referred to as clothes of darkness (*sefifi* or *senyama*) (Pauw 1990). As in many contemporary African villages in South Africa, the Bapedi widow is expected to wear black clothes and behave in a manner that shows that she is grieving' (Kotzé *et al.* 2012:754). A Mopedi widow also has to give way to other road or path users whom she meets along the road or path. Kotzé *et al.* (2012) mentioned that the widow wearing black clothes also has to sit at the back of a bus or taxi, so as not to expose other passengers to her back and the possibility of 'bad omen or luck'. (p. 755). Some mourning rites are believed to also have the aim of removing *Senyama* (bad luck or misfortune) that is said to surround the widow, and which makes people discriminate against her or fear her. Manala (2015), concedes that, "If the widow knows that the purpose of the traditional widowhood rites is to remove the alleged bad luck or *senyama*, it can be therapeutic. As such, it can be experienced by the widow as facilitating her integration with the community, which she desperately longs for".

This section describes some of the widowhood rites performed in Limpopo. The description is based on a study conducted by Pauw, in 1990, and confirmed by other researchers in some other

African contexts. Most of these rites are meant to purify the widow from the perceived “*Makgoma*” or defilement, brought about by the death of her husband, and to neutralise the effects of ritual danger embedded in widowhood. However, the rights are not limited to the facts presented in the section. There are many other practices from different African cultures.

In the Bapedi culture in Limpopo, the widow participates in a general washing of the hands and feet immediately after the burial. Furthermore, the grave is sprinkled with water treated with *leilane* (Pelargonium), which is a plant believed to comprehensively neutralise the effects of death. The elders then blacken the widow’s body and traditional garb, with a mixture of fat, earth and the baked or scorched kernel of the *motšhidi* (*Ximenia caffra*) fruit, whilst the tips of her double-pointed back apron are cut off. The mixture consists of the back and front skin aprons which are normally white in colour. The widow is also given mourning garments comprising of a black head cloth and dress, and wears a special headband made of cow skin (Pauw, 1990)

It is however, important to note that literature shows that in most cases these cultural practices place heavy and more burdens on widows. Many of these practices are also particularly emotionally, physically and/or financially harmful to the widows. When the widow’s husband dies, mostly the widow is perceived to be unable to make any concrete decisions. Decisions are imposed on her, commonly by her family-in-law. Living patterns are similar in African cultures, although each African society or sub-culture may differ in the number of routines and beliefs and Vhavenda sub-culture of South African societies is no exception.

The Vhavenda cultural mourning rituals are barely explained in the literature, documented or published, leaving a question as to whether the bereaved do benefit from or heal through the rituals and how the rituals are performed. This study seeks to explore the experiences of death and bereavement amongst the Vhavenda young widow, with the aim of explaining the feelings of the young widows after loss of the loved ones, as well as the effectiveness of the type of a mourning procedure presented by the society to the widows.

2.10 Socio-Cultural Diffusion

Societies are continuously faced with pressures caused by evolution and modernization to change some of their traditional practices in an effort to improve quality of life in the modern day. However, the benefits of Modernisation cannot be accomplished without displacing some entrenched customs and introducing new social organizations and technologies (Bandura, 1986). King (2011) asserted that societal norms, religion criteria and gender power relations infuse meaning into behaviour, enabling positive and negative change. Sociological theories assert that society is broken up into smaller subcultures. Furthermore, it is within a member of one's immediate surrounding the peer group that one mostly identifies with, that has most significant influence on individual's behavior. Bandura (1986) explains this as *social incentives*. In this case, young widows will do things for approval and refrain from actions that arouse anger from the elders and other members from their society. This suggests that the development of social incentives is crucial for successful human relationships, especially in rural areas, where people expect certain cultural behaviours from the members of society.

Bandura (1986) also refers to *status and power incentives*. Social power provides a measure of control over the behaviour of others. Thus through symbolic display and exercise of the power individuals possess, they wield jurisdiction over the group's life, enjoy material rewards, social recognition and privileges associated with high social ranks. Social changes are resisted when they arouse apprehension, conflict with entrenched customs and threaten the status and power structures. Thus, young widows are expected to succumb to the laws and customs of bereavement processes that exist in their cultural setting, in order to be approved and accepted by the members. Alienation to the customs of bereavement may cause the society to disown or reject the widow.

According to Manala (2013), it is clear that young widows accept many of the practices because they are under a cultural obligation, not because they are pleased to accept it. Widows often accept to have the mourning rites and practices performed to them because non-compliance is viewed as disrespectful for their deceased husbands, family, culture, themselves and the community. This is influenced by the fact that widows are regarded as carriers and transmitters of bad luck and

defilement that are harmful to the community. Thus, they are compelled to comply unquestioningly with these rites and practices, however painful and distressing they experience them (Manala, 2015).

2.11 Death as a community event/ the role of a community to the bereaved

Another common way that death is experienced in many other cultures is to treat it as a social or public event. This integration of the entire community into the grief process provides support and mutual sharing for the immediate family of the deceased. In the Hispanic culture, an individual sharing their loss with their extended family and community are encouraged (Walsh, 2007). This is providing support but also taking some of the grief off of the family and giving it to the community, in essence sharing the grief load with them, rather than leaving them to deal with the grief in private. The Jewish traditions on death and bereavement are focused on providing support for the individual dying as well as the bereaved, in an attempt to “dispel the loneliness that comes with death and bereavement, and to embrace the dying and bereaved within the Jewish community” (Levine, 1997, 02).

A study conducted by Khosravan, *et al.* (2013), revealed that in the expression of social norms and coercions, these women adopt a set of ‘self-restricting’ behaviours in order to prevent being socially stigmatized and bothered, and also to reduce male attention on them so that they can be present in society without a spouse or male support. Khosravan and colleagues further mention that one of the same is avoiding feminine behavioural clichés (sic).

2.12 The Role of family and Society during bereavement

Family is the primary institution for all human beings born in it, and the first and most bereaved after a loss of one family member will always be the family members, who essentially resided closer to the deceased. Family therapists have also observed that, “Of all life experiences, death poses the most painful adaptation challenges for the family as a system and for every other surviving member, with reverberations for all other relationships” (McGoldrick, Walsh & Anderson 1991, xv).

Family members are extremely emotionally connected and they react to one another's needs, anxiety, and distress. The degree of interdependence varies, but families are often more emotionally connected than they might think. Family therapists such as Murray Bowen and Lynn Hoffman have discussed the impact the loss of a member can have on the family system (Hoffman, 1981 & Bowen, 1976). When death happens, most family members react with anxiety. According to Bowen, raised anxiety levels can lead to one or more family members feeling alone, depressed, or out of control. Given that, families face the highest moments of crises when they are renegotiating membership within the family, (Hoffman, 1981) mentions that it is not surprising that losing a family member, having to let go, or bringing a new member into the family is especially hard on those that have trouble reorganizing. When families experience the death of a loved one, there is an "emotional shock wave," a network of events that occur up to years after death (Bowen in Brown, 1999). Such a shock may result in emotional dependence on family members that is denied but is still present and affects the family's overall emotional balance (Brown, 1999). These may also result in other stress related illnesses such as stroke and heart failure. However, Krell & Rabkin in McGoldrick, Gerson & Petry (2008) found that after the family system encounters the loss of one of its members, adaptations are made in order to secure a new family balance connected through a loss.

After the death of a family member, new strategies are employed to try to maintain stability or "homeostasis." Among the most common homeostatic adjustments after a death, according to Bowlby-West (1983), is *enmeshment*, which occurs when family members fear the loss of another member, and therefore display overprotective behaviour and tighten the family boundary. Another strategy for maintaining homeostasis is through *family secrets*. An example is the family grieving the loss of a member to suicide. Death by suicide tends to bring guilt and shame to the surviving family members and they will often decide not to talk about the death or the deceased person. The silence enacts an understood family secret that is kept by all members and is usually passed down from generation to generation. Surviving family members just do not talk about it. As Nadeau explains, surviving family members struggle with reconfiguring an identity now that the loved one has died. Some family members may feel they have not only lost the deceased member, but also other living family members. This is a type of secondary loss.

Secondary losses almost always emerge over time as the death is processed. Rosenblatt (1996) points out that all that is lost is not concentrated at the time of loss, however “there is, instead a sequence, perhaps extending over one’s lifetime, of new losses or new realizations of loss”. Many theorists emphasize the idea that conflict and discord among members are common changes in the family after the loss of a loved one (Hoffman, 1981). They also agree that family members have to take on two different tasks after a death in the immediate family. First, they must grieve for the relationship they had with the deceased, and second, they grieve for the change in the family. Hoffman, (1981) notes that families face the highest moments of crises when they are renegotiating membership within the family. Losing a family member, letting go, or bringing a new member into the family, is especially hard on families.

Rituals are believed to be the best entry point to facilitate healing (Walsh & Mc Goldrick, 1991), because death is seen as dreadful and traumatic for the survivors (Bento, 1994). Each ritual in the traditional mourning process provides a vehicle for expression and containment of strong emotions (Kilonzo & Hogan, 1999; Romanoff, 1998). This indicates that grief reactions can be accompanied by strong emotions, and performance of bereavement rituals can serve as a technique of expressing those emotions. During bereavement and mourning periods, groups of people such as extended families, friends and community members, gather to express words and behaviours symbolic of support and comfort. Neighbours partake the opportunity to express their condolences, share what they have to support the mourners in dealing with the reality of loss. Therefore, rituals allow for those supportive interactions to happen which are trusted to strengthen family and group ties (Setsiba, 2012:19).

Apart from rituals, the amount of financial and emotional support provided by the family, community and society at large highly impacts on widows and widowers in identifying and utilizing coping mechanisms (Gunga, 2009). However, although a married woman is granted respect and a good standing in the community, the moment her husband is counted amongst the ancestors, she becomes a sexualised being (sic), a threat to the church and her community. As a single woman the widow begins to experience what other single women go through. She is not free to talk to any man, not even a qualified male who can assist her in her grieving experience.

She must not speak to men, in order for the society to label her as a pervasive and attempting to entice or seduce them. When there is urgency to speak to a man, she has to ensure that she has someone present. However, this can be limited to men who are not her blood relatives. Her interaction with her social networks is reduced as she is under surveillance by the community (Kapuma, 2011).

Kalu, (1989) mentions that the widowhood issue, like that of death, is often caught in myth or a mysterious outlay. All attempts are made to make the subject and its processes uncomfortable and painful, even in discussions. To those involved in the widowhood process this often involves disturbing and violent experiences from the very social support network intended or expected to deal away with the traumatic impact of widowhood. The pain is then aggravated by the fact that it is inflicted by those who are closest to her and whom she has to trust as sources of her comfort. Thus, support, both emotional and material, from the widows' families is valued highly, other support systems to the widows are associates, church members and neighbors (Manala, 2015). It seems, however, that the in-laws are not very supportive. This is according to widows' perceptions, from most studies conducted, but was also confirmed by most of the participants in the present study.

2.13 Social Support

Death brings about different kinds of treatments to the widows by family and friends. For some widows, widowhood is a time of inadequacy, family members and friends disassociate themselves from the widow, but for some widows it becomes a time of increased social and financial resources (Umberson, Wortman, & Kessler, 1992). When a husband dies, the widow becomes confused financially and emotionally, especially in a case where the deceased was the bread winner. This increases the potential need for adaptation and a hunting for other supportive channels (Helton & Smith, 2014). The literature also indicates that when one is stressed or bereaved, they most want social channels rather than confiscation (Dunn, Lehman, Chinchilli, Martin, Boushey, Israel & Peters 2015; Thoits, 2011; Somhlaba & Wait, 2008 and Prigerson & Vanderwerker, 2005-2006).

In addition, the need for support during stress and or bereavement is highlighted by the support theory which posits that in the centre of antagonistic conditions, individuals intend to expect and derive benefits from their trusted social networks. This includes the ability to better cope with stress and grief (Dunn *et al*, 2015; Hobfoll, & Shirom, 2001; Cohen & Willis, 1985 and Cohen & McKay, 1984). Personalities, perceptions, emotions, and resilience vary among individuals. These result in many widows finding it difficult to cope and experiencing stress with limited availability and helpfulness of comfort that is even cut short when their friends and family have come to the conclusion that the time has come for the widows to move on (Guiaux, Van Tilburg, Broese Van Groenou, 2007; Field, Gao, & Paderna, 2005; Nwoye, 2005).

Whatever type of support is of paramount importance in African principles, particularly when death has occurred in a family belonging to a certain community. According to Lennon, Martin & Dean, (1990) not purely the availability but the extent and eminence of the social support is an important element of resolution to grief.

Nwoye, (2005) argued that in the African culture, irrational grief is not mostly experienced due to the nature and the extent of support that the community provides to the bereaved family and individuals in particular. However, recent studies conducted on difficult grieving experiences, such as Cebekhulu (2015), which highlighted the presence of complicated grieving among South African young widows which could highlight the changing nature of the supportive functions of African communities. However, the studies do not highlight how social support and communities can prevent the commencement of extreme grief reactions in people, who have lost their loved ones. Findings from the present study also highlight that young widows generated support from friends and relative with most of them asserting to have generated support from friends.

2.14. Universal Declaration of Human rights (UDHR)

Local widows qualify for human rights from a global point of view and as South African citizens, as women and also qualify to attain property from their marriage as wives. According to Bustreo & World Health Organization (2013), the UDHR of 1948 is the first international mechanism that articulated the rights to be rendered to every individual. Furthermore, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. The collective assembly of the United Nations (UN) comprehensively adopted the declaration for an intercontinental pledge to human rights. She further adds that the declaration further elaborates that everyone has the right to own property and right away a full recognition to property rights as part of human rights was then granted. Thus, widows who have a right to their husbands’ properties should be given what is rightfully theirs, without disrespecting culture and traditions, widows as women and humans have rights to approval of any activity performed on their physiques.

The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights was the main regional instrument that protected human rights of women in Africa until very recent times. Apart from the general provisions in the African Charter that apply to all persons, article 18 has been devoted to; *inter alia*, the family, women, children, the aged and the disabled (Ouguergouz, 2003) . Article 18(3), which provides specifically for women states:

“It has been argued that women’s rights have been treated in a cursory and perfunctory manner because not only is it the case that women are mentioned in only one provision, but also, they are lumped together with other ‘quite complex and controversial notions of the family, tradition and morality’. Indeed a closer look at the provision suggests that women have been subsumed under a provision devoted to the family. (Cebekhulu, 2015; Leda Hasila Limann, 2003 & Ouguergouz, 2003).

2.15 Summary

This chapter presents studies on untimely spousal bereavement. It offers the perspectives of the lived experience of young widows. The literature presents no studies comprehensively exploring the specifics of living as a young widow. Some studies have been completed that address certain aspects of spousal bereavement in young women. However, none of these present the essence of the lived experience, including the process of rituals performed in Venda. The value of knowing the lived experiences of young widowhood lies in the opportunity to understand the unique challenges faced by young women. This understanding may enable health professionals, societies, friends and family members, to empathically relate to young widows and provide support and assistance

This chapter discusses the challenges experienced by young widows, experiences of young widows, sociological challenges faced by widows, Ubuntu, coping strategies for widows, culture coping strategies and grief therapy, bereavement rituals in South African culture theoretical construct of this study, socio-cultural diffusion, the role of family and society during bereavement, the impact of death on the young widows.

The literature review chapter provided the foundation for the study. It drew on debates from a Psychological, sociological and cultural perspective about death and bereavement. Widows, are encouraged to pursue and claim their rights to redefine their grieving. This chapter also provided an overview of the mourning rituals as experienced in different portions of the world, globally, Africa and South Africa to be precise. Although there are positive expectations from practicing the traditional mourning rituals, what emerged from the overview appeared to portray the young widows in most parts of the world as victims of dilapidation and sometimes ill-treated during the performance of mourning rituals. The next chapter will focus on the research methodology to be adapted when the researcher collects data, to attain the purpose of this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Studying of the death of a loved one is a sensitive subject that requires one to first understand the context that shapes the grief experience. The General and Specific Theories of coping with Loss, Attribution theory, Attachment theory, Kubler – Ross Model of Bereavement, and Mbigi’s Five Finger Theory which the study employed as the main theory. The latter mentioned theories will be discussed in order to make sense of the lived experiences of young widows while attempting to cope with the death of their spouse (Giele & Elder, 1998).

3.2 General and Specific Theories of coping with Loss

The concept of mental incongruity is a credible motivational understanding (Münch, 1972 in Kupsch, 2013; Tazelaar & Wippler, 1985). According to this framework, the behaviour of a person is formed by analogy in the joint values and current experiences, the alleged subjective organization. Incongruity refers to an inequality in the organization and is scheduled to be excellent when circumstances change (for example, royalty, and responsibility) are less fair. By introducing limited elements in the report of inconsistency, the philosophy explains why people do not ever manage to the degree of their standards or attitudes. The desolation experienced by the bereaved is regarded a mismatch in relationships, a “divergence between the ties one has and the ties one wants” (Dykstra & De Jong Gierveld, 1994, p. 245).

Relationships with other people may appear inappropriate when expectations of subsidy disenchant the current payment received. Bereaved persons with more civil subsidy or who are superior to morale have a more convenient surrounding for transformation. For this consideration, they befit to feel less isolated later, the loss of a companion than these with less relief or low self-image. In consonant with the logical framework, the ties not beyond a particular web are accepted

to have nearly the same spirit; however, loneliness after a partner's death can be moderated by any relationship other than that with the partner. However, for young widows, there is a huge necessity for a romantic relationship to fill the gap which was left by the deceased husband.

The viewpoint of interpersonal lonesomeness is an exact theory of loss and restoration that directs the emotional and relative mechanisms essential to the adjustment process. According to Weiss (1973), feelings of despair may commence in one or more comparative roles, like commitment, societal interactions, and comfort of feeling valued. The Findings of the study also confirmed that society provided more comfort to the young widows. Two types of solitude are identified in this framework: alienation over social detachment and despair about emotional segregation. In the first, solitude arise by a lack of civil union and in the recent, aloneness rise when there is drought of a strong devotion such as a husband. Thus, most widows in the literature chapter reported a lack of support from their in-law families and loneliness after losing their partners.

Losing loyal identity necessitates integrity destruction to young widows (Weiss, 1973). A precondition in adjustment to loss is the change of a new self-concept altogether. In supplement, Weiss argued that the loss of a devotion to the deceased individual can only be substituted by attachment to another close bond with another individual. Other supported relations cannot rectify the loss. The two theories, settle and dissent, separately, around the roles of self-regard and civil support in fading solitude after the loss of a loved one. The concept of mental incongruity offers a collective theoretic cage in which dignity, as well as social support, is one of many achievable opportunities for adjustment.

The concept does not distinguish in the centre of the differing roles of party to and social resources or opportunities to turn an unwanted element. On the diverse hand, the idea of relative solitude deceive specialized assumptions around the role of confidence and relates dignity to the treat of identity alteration. With respect to social responsibility, the strategy of mental incongruity predicts that responsibility of compassionate relations can overcome the lost relief from the companion, this is due to the fact that support is seen as a generic sympathetic excuse for opportunity. The idea does not differentiate bounded by specific association exercises. Instead, the theory of relational

Loneliness interprets the role of social encouragement on the grip of one's relation function, especially, attachment, and rejects the impression that other people such as friends, and qualified social and health personnel can prevent an individual from the impact of death of their loved ones.

3.3 Attribution theory

According to Gagne, Yekovice and Yekovice (1993) attribution theory is based on a cognitive approach and proposes that every individual attempts to explain behaviour, such as success or failure of self and others, by making certain attributions. Attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why they do what they do, that is, attribute causes to behaviour (Zuckerman, 2006), based on a three-stage process. One must first perceive or observe a behaviour, one must then believe that the behaviour was intentionally performed, and then determine if one believes the other person was forced to perform the behaviour in which case the cause is attributed to the situation; for example, the death of a spouse, or not in which case the cause is attributed to the other person (Kanfer, 1990)

The theory is relevant in this study because it could explain that participants' perceptions. Event perceptions and attitude change can impact on their self-esteem and their levels of anxiety (Tesser, Crepez, Collins, Cornell & Beach, 2000). Heider also believes that individuals act on the basis of their beliefs. Also, the participants' past experiences could have affected and contributed to how they dealt with their bereavement. However, not all behaviour can be accounted for by attribution theory, but the theory can be used as one way of identifying and explaining how behavior (negative or positive) may be related to other events that have occurred in the past. According to Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, (1999), people constantly make attributions and judgments about their own and others' behaviour. In doing so, situational influences tend to be underestimated, and dispositional influences are overestimated when understanding other people's behaviour.

This tendency leads to fundamental attribution blunders. Attributional judgements are influenced by many factors, including cultural differences (Choi, Nisbett, & Norenzayan, 1999). They also include ability, effort, task difficulty and luck, such as internal and external attributions (Weiner,

1983). Effort relates to an internal and unstable factor over which one can exercise a great deal of control. Ability relates to an internal and relatively stable factor over which one does not exercise much direct control. Level of task difficulty relates to an external and stable factor that is largely beyond one's control. Luck relates to an external and unstable factor over which one exercises very little control (Weiner, 1983).

External attributions (situational attribution) relate to causality, which is assigned to an outside factor, agent or force; for example, if a participant in the current study perceives herself as having no choice. Internal attributions relate to when causality is assigned to an inside factor, agent or force where one can choose to behave in a particular way or not, i.e. when behaviour is not influenced. For example, while a widow transitioning to Western culture is more likely to emphasize people's freedom of choice and not situations, a rural African widow's locus of control is more likely to be external. Her behaviour would more likely be interpreted in terms of situational attributions, and she then conforms to the traditional process of bereavement, which entails externalizing behaviours. The two widows maintain different sets of perceptions and beliefs because they are provided with information from different points of view, with different available information that is processed differently (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

The formation of impressions of others depends on the activation of appropriate categorical knowledge, the ability to attend to relevant aspects of behavior, and the efficiency with which attributes are encoded (Hess, 1994). Attribution theory also sheds light on depression that is associated with bereavement, as people who experience depression tend to have a particular attribution style where failures and negative events are attributed to internal, stable and global causes (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This style could contribute to a very complicated bereavement experience.

3.4 Kubler – Ross Model of Bereavement

At one stage, the bereaved must let go of memories shared with the deceased. The theory of Kubler – Ross proposes five overlapping stages of the grieving process namely; denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These processes may guide the young widows through letting go of memories and accepting the death of their husbands. Kubler argues that not everyone will experience all these stages and if one experiences all of them, she or he may not experience them in a particular order. The first stage is denial in which the bereaved is unable or unwilling to accept the loss or reality relating to the situation at hand (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2014). It is a natural defense strategy to avoid reality. When a bereaved person comes out of denial she experiences anger as she recognizes she does not have control over the death, widows dealing with emotional upset can be angry at themselves, death, people closer to her or the husband who left her in pain, depending on the nature of the death occurrence. Once the bereaved recognizes that, not even anger can bring back the dead they begin to negotiate for the return of the loved one.

This is the bargaining stage, people may bargain with God or the ancestors whom they believe in involves promises of better or improved behaviour in exchange of better behaviour (Kübler-Ross, 2009). When bargaining does not yield the results that the widow had hoped for, she is left depressed; this is the stage of depression which prepares the widow for grieving. Depression is a sign of acceptance coupled with emotional attachment. It is natural to feel sad after death, to fear, regret, be uncertain and miss the deceased husband. In the depression, stage the bereaved may cry, withdraw from the social relationships and have other disorders related to loss. The last stage is acceptance of the loss by the bereaved. Acceptance indicates the emotional detachment and objectivity of the bereaved after struggling with resistance (Bell, & Taylor, 2011). This study focuses on bereavement of young widows, so the last aspect states that the bereaved begin to plan about the future, and this is precisely the action that needs to be taken by a young widow who still has life ahead. This is the stage where the young widow decides to remarry or stay happily single. (Kübler-Ross, 2009).

3.5 Attachment theory

Worden, (1983) stated that the intensity of grief may be influenced by the way one is attached to the deceased. The attachment theory provides a means for people to understand the strong bonds of affection that individuals make with each other and the intense emotional reaction individuals may have when these bonds are broken. The main aim of the attachment behaviour is to maintain a bond of affection and any danger to this bond will give rise to very precise behaviour, such as crying and clinging (Parkes, 1999; Worden, 1983). According to (Bowlby, 1973) grief is conceptualized as a form of separation anxiety. Its aim is to retrieve or restore the proximity to what is lost. Bowlby categorized separation into three different phases; namely, the protest phase, the despair phase and the detachment phase (Bowlby, 1973). Seemingly, there are many good and suitable biological explanations regarding reasons for every separation, the response is automatic, instinctive and aggressive in nature (Appel: 2011:30). Through the course of evolution, behavioral responses of grieving became geared towards re-establishing a relationship with what is lost (Bowlby, 1973; Worden, 1983). Bowlby (1973) claimed that attachments stemmed more from a need for security and safety and not because of the person's biological drives that must be met (Worden, 1983).

Bowlby, (cited in Worden, 1983) identified how certain circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one could affect the characteristics, intensity and duration of the bereavement process. His grief theory explained a cycle of phases that the bereaved people experienced, the grief reactions and the time to reach recovery. During the initial phase of grief, the bereaved experience a sense of numbness and shock, and they might show outbursts of extreme intense distress or anger. At this stage the bereaved is unable to fully comprehend the impact of the death. In the second phase the bereaved protests the loss, search and yearns for the deceased to return. This stage triggers crying, anxiety, self-reproach, confusion and loss of security by the bereaved (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987). During the third phase, as the bereaved learns to live without the deceased, they experience an intense despair (Appel, 2011:30).

Cultural societies grieve differently. Vhembe society is one of the traditionally operated societies in South Africa. This study seeks to explore the bereavement experiences faced by young widows

during the traditionally-derived grieving methods. Parkes, (2000) built on past theories, to devise a new conceptualized grief experience and also viewed grief from an evolutionary perspective. He believed that “grief is not itself a unitary and universal phenomenon but is derived from the interactions of several components which are themselves universal” (Parkes, 2000, p. 323).

3.5.1 Parkes’ analysis of grief

“All social animals make and maintain attachments which are necessary for survival. It is in the nature of attachments that they resist severance. If a threat is perceived to the attachment (separation), neuro-physiological arousal occurs and behavioural inclinations (crying and searching) begin to achieve a reunion with the separated object. Attachments have high survival – value, attachment behaviours take priority over other tendencies. If the set goal of the behaviour is not accomplished, the behaviour will gradually diminish and the person becomes open to other attachments“

Attachment theory focuses on the disconnection of the relationship between the attached bereaved people to the dead. It highlights not just the social and cultural events occurring to the bereaved. Furthermore, neither the societal expectations of the bereaved, nor the bereaved individual’s expectations from the society are significant during bereavement in the African cultures. South African cultures revolve around Ubuntu, in order for individuals to survive various circumstances, respect and help other fellow citizens, where necessary. Therefore, the theory adapted the in this study is the Collective Five fingers theory in addressing the African values and bereavement experiences.

3.6 Five Fingers Theory

The principal theory upon which this study will be founded is the Collective Fingers Theory. Mbigi (1997) referred to these fingers as dimensions. Each finger represents five dimensions; namely, Survival, Solidarity, Compassion, Respect and Dignity. These dimensions are part and parcel of the African culture, which is founded on Ubuntu values. Whenever, there is death and bereavement in a family, these dimensions are the bonds that bind and console the bereaved family. According to Broodryk, the dimension of Survival and Solidarity can be seen as the heart of Ubuntu. African people rely on each other through brotherly caring.

African people combine their resources and strengths, and in this way, they create communities (Broodryk, 2006). When there is death and bereavement, compassion is the value that illustrates the quality of understanding of the other one's problems and the urge for helping him. When Africans grow up, they learn that they are all interconnected and only by sharing and giving can they eventually receive (Mbigi, 1997 and Broodryk 2006). Dimensions of Respect and Dignity are closely related, Poovan *et al.* (2006) and Broodryk (2006) do not make a distinction between Respect and Dignity either, and describe them as one dimension. When there is death and bereavement in the family, in the African culture, those dimensions may be considered as one of its building blocks, and in the collective five fingers theory they are seen as the cardinal social values.

3.7 Summary

This chapter presented the theoretical frameworks by scholars from diverse disciplines in the context of death and bereavement, and critiques were therefore established, where necessary. These models debate the superlative techniques to comprehend death and bereavement, to cope and move on after death has occurred. However, the current study employed the Mbigi's five finger theory of Ubuntu which embraces the African values, norms and traits for the reason that the study is conducted in the South African part of Africa in Tshikombani Village of Limpopo Province.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims at presenting the research methodology used in collecting and analyzing data for this study, so as to substantiate the choice of the research method, the data collection process and the data analysis which was implemented. Research methodology is defined as different approaches to systematic inquiry developed within a paradigm with associated epistemological assumptions (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007). Research methodology provides a description of the precise techniques used to conduct the study and the precise instruments that will be utilised, as well as the overall structure of the research draft. Tashakkori & Teddlie (2010) argues that research methodology is what makes social science scientific. The strengths and weaknesses of any research study depend mainly on the methodologies used.

4.2 Research approach

The primary objective of this study is to explore the personal “lived experiences” of death of loved ones, and bereavement amongst young Vhavenda widows in Tshikombani rural village of Nzhelele. This study will employ a qualitative research approach in order to gain original experience and in-depth data. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Delport (2013) define qualitative research as a method that involves natural and interpretive ways in approaching the respondents’ matters. The use of qualitative research method will allow the researcher to study situations in their own natural settings, as well as the underlying opinions and motivations; attempt to understand situations in terms of the meanings portrayed through actions.

The reason behind considering a qualitative research method is for the purpose of exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. It involves

using emerging questions and procedures for data typically collected in the participants setting (Creswell, 2007: 4). Schofield (2002) suggests that the main weakness in using a qualitative research method is that the size of the sample may not be generalizable.

Qualitative studies aim at providing illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues and are useful in answering humanistic “why” and “how” questions” (Green & Thorogood 2013). Qualitative research presents data as a descriptive narration and attempts to understand phenomena in ‘natural settings’ (Polit & Beck 2004). Qualitative researchers believe that the commission of a qualitative research is to acquire insight and develop understanding and getting close to the data in order to understand participants point of view (Punch, 2013). Qualitative research seeks to preserve the reliability of narrative data and attempt to use the data to demonstrate unusual core themes rooted in contexts (Creswell, 2012). On the other hand, quantitative research utilises statistical results represented by statistical records and aims to “test pre-determined hypotheses and produce generalizable results.

Basically, the methods used to collect, analyse and present the accumulated data provide a distinction between qualitative and quantitative. Eisner (2017) describes qualitative research as “a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. It presents information in words, in a descriptive narrative. It attempts to understand phenomena in ‘natural settings’.” “This method is helpful for answering more mechanistic *what* questions” (Mchunu, 2013).

This is expansively relevant for this study, as it is geared towards understanding and touching on the prospect of death and bereavement and the effects thereafter, which is a highly sensitive issue. According to Denzin & Lincoln (1994) qualitative research uses a number of methods “as it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter”. It involves the use of different materials, case studies, personal experiences, introspective, life story interviews, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe experiences and meanings in the lives of individuals (Setsiba, 2012). The choice of a qualitative research design in this study was grounded

on the need to acquire in-depth understanding of relatively unexplored phenomena that are loaded with value.

4.3 Research design

The design used in this study is exploratory. Research design is the overall tactic that a researcher co-opts in order to integrate the different components of a study in a coherent and logical way, thereby, ensuring that the researcher effectively addresses the study problem; it also constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (De Vaus & de Vaus, 2001). Creswell, (2012) defines research design as a set of guidelines and instructions to be followed in addressing a research problem. Research design allows researchers to focus on the end-product and all the steps in the process to achieve the anticipated outcomes De Vos *et al*, (2013:143). A research design incorporates a description of a population, sample and the sampling technique used in conducting the study. De Vos *et al*, (2013:73) define research design as a set of logical arrangements from which prospective researchers can select one which is suitable for their specific research goals. Researchers focus their standpoint for the purpose of the study at hand.

Research design involves decisions on which topic to study, in which population, the significance of the study and which research methods to use. This part of the study mainly explored the population used in conducting this study and the methods used in attaining the sample. The purpose of an exploratory study is to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Runeson & Höst (2009), regards exploratory research as the first stage in a sequence of studies. Thus, “what” questions established a first and exploratory study and the “why” questions could then occur in the future studies through explanatory, descriptive and etc. Specifically, this study design presented a description of the study area, which was followed by entry into the location, the population, sampling techniques, data collection and the instrument that was used, as well as data analyses and ethical considerations.

According to Yawa (2010), research design has two meanings - one meaning insinuates a procedural strategy that is adopted by the researcher to answer questions validly, objectively, accurately and economically. This is connected to the testing of the hypothesis and it is appropriate

only in a quantitative paradigm. The second meaning, which is relevant in this study, is a meticulous plan that guides a researcher about collecting, analyzing and interpreting observed facts. It is the naturalistic approach to research and it emphasizes the significance of the subjective experience of the individuals being studied, focusing on qualitative analysis, also see (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002).

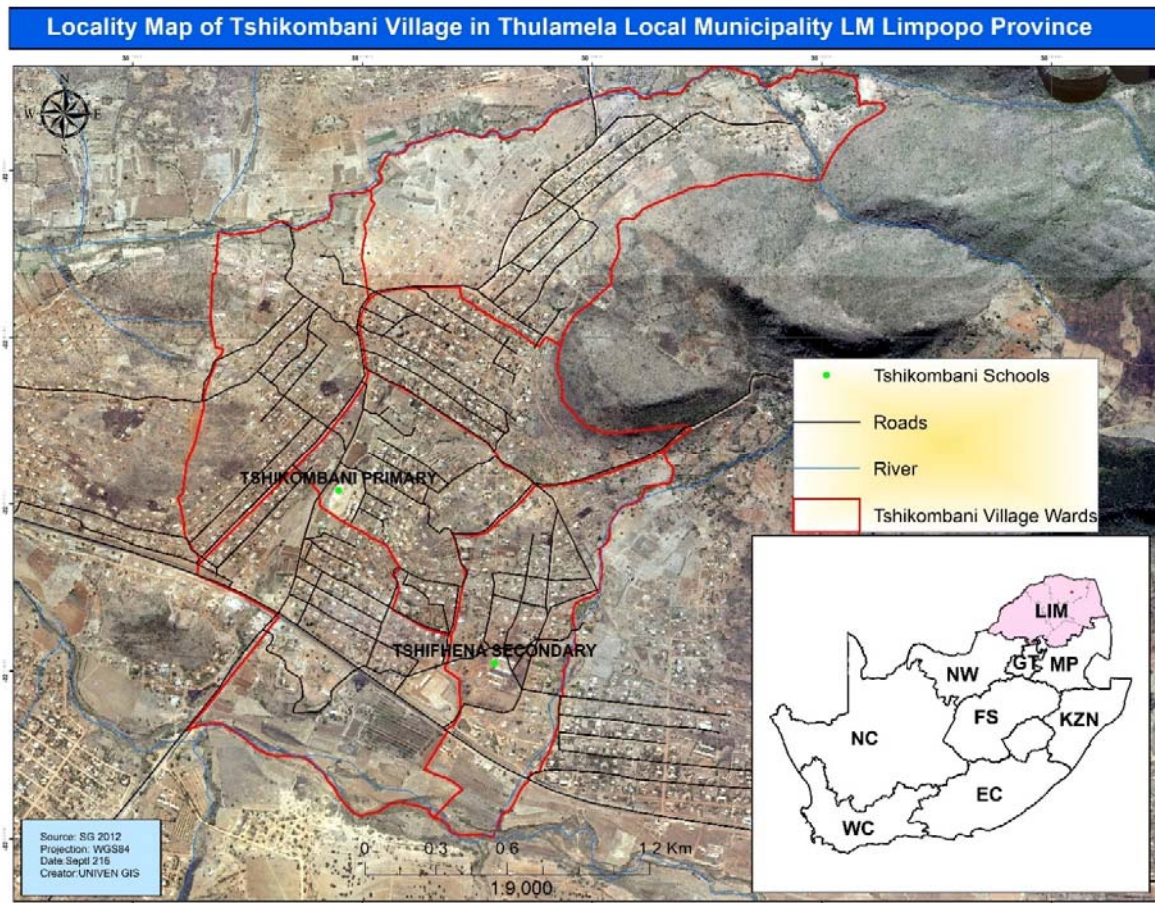
A research design is a ‘‘ blue print or master plan indicating how the whole study was conducted (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As a foundation for whichever study, research design comprises of various approaches which was employed in solving the research problem, the information concerning the research problem and the time frame of the study. Creswell (2013) describes a research design as a detail plan about how the researcher will go about conducting a study. Berg, Lune & Lune (2004) poled a detailed description of research design, it is defined as a plan which the researcher uses to obtain participants and collect information from the participants with the purpose of reaching conclusions about the research problem.

Basically, the design of the entire study first outlined the study area, followed by entry into the study area, then the population to be studied, the sampling techniques which the study has nominated, the data collection and the instruments which were used in collecting data, the data analysis and the ethical issues considered.

4.4 Location of the study

The study was conducted at Tshikombani Village in Nzhelele in the Vhembe District under Thulamela Municipality, Limpopo Province of South Africa. Neuman (2011) defines a location as a place where a researcher may conduct a study in which the events and activities will be held. The image below elucidates the rightful location of the study.

Figure 4.4.1 Indicates the exact location of Tshikombani village of Nzhelele.



4.5 Entry into the study area

Due to the fact that this study required the participation of young widows in Tshikombani, Limpopo Province, the researcher requested for permission to conduct the study from the leaders of the village. In order to do that, an application letter was written to the traditional leaders of the village, who granted the researcher the permission to conduct the study.

4.6 Population

A population is perceived as a sampling frame and the totality of events, persons, case records and other sampling units which the specific research problem is concerned with (Mc Burney, 2001:248). According to Brynard & Hanekom (1997:45) a population refers to the focus group/area that a researcher wishes to target in order to find out the truth about that particular group/area e.g. primary school learners, public institutions, dogs etc. A population in research is the abstract idea of a large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalised (Neuman, 2011). He further describes research target population as the actual specified large group of many cases from which a researcher draws a sample and to which results from a sample are generalised. In order to define a research target population, a researcher specifies the unit being experimented, the exact geographical location, and the temporal boundaries of the population.

Population refers to a group of people with common features that a researcher is interested in (Salaria, 2012). It can also be individuals in a particular group or restricted aspect of the group. Huysamen (1997:2) defines a population as the total collection of individual who has attributes in common to which the research hypotheses refer. Grinnel & Williams (1990:124) define a population as the totality of persons or objects that a study is concerned with. Powers, Hansen, Geusic, Michalopoulos, & Smalley (1983:235) defined a population as the total set of entities in which all the measurements of interest to the researcher are presented.

Frankfort-Nachmias, & Nachmias (2007), defined a population as the total set from which the individual or units of the study are chosen and have the attributes in common to which the research hypothesis maintains. Bless & Higson-Smith (2000:85), regard a population as a set of elements that the research focuses on and to which the obtained results should be generalized. Finally, Shkedi (2005), further defined a population as the totality of persons or objects that a study is concerned with. It mainly refers to the entire group of people, events or things of interest the researcher wishes to investigate. Thus, Vhembe district is a large facility that employs a considerable number of its local society; it consists of suburbs and rural villages. The population

that which was used for this study was 13 young widows drawn from the Tshikombani village of Nzhelele in the Vhembe District.

4.7 Sampling

The purposive sampling method was used to select young Vhavenda widows from all widows in Tshikombani villages. It is a reduced set of cases which a researcher selects from a large pool representative of the population (Neuman, 2011). According to Tan, Kumar & Srivastava (2004) sampling is almost equivalent to selection. Tshikombani village is selected using purposive sampling because of its convenience for the study as a rural area that still practices cultural norms and values. According to Kothari (2004) purposive sampling is based completely on the researcher's judgement as to whether the sample is composed of elements comprising of the most characteristic, representative qualities of the population.

The participants for this study were selected using both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Snowball sampling also called network, chain referral, or reputational sampling is a non-random sampling technique which is used for sampling cases in a network (Neuman, 2011). Snowballing method according to Berg, Lune, & Lune (2004) identifies cases in the interest of people who know individuals who can contribute to the field of study. Thus, the widows of Tshikombani village referred the researcher to other widows who were assumed to be prospective participants of the study, and then each respondent participant referred the researcher to another candidate, until data saturation was achieved. This sampling technique is based on an analogy to a snowball, which begins small, but becomes larger as it revolved and pick up additional snow (Neuman, 2011). The participants selected using snowball sampling technique were further assessed purposively to fulfil the identified problem and the age of widows under study.

Purposive sampling is a sample technique in which the researcher uses a wide range of methods to locate all possible cases of a highly specific and difficult to reach population (Neuman, 2011). According to Odoh, Yang, Wang, Farha, Hupp, Cramer, & Gates (2015), purposive sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique whereby the respondents or participants are chosen based on their knowledge or judgment regarding the topic under investigation. Odoh *et al.* (2015) add that

purposive sampling is a type of nonprobability sampling which conforms to certain standards or criteria. Singh & Masuku (2013) defined purposive sampling as a non-probability sampling where the individuals or the participants are selected according to the purpose. The participants were strictly young widows of Tshikombani. Marshal (1996) recommends purposive sampling in qualitative research, stating that people are not equally good at observing, understanding and interpreting their own and other people's behaviour. "Qualitative researchers recognise that some informants are 'richer' in data than others and that these people are more likely to provide insight and understanding for the researcher" (Mchunu, 2013).

4.8 Data collection process

During the stage of data-collection, a phenomenological researcher is guided by quite a number of principles (Makhahlela, 2016). Hence, the researcher ought to ensure prolonged engagements with participants, keep a journal, tapes and all diaries used during data collection and conduct validity checks (Lacey & Luff 2001). All these are measures ensures the trustworthiness of data collected.

During the data collection process, the research will conduct interviews where questions will be asked in line with the objectives of the study with regards to the research paradigm chosen. The researcher carefully asked the questions often checking whether the answers are in line with what is to be measured according to study objectives. In order to achieve the lived experiences and challenges of the young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe, the researcher asked the questions which depict the "lived experiences" during the period of death and bereavement and the challenges encountered during the process of bereavement.

Participants were able to give a full story about the bereavement, which allowed the researcher to probe and ask follow up questions. Answers to the questions raised accurately highlighted the coping strategies which the respondents attempted to follow. Further questions were asked to follow up on the interesting data that could be useful to the study which the researcher was not aware of. The respondents were thus able to add the information that the researcher did not ask, but were related to the study being conducted.

The researcher used a digital recorder during the interview process. The recording method allowed the researcher to concentrate on the non-verbal actions of the respondents and allowed the researcher to have eye contact with the respondents during the process of the interview. According to Blaxter, Hughes & Tight (2006:172), collecting data using a digital recorder allows the researcher to concentrate on the process of the interview and be able to give necessary eye contact. Wagner (2005), accords that recording maybe done to support audio transcription to text, recording interviews, conversations and meetings to listen to later, log or transcribe, annotate or code, in order to achieve the correct, unaltered responses given by the respondents.

4.8.1 Measuring Instrument

An unstructured interview was used as a data collection instrument from the respondents. According to Burns & Groove (1997:747), can be a structured or non-structured verbal communication between the interviewer and interviewee, in which the information is presented to the interviewee. Researchers use interviews to gather information through a set of questions necessitating them to score original information directly from the respondent. According to De Vos *et al* (2013:342), an interview is a social relationship designed to exchange information between the participant and the researcher. Collins (1998:3) further regards interviews as a social interaction in which meaning is essentially negotiated between individuals.

This form of interaction is executed through one to one interview and also participants in a focus group. The interview schedule comprised of open-ended questions, to allow the interviewee to express their feelings, experiences and ideas freely, without limitations. Open unstructured interviews employ an informal style to gain knowledge concerning “personal matters, such as the respondent’s self, experiences, values and decisions, ideas and cultural knowledge” (Johnson, 2002: 104). Wimpenny & Gass (2000:1488), further confirmed that open unstructured interviews in a phenomenological are intended to be in-depth.

4.8.1.1 Structured interviews

The researcher used structured and unstructured interviews to obtain in-depth data. Structured interviews are those interviews in which the questions asked are decided in advance (Neuman, 2011). Also, when used as an interviewing method, the interviewed questions are asked exactly as they were written, in the same sequence, using the same style, for all interviews.

For the current research, the formal interviews were helpful because participants because each category answered the same set of questions, and this helped the researcher to compare their responses. Interviewing is the predominant mode of data or information collection in qualitative research. Every word that people use in telling their stories is a microcosm of their consciousness. All interviews are interactional events and interviews are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within participants (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004).

Interviewing the participant involves description of the experiences, but also involves reflection on the description and it is technique based on the assumption that in this way individuals can impart a great deal of information about themselves, and that the information given represents the ways in which the respondents experience and make sense of the social world (Mosoetsa, 2005: 41). Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape (2014) define qualitative interviews as attempts to understand the world from the participant's point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples experiences [and] to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.

4.8.1.2 Unstructured interviews

The use of unstructured one-to-one interview extends a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee. An unstructured interview is comparable to a conversation with purpose. Thus, the interview's focus is not to merely evaluate or obtain answers to the posed questions. Centre to unstructured interviews is an interest and understanding of the experiences of other people and the meanings devised from those experiences (De Vos *et al*, 2013: 348). Both the researcher and the participant are allowed an opportunity to explore on the issue at hand. Unstructured interviews are

used to determine the individuals' perceptions, opinions, facts and forecasts and their reactions towards the initial findings and potential solutions to the issues (De Vos *et al*, 2013: 348).

4.8.1.3 Open unstructured interviews

The researcher asked open-ended questions to the interviewee, to allow free expression of the interviewee's feelings, experiences and ideas without limitations. Open-unstructured interviews employ an informal style to gain knowledge concerning "personal matters, such as the respondent's self, experiences, values and decisions, ideas and cultural knowledge" (Johnson, 2002: 104). The unstructured method is advantageous to the current study because it allows the researcher to ask follow up questions in case of misunderstandings to the questions by the interviewee or emerging new information benefitting the investigation. Wimpenny & Gass (2000:1488), confirm that an open unstructured interview in a phenomenological is intended to be in-depth.

4.9 Reliability and Validity of the measuring instrument

Although the terms reliability and validity are concepts used for testing or evaluating quantitative research, the idea is most often used in all kinds of research (Galofshani, 2003: 601). To ensure reliability in qualitative research, an examination of trustworthiness is crucial. Seale (1999:266) asserts that while establishing good quality studies through reliability and validity in qualitative research, the "trustworthiness of a research report lies at the heart of issues conventionally discussed as validity and reliability". Lincoln & Guba (1985) highlighted that there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]. Healy & Perry (2000) assert that the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms. Lincoln & Guba (1985) stressed that in qualitative paradigms the terms credibility, neutrality or confirmability, consistency or dependability and applicability or transferability are the essential criteria for quality.

4.10 Data Analysis

The data collected is usually chaotic and disorganised. Data analysis was conducted in order to reduce the chaos and organise it into functional chunks. Data analysis is a process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). Qualitative method of analysis revolves around describing the characteristics. In the current study, data was analyzed through thematic presentations. Thus, data editing, was done before the actual analysis. For the qualitative data, collected through key informants, structured interviews and literature search, matrices will be created using content thematic analysis. The researcher identified words, sentences, certain patterns and themes from the respondents. The data was then transcribed and went through an editing process. A scissor and sort technique was then used to analyze data. In applying the technique, the researcher transcribed the interview data. All transcripts were read and reread, to identify common words, experiences and perceptions that were coded. The researcher went through the transcript and identify sections that are relevant to the research questions. Subsequently, those relevant sections formed part of the data analysis process.

4.11 Ethical Considerations

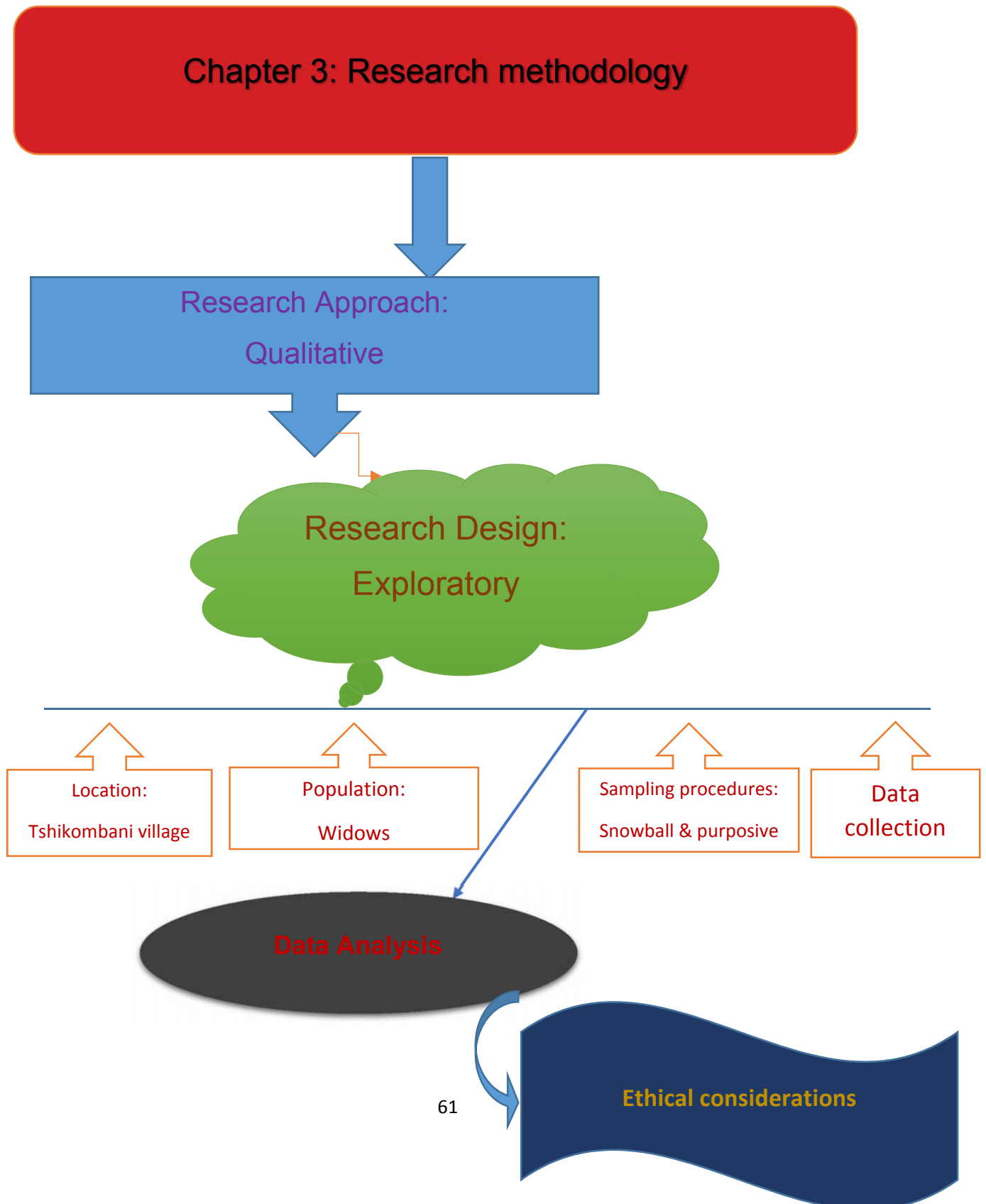
Ethics are a set of principles that are suggested by an individual or a group. These principles serve as rules and behavioral expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subject or respondents, employees, sponsors and other researchers, assistants and students (De Vos, *et al* 2013: 114). For approval purposes, this proposal was submitted (through the Head of Department) to the Higher Degrees Committee of the School of Human and Social Sciences prior to the execution of the research project for presentation. Once accepted and approved by the School, the proposal was sent to the University Higher Degrees Committee and then to the University's Research Office for ethical clearance, before the study was conducted. A gate-keeper letter requesting permission to conduct the study was submitted to the Traditional leaders of Tshikombani Village. In the letter, the researcher requested the leaders to communicate with their subjects regarding the proposed study. Once the request was approved, the researcher issued an informed consent form to all the participants, which explained the research intentions and the importance of the respondents' participation in the success of the research.

According to Monette *et al* (2008:52) informed consent refers to telling the potential research participants about all features of the research that might practically influence the decision of participating. Informed consent is a statement, usually written, that explains aspects of a study to participants and asks for their voluntary agreement to participate before the study commences (Neuman, 2010:149). Informed consent was applicable in this study because the researcher agreed with the potential participants in the study. The researcher implemented this ethic, by informing the potential participants about the background and goals of the study, and the benefits that they may experience during the study.

Participation was strictly voluntary, which, implied that participants who wanted to discontinue for any reason would be allowed to do so. All information provided by the participants for this study is treated in strict confidence and for academic purposes only. The identities of participants were not recorded as part of the findings to be reported. No one, including the researcher, should be able to identify any respondent after data collection (De Vos *et al* 2013:120). Anonymity is the guarantee that the identity of the research participants will remain discreet (Bless *et al*, 2006:181). Babbie & Mouton (2010:523) adds that a respondent may be considered anonymous when the researcher do not match a given response with a given respondent. The data collected should always be confidential with the respondent's knowledge or without, and the responsibility towards the success of this principle lies strictly with only the researcher. Confidentiality is an agreement between people that limits others to access private information (De Vos *et al*, 2013). The researcher lastly elected violation of privacy as part of the ethics to be considered in this study, cautious that every individual has a right to privacy and to decide, where, when, with whom and to what extend his/her beliefs will be exposed (De Laat, 2008).

4.12. Schematic representation of Research methodology for this study

Figure 4.12.1 Schematic representation of Research methodology for this study



CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.” (Harrison, 2015).

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data collected from the young widows of Tshikombani Village. It includes the analyses and discussion of the data. The results are guided by the research questions appearing in Chapter One. This chapter first examines the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and establishes how these characteristics influence the representation of experiences of death of loved ones and bereavement amongst the young Vhavenda widows, as well as the biographic characteristics of the young widows. The chapter then analyses the themes that emerged during data coding. It also presents the responses of the young widows, which are integrated in their reflections of their experiences, and are followed by discussion from the literature. Quotes from the interview conversations are also used to acquire direct experiences and emotions of the respondents.

The sample in this study comprised of 13 young widows who had been widowed for an unstipulated period, whose length of widowhood was thus unknown before the interviews unfolded. Participants were allocated numbers, instead of using their names, in order to safeguard their confidentiality and anonymity, as indicated in the ethical clearance letter attached as an appendix. However, 2 participants withdrew from the study in the process of the interviews due to personal reasons, as guaranteed in the previous chapter and research proposal. Qualitative data was collected through individual open-ended structured and unstructured interviews. The results are presented in matrixes and grouped according to content thematic analyses. The following findings are thus presented according to the research questions which guided the research interviews.

Following the demographic information and profiles of participants, the following themes are therefore explored:



5.2 Demographic information respondents

Figure 5.2.1 Demographic information respondents

Participant number	Age	Type of Marriage	Current Occupation	No. of Children	Mourning period	Type of religion
1	33	Customary	Market vendor	3	3 years	Christian
2	36	Customary	Tailor	3	1 year	Christian
3	27	Customary	Unemployed	2	1 year and 6 months	Christian
4	38	ANC	Unemployed	5	2 years	Traditional
5	25	Customary	Unemployed	1	9 months	Christian
6	27	ANC	Unemployed	1	2 years	Christian
7	31	Co-habitation	Tailor	2	6 months	Christian
8	33	Customary	Unemployed	1	2 years and 3 months	None
9	39	Co-habitation	Teller	3	2 years	Christian
10	26	Customary	Teller	1	1 year	None
11	29	Customary	unemployed	2	8 months	Christian
12	35	Customary	Farm employee	6	1 year	Traditional
13	30	Customary	Nanny	2	4 year	Traditional

5.3 Profiles of the Participants

The researcher grouped participants according to their numbers in compliance with the ethical consideration of confidentiality in the consent form. However, most of them showed no problem revealing their names, as a sign of their zeal to honesty and in order to contribute towards the study. A few participants were reluctant to talk about the bereavement processes of fear that the researcher would publish their names. This is because according to the Vhavenda culture, bereavement rituals are not supposed to be disclosed to people, specifically those who have never experienced them. The same is true of other rituals such as circumcisions and passage to womanhood. The study participants all resided at Nzhelele, Tshikombani and the following are their personal profiles.

Participant 1

Participant one is a young woman who sells fruits by the market and also receives the social grant for her two children. Her husband was about the age; he was a building free-lancer and had died after a short illness. He had never signed a legal marriage contract with her. However, he had paid full Lobola to her parents as tradition declares all marriages legal after the bride price has been paid. Thus, she was married under customary law. **Participant 1** mourned for two weeks and thereafter continued with her daily routines.

Participant 2

Participant 2 took care of her sick husband from the beginning until he died and in the process, they both planned his funeral and the way forward for the wife and their three children. The planning was specifically for the children because the wife also had the same disease and she believed she would not live long. Unfortunately, she never got an opportunity to bury her husband as she and the husband planned due to unforeseen circumstances during the funeral. The family took away the husband's corpse to the village where he was born, only to find that **participant 1**

shared a mourning hut with another woman whom she was told was the first wife to the deceased and according to culture they must both be in the same hut during the bereavement process. The husband who was a soldier had passed away a year before. Unfortunately, she was not receiving any child grant because her husband was a government employee. Paperwork had been made for her children's social grant; however, it was still being processed.

Participant 3

Participant 3's husband had passed away in a car accident. Although the accident did not kill him instantly, he spent a few weeks with his family after the accident and then collapsed on one fateful Sunday morning, and then died after one week in hospital. The husband was a truck driver, and he earned very good salary from his job. However, **Participant 3** never got a chance to follow up on her late husband's pension funds due to the attitude displayed by some members from the in-laws side and the fear of what the outcomes may be if she tried to make any claims. She thus survived on her two children's government social grant.

Participant 4

Participant 4 married her first love and their relationship was built on friendship, which made things much more enjoyable. Her husband owned construction trucks and farm tractors and practiced farming at his family's homestead. The participant worked with her husband and did very well to provide for the children and the other family members. They built a house where the in-laws reside and then build another in the same village, moved out to stay there and give the in-laws some space. Her husband died of an unknown disease. Subsequently, everything they owned (with her husband) no longer belonged to her. This included moving out of the house that they lived in and returning to her parents' home.

Participant 5

Participant 5 lost her husband due to acute bronchitis and had been bereaved for nine months. She mourned for a month publicly although she still regarded herself to be still mourning in her heart. She survived on her child's social grant and her husband's pension fund, although he never worked for many years. She currently resided at her husband's house with her child.

Participant 6

Participant 6 was married according to customary law, although she was a second wife, and her husband had passed away during the process of planning their white wedding. He had breathing problems and passed away a few hours after being admitted to Siloam Hospital. As she was not employed, her husband was the bread winner. His death left a huge gap to his family. At the time of the interview with her, she had been widowed for approximately two years.

Participant 7

Participant 7's husband had died six months before the interview, and the pain of the death of her husband was not as raw, as she had been taking care of him in his dying moments. The husband was HIV positive and the family was prepared for his passing. She dropped out of school in grade 10. Thereafter, she went to a dress making school later. Her husband was working in another province of South Africa. She and her husband never had a close relationship before he fell sick, but they built one when he returned home during his sick moments and at the time of his death. However, she indicated that she loved her husband and she believed he loved her too, because he confessed and protected her from the disease. She mourned for a period of two weeks publicly, although she indicated that she would continue mourning without the black clothes until the cleansing ceremony in the following six months.

Participant 8

Participant 8 had passed grade 12 but could not go further. She and the husband had failed to have children of their own so they adopted one from her sister. He was a teacher at a nearby village. He was stabbed to death by robbers few kilometers from the local beer hall. The wife suspects that he fought the robbers when they wanted to take his belongings. The participant's husband left her with a house and other belongings which were seized during the fights with in-laws after his death.

Participant 9

Participant 9 had completed her matric and could not go further due to financial difficulties in her family. Her husband had been an elderly man who was a police officer for many years. She indicated that her husband was working in Pretoria and gave them little money, compared to the monthly pension fund they were receiving from the government. Thus, her current financial status was satisfactory, compared to when her husband was still alive. However, she indicated that she would have loved to share the money with him. She had been married for 5 years and she mourned for a period of two weeks. Participant 9 had been widowed for two years at the time of the interviews.

Participant 10

Participant 10 is currently residing in Makhado with one of her siblings. Her husband left her with one child and pregnant with another. She is a holder of marketing diploma, unemployed and depends on the government's social support grant for her child. She was married according to customary law and her husband was not employed. He covered car seats and sofas (upholstery) and sold a few things to provide for his family while searching for work. Participant 10 had been widowed for 2 years at the time of the interviews.

Participant 11

Participant 11 quit high school in grade 9 and furthered to have a level 4 ABET certificate. Her husband was unemployed at ESKOM at the time of his death. He died after a short illness and left her staying with his mother and siblings, as he had not yet built his own house. They all survived his pension fund, however, her mother in-law who is also a widow, received an old age social support grant and was doing her best to assist financially.

Participant 12

Participant 12's husband died a year before the interview and was killed by a chronic disease. He worked as a security officer in Gauteng and hardly came home. However, **participant 12** mentions that he saved money and spoilt her and their children whenever he comes home. She mourned for two weeks and went back to work the following third week. Although they both did not make much money, they managed to get a site and built a house that her husband died in. It was the house that she and the children currently occupied.

Participant 13

Participant 13's husband had passed away 4 years before. They were married according to customary law and the husband had died after a short- term illness. She took care of her sick husband and was aware that he was on his death bed. Her husband was a car mechanic and he saved some money to help his wife and family with his funeral. They stayed at his late parents' house, which he had inherited.

5.4 Bereavement rituals of Vhavenda widows

The rituals performed specifically for the widows of the Vhavenda tradition differed to some extent from those of other South African groups. However, in all South African cultures widows are generally treated similarly, without age consideration. For those that still practice this rituals, the mourning process is perceived to be incomplete if the widow does not undergo the process of cleansing (Kapuma, 2011).

5.4.1 Process of bereavement before burial

During bereavement in Venda culture, the widow is expected to stay in the house on a mattress, covered with a blanket. Her head is wrapped. She can only go out to the toilet in the morning when people are still asleep and at night when it is dark, covered in the blanket. The elder widows provide a small bucket for use during the day. She is not allowed to be seen by public until burial day. In the house that they keep her, not all women are allowed to enter; only widows who have finished their mourning period. Thus, the widow's close relatives, including the mother (if the father is still alive), are not allowed to see her before the funeral. The widow seats and sleep with other older women who are widows themselves, until the day of the funeral. The widow is served by other widows from the relatives who also comfort her and help her eat.

“I have never went out of the hut unless I was going to the loo because we use outside toilets. I could not see people because I would be covered with a blanket when I was outside. It is a good support but when I am in the toilet knowing that there is someone outside near my door, I did not feel comfortable.”.....**Participant 1**

“I was not allowed to see even my own mother, because she is not a widow. If she came in to the house I was at, she was going to leave with bad spirits and endanger my father. It was painful but worth it.”.....**Participant 13**

“They made me eat every meal, even when I was not hungry. That is how it is done for every widow. I guess they knew that the bereaved would not want to eat. However we need to have energy from the food.”.....**Participant 3**

During her stay in the house, the family calls a “*Vho maine*” a traditional doctor to start performing her personal rituals. On the day the men of the community dig the grave *Vho maine* picks “*Mudzi*” a root from the grave to begin with the rituals for the widow. The root is boiled and its water mixed with maize-meal to make “*Mukapu*”, a soft porridge to feed the widow and in some cases the elders divide the soft porridge into equal parts to also feed the first as part of the rituals to strengthen them.

“They fed me soft porridge made out of herbs from the traditional healer, very sour herbs. I wonder if my child was able to swallow it. I just had to be strong so that they do not think I do not conform to our customs. The herbs are made of a root from of my husband’s grave, so it somehow made it easy for me to eat, I was doing it for him.”.....**Participant 10**

5.4.2 Burial day

There are fewer rituals performed on the burial day. The first one is called “*u tovhowa*”, the last viewing of the deceased. This is done at midnight towards burial day, but in some families it is done a few hours before going for burial. Then the procedure called “*u seriswa bogisi*”, meaning passing under a casket, is performed. The first born child is carried by the elders by the feet and hands and helped to pass under the father’s casket before they take it to the grave yard. Other families request both the first born and the last born child to undergo this ritual. This is done to help the children accept the passing of the father and forget the pain. Then the funeral programme will proceed from home to the cemetery. The widow is requested to be the first one to pick a handful of soil dug out of her husband’s grave and throw it on his casket in the grave before “*dziphele*”, meaning the “*wolves*” build the grave. The *wolves* refers to the community men who offer to dig the grave and build the grave on the burial day for free. Therefore, the first and the

lastborn children will follow and this is regulated by the family elders. Other young widows indicated that none of the family members, including them, threw soil on the casket.

“We did not have any rituals which are mysterious, the funeral was just a normal one that you see on TV, except that my first born child was made to pass under the casket”.....**Participant 1**

“I was the first to see his face in the casket at home, and to throw the soil in his grave by the burial site, then my children who are old enough followed me and their relatives. That process of carrying the soil seems very easy, but it is not easy at all. Even though the traditional healer had strengthened me and also worked on the burial ground, to make it easy for me.”.....**Participant 7**

5.4.3 Bereavement cleansing rituals

The cleansing rituals occurs a day after burial. All widows of all ages go through the same cleansing rituals. The widow will first go through the process of “*hu aravhela*”. In this process, the traditional doctor boils water and burns six stones by the side of the fire, and then puts the hot stones in the boiling water together with traditional medicine and covers the widow with a blanket to stoop down to the steam of the mixture.

“This is the one process every widow should go through. Our culture expects that from us. Whether you are a Christian or not. So because I am a Christian, the traditional healer did not come to me. The elders consulted on my behalf and were given herbs for my ritual. They made a big fire and put stones by the side and waited for them to turn red. Then that’s when they covered me with a thick blanket so that the medicine and the heat would penetrate through to my whole body without being disturbed by the air outside. It was the most intense heat I have ever experienced. I knew it was helping me but I could not wait to finish the ritual.”.....**Participant 11**

After that, the widow is taken to the river by older aunts who are also widows. She would still be covered with a blanket. The aunts give her “*luselo*” a traditional sieve, with 6 stones which she carries while they walk her to the river. This happens in the early dark hours.

“I was taken to the river in the early hours while people were still asleep because I am not supposed to be seen. If we happened to meet older people, I was supposed to lie down, as a way to show them respect and give them the right of way. However, nowadays, some widows are washed in their houses in a big basin. And nothing happens to them. I enter the river naked carrying “Luselo” on my head. The widows who are with me then fetch some water near me and pour it in that “luselo”, which has holes. The water wets my body through those holes until they feel I am well cleansed. It does not matter whether it is winter or summer, the water is never heated”.....**Participant 5**

Figure 5.4.3.1 shows a picture of *Luselo* basket carried by the widows to the river



Photo by: [Mubikwanaive.wordpress.com](https://www.wordpress.com)

At the river the widow will first bury the 6 stones she used for “*hu arabela*” and then remove all her clothes and get into the water still carrying the empty *luselo* on her head. Then, the aunts also enter with small buckets and the cleansing medicines are given by the traditional doctor, and fetch

water in sequence, pouring it on the *luselo* on her head to flow on to her whole body as many times, until they are satisfied that she has been cleansed. Thereafter,, they dry her, put her clothes on and the blanket, and then go back home the same way they came and while it is still dark. This is done in the dark to avoid meeting other people on the way or being seen by other people from their houses. When they arrive home, the traditional doctor will be ready to finalise the cleansing rituals. The traditional doctor could be a man or woman, it is not a taboo for a man working with ancestors to cleanse a widow.

“ when the other widows are done bathing me, the traditional healer then came to strengthen me with some weird bone, small hoe and other herbs that i had no idea what they are. I asked my mother and other women after the mourning process and that’s when they explained that it is rare animal oil, I forgot the name and herbs from the bushes”.....**participant 13**

The widow has now reached a point of being strengthened. This process includes “*hu kandiwa zwienda nungo*” and “*hu thavhelwa*” in no particular sequence. *Vho maine* smears a mixture of animal oil and traditional medicine on the widow’s whole body with help of the elderly widows, and then he/she uses a big animal bone which none of the participants can recognize, and an old bottom part of “*dzembe*” a hoe. *Vho maine* uses the bone to hits the old piece of the hoe and then softly hit on the “*zwienda nungo*” every joint of the widows body. He hits the bone and the hoe piece once, in order for every joint to be stronger. This process is named “*hu tsudululwa*”, Vhavenda people perform this strengthening ritual to prevent the widow from having joint problems when the husband’s body rots and his bone disjoin one another. And then *vho maine*, slightly cut the widow with a razor for blood to come out and then put medicines on the small cuts. This ritual is also performed to other close family members such as children, siblings and parents of the deceased in other selected families. The medicine is believed to be a part of strengthening of the remaining family members.

Towards accomplishing the rituals, the traditional doctor starts by a killing a black she- goat. The goat dies through drinking water, and can only be skinned after dying. After slaughtering the goat, the traditional doctor will make medicine called “*muhuluso*” and give it to the widow to drink,

and then mix the feces of the goat with traditional medicine called “*gumululo*” until it is soft and smear the mixture on her entire body except her head. After a while they wash her clean with other traditional herbs while other women are cooking the meat. The rest of the family members, including the young, eat the meat and put the bones together in one place to give them to *Vhomaine*, so that he can put herbs on them and then bury the bones in the family yard. The picture below shows a Venda traditional healer sitting near her apparatus with her assistant by the side ready to perform the rituals.

Figure 5.4.3.2 A female Venda traditional healer performing the mourning rituals.



Picture By: www.alamy.com (24.06.2017)

In the olden days, Vhavenda people used to shave their heads during the mourning process. This is still being done in some families. However, most of the participants said they shaved their heads

during the bereavement period. They indicated that they had their hair cut short while some other indicated that they cut only the ends of their hair.

5.4.4 Mourning period

The Vhavenda tradition does not have a longer period of mourning compared to the South African cultures such as Batswana, Zulus, Bapedi and Xhosas. The latter mourn for about a year (Yawa 2010, Manyedi, 2003, Cebekhulu, 2015 & Baloyi, 2014). Vhavenda people continue with their normal activities about a month after the cleansing ritual. Other young widows indicated that they spent about a month at home and others said two weeks, before they continued their normal daily activities.

“I spent only two days indoors after being cleansed and then weeks without leaving my yard, except for in urgent reasons”.....**Participant 2**

“I was told that I was ready to face the world, just a week after the burial because I was cleansed. So I went back to work but had to at least wrap my head with a black head cloth just to show that I was still mourning. But it is not part of our culture.”.....**Participant 6**

5.4.5 Mourning garments for young widows

Unlike the Basotho, Bapedi, Zulus, Tswanas and Ndebeles, the Vhavenda have no specific clothing for mourning. The widow wears dark colours on burial day and then continues wearing the clothes of her choice after the period of bereavement. Other young widows indicated that they prolonged wearing dark clothes and covering their hair because they felt they had not mourned enough. After the young widow is cleansed, she is free to wear her normal cultural clothes for women. However, nowadays traditional clothing is not an obligation; everyone is allowed to wear as they please.

“We do not wear any specific clothes after the funeral. It is just that some of us choose to wear blue or black clothes for a while, to show the public that we are mourning. Some others wear them for a week, two weeks or three. For me it was difficult, I wore dark clothes of different colours to work for about to three months.”.....**Participant 9**

Figure 5.4.5.1 presents a young Venda woman in traditional Venda attire, however, the Venda attire has a variety of colours.

Figure 5.4.5.1 Venda traditional women’s attire.



Picture by: Top Notch productions, modeled by Ms. Tshavhungwe Penelope

5.5 Reasons for performing bereavement rituals

The bereavement rituals on Vhavenda widows are performed for a many reasons, with the ultimate aim of the successful moving on with life. It is also believed that a widow who does not accept ritual performances will have sicknesses when the husband's corpse starts rotting, it is believed that when the bones of the husband disjoin, the widow will also feel like her bones are disjoining. Vhavenda people also believe in "*Hu bvisa murundzi wa mufu*", which means to remove the shadow of the deceased from the widow. It is believed that the widow will always move around with the shadow of her husband if it is not removed; thus, she has possibilities of not being seen by other men who would want to marry her, she will dream weird dreams or even think she can see the deceased man at times. The young widows mentioned that spooky, weird things could happen, such as decoration paintings falling for no reason, to show that her husband's soul has not rested.

"it has always been our belief as Africans that widows should be cleansed after their husband's death. If I do not get cleansed, I will carry my husband's shadow wherever I go, and my things will never go right with me. If I am ready to remarry, my husband's shadow will be jealous of another man and start tormenting us until the new man runs away.".....**Participant 2**

"The elders told me that if I do not get cleansed my husband and the ancestors will be angry at me and block my success. It is true because, after being cleansed, I felt light on my shoulders; the shadow of my husband was no longer there, I would not even feel like he was around in the room".....**Participant 3**

"His favourite calabash that I had hung on the wall for decoration fell off one night when I was asleep, and in my sleep I dreamt him visiting the room I was sleeping in with other elder widows before his funeral. I knew it then that these things exists and once I am cleansed my husband will rest in peace.".....**Participant 4**

As the widows are still young and expected to marry again, part of the rituals are to cleanse her in preparation of accepting and leaving with another man in peace. By removing the evil spirits

resulting from the death called “*Mafa*” so that the new man will be safe and not get sick or tormented by the deceased husband. The removal of *mafa* is also believed to prevent the widow from trembling. Vhavenda people believe that a widow who walks around with *mafa* will tremble. Thus, anything undertaken by the bereaved will not succeed until certain rituals are performed on her. This is one significant ritual that is undertaken by every woman of any belief who belongs or is married in the Vhavenda culture. Thus, Christians who do not believe in the traditional doctors’ medicines and other rituals, are also compelled to accept this one, for their own well-being. It is believed that widows who do not conform to the cleansing ritual may have psychological disorders or total madness and horrible diseases in the near future. The witches also bewitch the widows and hide behind the fact that they are facing challenges because of being uncleansed.

“I cannot sleep with my husband and then when he dies, I go and sleep with another man before the ritual is performed, I will be carrying *mafa* with me and it might either kill the new man or make him sick. So it is important to be cleansed.”.....**Participant 5**

“I do not see the need to be cleansed; why am I not cleansed when I divorce one man and marry another? We still go through the same physical contact, don’t we? Unfortunately, I cannot give you an answer from my experience of meeting a new man because I am not planning to. However, many women who have remarried in my church, have never been cleansed and their husbands seem happy. That is just a way older people used to scare widows for their own reasons that I do not know.”.....**Participant 1**

“ I did allowed the rituals because, I was told that witches may bewitch me when they hear that I was not cleansed and then people will believe that I am punished by my deceased husband or ancestors even though it is not so. This is true because, I have seen other women whom I don’t believe are troubled by the death spirits. Everyone in the village knows that they were bewitched by those who hated them.”.....**Participant 9**

The young widows also mentioned that bereavement rituals can be performed to revenge against the person who killed the deceased, although it is hardly the case these days. Some diseases are believed to be natural or infectious. However, like many other cultures, Vhavenda people believe

that witches exists. There are some of the deaths which leave a questionable impression, which leads other families to consult “*Vhomaine*”, the traditional doctor, on the killers of the diseased. This process can take place before or after funeral, depending on the family’s judgement. It is called “*hu posa dzithangu fhasi*” also known as “*hu posa marambo fhasi*” which means throwing the bones. Once *Vhomaine* find out who killed the deceased, he or she then assists the family in finding measures to avenge their death.

“Part of the reasons for performing the rituals are to find out who killed the deceased, however, in my family, they not bother finding out the killer.”.....**Participant 10**

“Before the funeral we went to see *Vhomaine* so that we can find out if there was someone behind my husband’s death and avenge it. *Vhomaine* claimed that the person who killed my husband is from the family and they will follow him very soon, and the night before we buried him, one of the eldest females in the family died. We were not sure if it was because the ritual or not, and then followed one of his male cousins in soon afterwards. So we just believed that if it was them then the spirit of my husband will rest in peace”.....**Participant 7**

“*Vhomaine* cleansed me, and then that was when we went to consult, as a way of finding out who killed my husband. This was after some of our family members were arguing about whether to go or not to. We eventually went there and agreed that we would not avenge but we just want to know, and he gave us instructions to follow until the person shows up in our compound and confess without being conscious of it. Indeed a woman definitely came, although she did not really tell us openly but spoke in parables.”.....**Participant 11**

Another bereavement ritual performed by *Vhavenda* people of *Tshikombani* is called *Vhulivhadza*. However, it is not only performed on the widows, but on their children also. *Vhulivhadza* means “something that helps forget”. This is ritual is done through smearing *miora* (ashes). It serves as a therapy for the bereaved to accept and quickly forget about their loss, for children, a permanent execution of their father’s memorial is a high possibility. It is congruent, to the therapy of helping the bereaved forget, *Vhavenda* people also help the deceased to forget his way home, by changing the gate’s position and moving it to another side, and others demolish the old gate and build a new

one altogether, even after changing the gate position. Thus, Vhavenda people believe that a man dies, his spirit remains alive forever. This is attested by the change of gate and cleansing ritual on the widow to prevent her husband's spirit from coming back to torment the new husband whom she will marry. However, the changing of the gate ritual is gradually fading away. Most of the young widows who participated in the present study indicated that they did not change their gates after their husband was buried.

“In actual sense, Vhavenda people give widows something that will make us forget the pain and our most sensitive memories which can be make our lives difficult to live without our husbands. But it is rare now, I performed all the rituals excluding *vhulivhadza*, I am not even sure what they mix with the wood ashes.”.....**Participant 12**

“They smeared me and my children some ashes mixed with a traditional medicine that we do not know of. This is because in such situations you don't get to talk or ask a lot. We believed that it will help us forget, and we still do because we do not know how much is to be forgotten and how long it takes to forget. However, it is not a one day thing. In my case, I still think about him very much and maybe, if I did not perform the rituals it was going to be worse.”.....**Participant 13**

5.6 Challenges faced by young widows

The young widows who participated in this study indicated that they were facing a certain challenges. Namely; emotionally, financially, socially and some physically. However, one participant reported to have of the whole sample confirmed to have no financial challenge. Losing a loved one mechanically delivers an inevitable pain of loss, irrespective of age or gender. Young widows certainly experience confusion after a death of their husbands due to their current age and the thought of having to re-arrange their future plans without a husband, or to remarry because they are still young. The confusion is further fueled by the presence of children; rethinking ways to raise them either alone or with a non-biological father.

5.6.1 Single parenthood

Most of the young widows who were sharing the parental duties with their husbands found it very difficult to continue without them. Some indicated that they do not have an equal authority to their husbands towards their children, and hence the children are also bereaved. In such cases, they resort to any kind of relief from their pain that is available to them. They further indicated that their children hardly resorted to better ways of healing but resorted to behaviors leading them to trouble, and these affected the widows emotionally. Other young widows confessed that reprimanding the children as a mother is more difficult than it is as a father, particularly teenage children and mostly of the opposite gender. The following words quoted from participants reflect the challenges associated with single parenthood:

“Sometimes I feel like I cannot get through to my second born child. He used to smoke but we never had to have him do it in our house when my husband was still alive. Nowadays I just see by the smoke from the men’s toilets. When I confront him, he speaks disrespectfully,.....pheww! My husband’s presence did not only bring pride and respect in our house but to me also. I feel like he left with all of that.” **Participant 12.**

“Iyoh, I even changed my windows and made them smaller so that my daughter will not be able to jump out. Although I work hard and provide for her, she still finds comfort in men, and sometimes older men. One day a car dropped her off and when I spoke to her about it, she just laughed at me, knowing I can never beat her up, I just locked myself and started crying alone. I even plan to remarry and find her a new father figure who will maybe stamp more authority than me. My daughter is a teenager; she cannot be dating men with cars. Our village is too rural to find a young boy driving.....it is obviously some old man who is taking advantage of her and wants to mess up her future.” **Participant 2.**

“There is no one to give me ideas or reprimand me if I am not taking my children on the right path, when I lead them to do wrong things I always remember what my husband would have done to prevent that. Parenting is tiring, sometimes I want to take a nap and let my children play with their father or watch TV but now that I am alone it is impossible because if I sleep, one would start crying and I have to be up.” **Participant 3**

However, most of these young widows' children were still young. As a result, they hardly understood their father's absence and kept asking to see or call their fathers. As the young widows depended on their husbands for shelter and finances, they found it difficult to maintain the standard of living for their children. Some began to look for jobs, other started their small businesses which stole time to take care of their children. However, the young widows managed to provide for their children.

“Sometimes I receive many orders from my costumers. I have to stay in the garage the whole day making traditional dresses and skirts and I never get time to look after my youngest child when his siblings go to school. Although, I cook and clean before I start working, I never see where and how he plays. I also never get to regulate his behaviour and his extent of moving around the streets. When papa was alive, I would share some of my orders with other dress makers around Nzhelele. I knew that he would cover our groceries and other things we needed in the house while I took care of our children and worked on my free time. Right now I cannot let a single order pass me by” **participant 7**

I go to work at 4 am and come back home at 7am from the markets. When I arrive at home I bath, cook for my family for the following day while also packing the things that I will cook and sell the following day. I hardly see my children because I mostly sleep early, tired from the hard work we do in the markets. It is possible I might be spending about 2 hours daily with my children. The eldest got pregnant a year ago, I suspect that she was not used to the freedom she had.when my husband was alive, he would work for us, while I am a fulltime mother”**Participant 9**

While, the other young widows are fulltime single mothers without a secure income received for their household, most of them, indicated that they are able to give full attention to their children, except a few young widows, and are satisfied with their achievements in parenthood so far, although it is quiet tormenting to have no means to provide for their children the same way their father could have provided for them.

We were not even near being rich, but we could afford basic things. I am afraid of taking jobs too far away because my child will be abused by the community's hoodlums. I will not forgive myself if that happened.

If my mother was still alive I would going to ask her to stay with my child while I work far. Right now I rather suffer with my child and hope to find a job somewhere nearby **participant 3**

“I love the fact that, no one will abuse my children while I am too far away from them. I am here to protect them and make sure they grow up conscious of our cultural norms and values. However, it is mostly disappointing when I am unable to provide for them or socialize with them the way I did when their father was still alive. I am also very much aware that one cannot have their bread buttered both sides. So, I would rather have my children without fancy stuff, than go look for those fancy stuff and leave them to be raped or physically and emotionally abused by other people and not have any parent to protect them”.....

Participant 13

“Parenting is difficult even when I am home with my children. Being employed and a single mother full-time is quite a strain for me. I still have emotional and physical challenges resulting from my husband’s death, so I am not able to adjust to better ways of parenting as a single mother. I used to report them to their father when they messed up. But now I do not have the strength to deal with them myself. I also have heart-ache when I see them in need of something that I cannot afford. Sometimes I feel like they disrespect me because they know the there is no father figure to boss them around, and they can see that I am too weak to reprimand them, and sometimes children listen to the parent who has an income to take care of their needs.”.....**Participant 2**

The young widows of Tshikombani village basically, indicated that they had some challenges of parenting without their husbands, although the types of their challenges differed. It is quite impossible to stay at home full time when widows have fewer household resources, lower income, rent rather than own a house, unemployed and poor (Roman, 2015).

5.6.2 Burial arrangements

Most participants indicated that they were not allowed to participate in the planning of their loved ones’ burials and they were not happy with the funeral arrangements which were made by the family elders.

“I did not choose my husband’s casket. I think they took advantage of my age and went ahead to choose what satisfied them. I wanted something different. The blanket which they covered him with was new but I wanted to cover him with our favourite blanket that we used.”....**participant 5**

“It is not a wife’s duty to organize her husband’s funeral. It is regarded as a disgrace or taboo. It will cause people to start thinking I killed him. My job is to mourn in the house and let the elders arrange everything”.....**Participant 2**

“I do not like the fact that they organized a catering company for my husband’s funeral, because we could have saved that money for his children to live on. Everything about his funeral was perfect but I feel like it was a show off. I am hurt, I do not have to cry on an expensive wipe and eat muffins and a five course meal because it will not bring back my husband, especially because he did not like expensive things”.....**Participant 7**

“I did not form part of the arrangement for my husband. This is because in our culture, only the elders are responsible for that”.....**Participant 9**

“They bought me expensive black clothes, but they were not what I wanted and I had to wear them because I was not allowed to go and buy for myself. I also did not like the suit and the casket they bought. I do not really care about the food they bought and decorations because it was a funeral and not a party. But, I feel like I was deprived of burying my hubby the way I wanted”.....**participant 6**

Other widows, did not have a problem with the arrangements made; they indicated that all they wanted was to lay their husbands to rest in peace. They appreciated and enjoyed the support from the family, as they planned everything on the widows’ behalf. However, Participant one’s experience on the burial arrangements differs from the other participants.

“I will not lie to you, I did not ask my in-laws to help me. They also did not offer help me. My husband worked for the government and they knew that I would get money from his policies etcetera. So I went out to collect the money with my sister. I used my phone to plan my husband’s funeral, I called for decorations. Because I do not believe in the traditional way of doing things, I went out to buy the food, my clothes and the child’s, as well as organize people in the community to cook. Of course my face was covered when I

went out to show that I am a new widow and I was wearing black clothes, but I could not rely on anyone to do it for me, people will sometimes help you because they want to share your inheritance”.....**Participant 5**

“I did not form part of the arrangements, but my in-laws would consult with me during the arrangements. But all I wanted was husband to be buried with dignity. I did not care who planned what”.....**Participant 10**

“Whether they like me or not, we are his family. We shared the same pain. So I knew that they will arrange the funeral in a way that leaves us satisfied. I trusted them with the arrangements and they planned it perfectly”.....**Participant 12**

5.6.3 Financial implications faced by young widows

The participants indicated various life challenges which they experienced. However, most of them mentioned financial challenges which they experienced after the death of their husbands, with an exception of one participant whose husband’s death brought financial stability in her household. Most of the widows were not stable financially, before their husbands’ deaths. They indicated that the situation worsened because most of the finances came from their husbands. Having to take care of their children is difficult; hence the finances have declined.

“ It leaves us confronted with so many problems because our children are still too young for us to go back to school or to go too far and look for a job, and as you can see, our village does not have places to look for a job, except these mini-tuck shops which hire family members, Indians supermarkets or just be a helper at someone’s house.....Eish I sometimes feel like I should have died in his place because he would have managed to take care of our children better than me”.....**Participant 4.**

“The most difficult part is listening to your child narrating how others treat them at school because they do not have pocket money”.....**Participant 8**

“I now have to pay for electricity, groceries, school transport and other expenses, so I will have to change the child’s school and bring him to a nearby school in 2018, to reduce the financial burden, so that we can survive until I get a job”**Participant 6**

“ I do not have any finances with me right now, I survive through my sister who took me in to stay with her while I take care of her household and children while she is in the cities ”**Participant 7**

“We are not surviving at all. I try to take small jobs to patch there and there and I hate to admit it but I am failing my family”**Participant 5**

“Honestly, it is now, after my husband’s death, that I am able to survive with my children financially. When he was alive we could not afford pocket money or eat healthy food and wear properly, like other families. I would hardly buy Christmas clothes for my older children. I am not happy that he died, I loved him enough not to cheat on him when he was did not come back home, enough to accept him back when he was sick. I also honored him by not moving on with another man after his death. But I am financially stable now and I will also start a small business, so that we do not finish the money and go back to poverty”**Participant 4**

5.6.4 Property acquired from marriage

Participants indicated several challenges they faced during the process of inheriting their husbands’ property. Only a few succeeded and most indicated that they did not inquire about their property due to fights which ensured after the husbands’ deaths.

“I knew that someone would die if I tried to ask about my husband’s pension fund. People had already taken his cars and declared them theirs, even when they started fighting me in my own house I knew I must leave because they wanted it and they just could not say so openly. I left because I wanted to protect my child” **Participant 4**

Participant one mentioned that she fought for her husbands’ property until they acquire all of them.

“I could see the way that the brothers were taking care of our cars was suspicious. I cannot drive, but I wanted my cars. They then took a van and gave me a sedan. Then I fought them until I called the police to go and fetch it in Johannesburg, where one of my brother in-law is working. The police back my van back although it was messed up. The fights did not stop, but I was up to it, although I ended up selling my house and going to stay somewhere else because they had access to our old house because it was built by them. So I left and built my own where they would not have the right to enter”.....**Participant 1**

“I did not get anything from my husband’s pensions because his job did not qualify him to have any. I also did not ask for anything from the house because we were staying at his parents’ house with other family members, so I did not want to cause trouble”.....**Participant 12**

Some of the widows did not have to fight anyone as their husbands did not have many belongings. They resorted to moving out to their biological parents and other family members’ homes because they felt like they no longer belong to their husbands’ family, specifically those who had only one child before the husbands passed away.

5.6.5 New relationships with other men

Most of the young widows in the present study firmly disapproved of new relationships. They pointed out that they were not ready to face other men. However, the decisions were based on different reasons. Some were fearful of falling in love and be left alone again. Some had been abused in their previous relationships and did not want to face similar experiences. Some indicated that they do not want to have a second father for their children because they were afraid the new man might not love them, while others indicated that they may fall in love in secret but not marry due to the fact that their husbands had left them with a valuable property and the new man might cheat them and leave them poor.

“I cannot trust men, they might come to me only because they know that my husband left me some money and other things, just to come “chow” the money and leave”.....**Participant 8**

“ I do not want people to know that I have already started dating because they will start judging me, so I have a secret lover who is married to another woman”.....**Participant and 2**

“I do not need a man; I just want to take care of my children, that’s it”.....**Participant 1 and 11**

“I am not seeing anyone and I am not planning to marry again, I have had my fair share of headaches and heart-aches, I do not want to be abused by any man or lose him when things start to heat up”.....**Participant 9**

5.7 Coping Strategies of young widows

The participants were members in different religions. Figure 1 indicates the systems practiced by young widows under study. These were Christians, Traditional and non-believers. They all articulated different strategies that they used during bereavement. Although the strategies differed, they all survived the bereavement period.

5.7.1 Young widows belonging to Christianity belief system

Participants who were members of Christian churches indicated that they relied on prayer for healing their souls. They read the scripts to comfort themselves in their homes and fellow congregants also played their role in bringing them hope. They further indicated that Christians assisted them significantly with money and visits before and after the funeral.

“When the church elders brought condolences and money to my house, I felt so blessed. Nobody can perish if they are a member of a Christian church; churches help the needy, emotionally or in other ways. Our church has counselling sessions for the heartbroken and they motivate us to continue with our lives, no

matter what happens. We also motivate one another during women's midweek services, and other widows share their experiences to give the new widows hope for a better life. They really try; they even pray for us to re-marry and have better families in the future, but.....no, we will see if I will be able to open up for another man, I don't think so" **Participant 11**

"Although I had been cleansed, my church members did not have a problem with it. They prayed with me and my family, and women in our church offered some advice on how to deal with stress. Even though it is still difficult, I am seeing changes in my life because of their presence. It would not be the same if I had no one".....**Participant 6**

"The women's Thursday services are really helping a great deal, not to change the situation at home, but I get to renew my strength and hope each week because of those services. The Bible readings and other activities we have at church help me cope and keep me sane".....**Participant 1**

"My church sometimes prepares food parcels and buys clothes and cosmetics for the needy, so besides getting my heart healed I am also getting my family fed for free. So this has been a wonderful place of escape for us. However, this is not a monthly activity, some months we really struggle".....**Participant 3**

"Listening to other women and children of God saying comforting words is exactly what I need during these trying times, but it gets very lonely when I am alone at the house".....**Participant 11**

5.7.2 Young widows belonging to Traditional belief system

The coping strategies of widows who believe in traditional way of life is quite different from those of Christian widows. The former confirmed that they relied solely on the traditional way of coping with death. They indicated that the traditional healer gave them counselling and also comforted them with words of hope. They also believed that the rituals that the traditional healer performed helped them cope with their husbands' deaths. Furthermore, they indicated that they were strengthened by the rituals and also had peace of mind because the rituals ensured that they were not followed by "*murundzi wa mufu*", the "shadow of the deceased". The young widows further

reported that the rituals healed their souls and made the community respect them during the mourning period, as they had accepted and respected their culture.

5.7.3 Young Non-believer widows

The young widows who did not belong to any belief system mentioned that they followed the traditional way of bereavement because everyone, including the church members, do it. They indicated that they do not have a problem with their culture or church. However, they believed that they could cope through talking to other family members and community members, staying busy and trying not to think too much.

“It does not really matter whether I performed the rituals or not; those things are just beliefs. However, it would look like I have indeed killed my husband if I did not accept it; so I did. But, I do not believe that anything bad would happen to me if I did not perform the rituals. Death is death, and it heals with time, no medicine of words can remove the pain we feel inside but time”.....**Participant 10**

“I do not believe in cultural things, but I know that a person must be cleansed after losing a partner. So I think the rituals somehow helped me get the strength. I coped through talking to some of my community members and friends, then left the rest to be sorted with time. I do not really believe that I need help from someone in order for me to cope with my husband’s loss. Time heals everything, so I am that patient”**Participant 13**

5.8 Support systems for young widows

5.8.1 Family support

The support systems received by participants in the current study varied, although not to a great extent. Most participants complained that their immediate family members, (which at the marriage level are believed to be the in-laws) did not give them enough support after their husbands’ passing.

“I had to move out and go renew my relationships with my old family, because I really felt like an outcast. I did not get any support at all. That is what most widows experience when the in-laws think we killed our husbands”..... **Participant 10.**

“The moment I saw their anger towards me, I knew that they would rather kill me than support the person who wanted to take the property of their son. My (parental) family members are the ones who came through for me!.....sighs, honestly I thought my in-laws would support me because my mother in-law loved me so much before she died, and everyone knew how she protected me. I guess she was the only one who loved me and I was blinded by the rest. Some of them I could see they did not have much hate for me, but they did not come to check me or call to find out how I was doing because they were afraid of offending those who were against me, but I understand that a family stands together..... **Participant 8.**

Some widows indicated that it was only some members of their in-laws family who did not support them, while other members tried their best all to support them financially and emotionally. **Participant 11** said that..... “I am very happy with my mother in-law, we help one another financially and we share the same pain. She gives me all the support a young widow can ever ask for. She has also promised to take care of my child when I am ready to remarry or find a job. Not many mothers would do that, even biological mothers don’t support their children the way she supports me”.

These experiences, however, were not shared by one widow, who indicated that she got no support from both families due to the fact that her parents had died and she did not have a relationship with her family anymore. She mentioned that the husband’s family was not close to her before death, either. As a result, she was not expecting them to offer any support to someone who was virtually a stranger to them because she was only married for a short period of time. However, with the exception of the young widow whose parents had passed away, all the participants appreciated the support given by the families where they were born. They indicated that their parents and relatives were very loving during their excruciating periods and supported them financially and emotionally. None of them mentioned how well the relatives treated them.

5.8.2 Support by friends

Each young widow who participated in the current study mentioned that they had one or more friends who dearly supported them like family. The participants spoke fondly about their friends' compassion towards them. Notwithstanding the elders' support, friends seemed to be the best people to associate with during the saddest moments, according to the young widows in the current study.

“We are almost the same age with my friend, when I tell her I miss my man she understands because she is my level. She will never be surprised if I mentioned something about missing the touch of a man because she knows I am still young, she does not give me old fashioned advices, and although I need advice from my elders, they do not understand some of the things because we are not the same age.”.....**Participant 13**

“Before my husband's pension funds were transferred into my account, I suffered with my children, sometimes we did not have food to eat and I would call my friend to confide in her; she always sent her children to bring us food parcels because our tradition does not allow married women to visit widows for a certain period. So, even though I could see her, we would talk on the phone and she supported me financially even when I was going up and down doing paper work....she is the one friend I will never forget in my whole life”.....**Participant 8**

5.8.3 Community support

Most participants indicated that the community treated them with respect, compassion, dignity and solidarity throughout the bereavement process. The participants believed that all societies in every corner of the world consist of the most compassionate people even better than family members of the bereaved. The young widows acknowledged that even though the community members had heard that the widow was “the cause” of her husband's death, most of them would never acted with disrespect or hatred towards her.

“My community were compassionate all the way, I did not have a problem with anyone. Even those that I thought did not like me, were there for me.”**Participant 1**

“The community members might not have asked about how I am coping, but I could see through their actions that they were feeling empathic towards me. It is not in our tradition to talk much; some feelings are expressed through actions. I could read so many faces which were feeling sorry for me. Some of them would sympathize with me even though I had also heard that they were gossiping about the fact that I might have killed my husband.”**Participant 2.**

“It is our practice that, if one family is covered by a dark cloud, the community must help out. So I really appreciate the support I received from my community. Some brought their plates and pots to help feed my visitors, and then came to cook and clean until burial day. Others even came days after I was cleansed to check on me”**Participant 9**

“Some of the people from my community did not want to associate with me after hearing that I may have had a hand in my husband’s death. However, some would sympathized with me. I could see that there were those who did not believe that I had him. I cannot say I am complaining about my community members. I know that those who did not fully support me were just trying not to take sides between me and my in-laws”**Participant 4**

“My community supports every mourning family, whether they like it or not. They do it so that they can also be supported when there is a death in their families; so community support is always the first support we tend to receive as the mourners. It is a given case”**Participant 9**

“I was not born in this village and I hardly know people here, but the community did not see that as a problem or a stumbling block for them to come and help me. Some of the community members I knew them during my bereavement period as they were helping me.”**Participant 6 and 2**

5.8.4 Support by Social Welfare

The social welfare feeding schemes were sincerely acknowledged unfortunately by fewer widows who received their services. Most of the widows mentioned that they did not have courage to get help from the social workers as they did not want the village to start laughing at their poverty.

“I will not go to the social worker because she has only one office, and it is inside the clinic. So everyone who goes to the clinic will see me consulting and start gossiping about me, I have enough stress for losing my husband, I do not need anymore”**Participant 3**

“I went to the social workers to assist my children get to school with a proper uniform and winter clothing not long ago, they are busy processing my request, so I am still waiting for their response”
Participant 6

“I will not go ask for help from the social and welfare offices, when the time is right I will find a job and work for my children, I think we are surviving so far, and there is nothing they can do about emotional challenges because they are not widows, they do not know my pain and most of them are just too young.” **Participant 4**

“I have never had an idea of consulting the social and welfare department. I do not believe in those things” **Participant 1**

“I do not think social welfare can help me with anything while we have so many children without parents around the villages and they are not given attention. So what more a child who has one parent?”
Participant 5

“I have never consulted the social welfare offices, I am not so sure that they can help me with or what they really do to assist adults. I only know that they help children and that is it. ” **Participant 7**

“I was advised to contact the social workers and get help with food groceries while I wait for my husband’s money to be released. I did as advised and got assistance until the money was released. I am happy with the services that our government is rendering.” **Participant 8**

“I am still receiving some handouts from the government for my child. He goes to school in a nice uniform, we eat like any other normal family and I am really happy that the government could fill that gap. I do not know what would have happened to my child at school if other children had noticed that he is suffering” **Participant 13**

The young widows who received assistance from the social workers mentioned that the social welfare programme provided them with food parcels and assisted them with their children’s school uniforms, as well as winter clothes, until they got back to their feet again.

5.9 The impact of death on young widows

The participants indicated that they still have emotional and physical health problems, which they believe is normal and they accepted that it would take a while and perhaps forever to heal. However, it is unfortunate that some of them have physical challenges, such as breathing problems, feelings of weakness in their bodies, and other sicknesses which drove them in and out of hospitals. Furthermore, there were those who stood a chance of contracting diseases by sleeping with other men in order to survive financially.

“I am not happy, I do not have much strength and it is visible even to people who do not know me, that I am not a happy person. Sometimes it gets to me that, I look unhappy and mostly ugly because I no longer glow like I used to.” **Participant 2**

“I still visit traditional doctors and western hospitals to consult because sometimes I cannot breathe, or I would cough non-stop. They always tell me that I need to take it easy, although I do not know how one can take it easy when faced with loneliness and lack of finances to at least go out and relieve my stress, never mind the finances to take care of the household needs” **Participant 7**

“I do not have any problem in my body, the thing that bothers me is that I have lost my companion. I feel very lonely and that stresses me out because it is difficult to find someone else, considering my children”.....**Participant 5**

“My only fear is that, death might kill the next man I marry.”.....**Participant 1 and 8**

“Death brought nothing but poverty in my house. There are many illnesses because we no longer have enough food, clothing and medical aid.....I have never been so stressed and desperate”.....**Participant 12**

“My daughter sleeps with older man since her father died and there is no one to take care of us. It pains me but I will not complain because she is doing it to take care of us. Maybe she has noticed that I have affair myself, so my family is in some sort of a business transaction in exchange of sex and money”.....**Participant 9**

“I feel drained, I do not have much power and energy to do anything productive with my life”.....**Participant 11**

The death of a loved one leaves the bereaved with unspeakable pain which lasts for long periods. It is not uncommon to have a young widow who is emotionally and physically challenged even for longer periods. Hoffman (1981), argues that it is not surprising that losing a family member, having to let go, or bringing a new member into the family is hard on those that have trouble reorganizing into a new living system.

5.10 Participants understanding of Human Rights

Although South Africa provides a means for the citizens to be aware of the sensitiveness and significance of human rights through different subdivisions of the media and at schools, much more still needs to be done. Many South African citizens, specifically those in the rural areas, are

not aware of their rights. This was confirmed by the interviews with the participants; most of the participants in the current study were not aware of their rights as widows and as a human beings. However, few were aware of their rights. However, they did not understand what these rights entailed; hence they did not act on them. The sad part about people who do not know their rights is that they are mostly abused and no action is taken against the abusers.

“I honestly do not know my rights. I only knew that I am not supposed to be hit by my husband and that when one of us dies, the other one will inherit everything, that’s it. But, it is not always the case because our culture differs from the laws of the state. I did not want to go to find out more about my rights on my husband’s property because I knew it would bring fights and I might not get my husband’s property”..... **Participant 4**

“I know as a widow I have rights, although I don’t know which ones exactly. But those things do not work for us (the rural people), they work in the cities”**Participant 2, 5, 6 and 12.**

“I do not know of the rights pertaining funerals and rituals and I did not even care, I only did what tradition expected of me during bereavement and I was lucky to keep my house because the in-laws did not throw me out of our house”..... **Participant 8.**

Honestly I do not know many rights that I have. But I know I have the right to say no. I said no to all those rituals which they wanted to perform on me, like smearing me with goat faeces....no no no! I could not deal with that, I am a Christian. But I am still a Venda woman, but the cleansing with water and other traditional medicine, I had to do it because I also believe that I will carry *Mafa* to bring out bad luck for myself and people around me, I had no choice.**Participant 1, 4, 7, and 10.**

5.11 Summary

When a loved one dies in the African society, the bereavement procedures do not end with the burial of the deceased, and South African cultures are not an exception. The family continues with other activities after the burial. The types of activities differ according to sub-cultures. However nowadays, the activities performed sometimes clash with with the some of the human and women rights stipulated in the South African Constitution Section 10 on human dignity. In rural areas, culture appears to be a major influence on the character of the mourning rituals. Furthermore, patriarchy seems to be more observed in African culture, leading to gender imbalance, even in the evolving regime. The main aim of this study is not to attack or undermine cultural traits and practices. However, considering the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act No 108 of 1996 Section 10 on human dignity, women and widows must be treated equally as men and be allowed to have consent over their bodies and lives.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This section presents the discussion of the themes that were developed during the data analysis. Significant insights on the experiences of young Vhavenda widows during the death of their husbands and bereavement rituals thereafter, as well as the challenges they face, were generated. A summary and discussions of results from the empirical study are also presented in this chapter. Limitations of the empirical study are also discussed and recommendations for future research are made based on the results from the empirical study. The aim of the current study was to explore the experiences encountered by young Vhavenda widows living at Nzhelele village of Limpopo in a South African rural area during the process of mourning the death of their loved ones. The following objectives reiterated:

- To explore the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during times of death and bereavement;
- To find out whether young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during death and bereavement;
- To explore the coping strategies employed by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe in dealing with death and bereavement;
- To ascertain the overall impact of the process of death and bereavement on widows' future lives.

The findings of the study were aligned with the Ubuntu framework on which this study is founded. The narratives of each participant were constructed according to the cultural traits of the African context of humanity. Thus, African people share common values, beliefs, norms and also combine their resources and strengths in order to create and build communities (Broodryk, 2006). Mbigi, developed the five finger theory, looking at the aspects of Survival, Solidarity, Compassion, Respect and Dignity, that builds the Ubuntu values. Therefore, the Ubuntu approach indicates the influences one can get from others of the same community in times of death and bereavement. The current research is protuberant in that it uncovers a different dimension of the experiences faced by young widows in rural-based areas. The researcher allowed the young widows to voice out the challenges they come across during the bereavement period and their lives' calamities thereafter. Previous literature on young widows is not disregarded in the current study; however, the present study will fill the gaps of existing data on widowhood and bereavement rituals in South Africa.

A qualitative research approach was allotted for the sake of attaining a comprehensive data in the current study and the Tshikombani area in Nzhelele was used as the study area. The population of the study was young widows with the sample size of thirteen participants was selected. The researcher used purposive sampling and snowballing techniques for selecting the participants. The instrument used for gathering data was an unstructured interview guide, which was aligned to the research questions and data was gathered over a period of two months in 2017. A scissor and sort technique was used to analyze data and the participants' original narrations were used during data presentation. The study findings include the feelings, emotions and challenges faced by young widows, as well as the young widows' experiences from the traditional way of dealing with bereavement.

The study further elucidates that the bereavement process of widowhood is not comfortable for the young widows. Unfortunately, the findings of this study further indicated that most young widows in Tshikombani village are not aware of the government sectors where they can go for legal, social and health care for free. The young widows also did not know about the human rights, women's rights and widows' rights, espoused in the Constitution of South Africa. This shows that there is a need for education on the constitution in the rural areas and a need for the rural communities to

receive a special information from the social and health welfare regularly on health and social issues.

The study was conducted because literature on young widows' issues pertaining mourning and bereavement in South African rural areas seems to be limited. This was also confirmed by Cebekhulu (2015; 87), whose study was in line with the findings of the current study. The literature found is mostly based in the eastern, and western parts of South Africa and very little about the people residing in the north. Moreover, the little literature on the Northern part of South Africa has richer information on Bapedi people leaving around Polokwane than Tsongas and Vhavenda people. Furthermore, the literature on Vhavenda people mainly compared the Christian and traditional way of bereavement, the perceptions and attitudes towards the two ways; there is nothing on the experiences of bereavement process on the young widows.

The table below matches and contrasts the findings of the literature and results from the empirical study.

6.2 Process of bereavement on Vhavenda widows

a. Duration of Bereavement

The Literature Consulted	Empirical Study Findings	Interpretations
According to the literature, bereavement period for most ethnic groups in South Africa, such as the Xhosas, Bapedi, Tswanas and Zulus, lasts for a year.	The mourning period for the Vhavenda is different from the literature consulted, according to the empirical findings. Vhavenda people's bereavement period lasts for few weeks after the cleansing	There is a huge difference between the literature consulted and the empirical study. This is because the literature reports that among the Bapedi, the Zulus, Tswanas and Xhosa cultures,

<p>(Baloyi, 2014; Yawa 2010 & Manyedi, 2003). No duration is specified for Vhavenda in the literature consulted.</p>	<p>rituals which are performed a day or two after the burial day. The number of weeks varies according to families.</p>	<p>bereavement lasts for about a year, and empirical research indicates that for Vhavenda, it is less than a month. The duration of mourning in Vhavenda culture does not seem to be a significant aspect, provided the widow is traditionally cleansed</p>
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b. Processes before Burial

The Consulted literature	Empirical study findings	Interpretation
<p>The literature indicates that in most cultures of South Africa, such as Zulus, Bapedi, Xhosas, Ndebeles, Coloureds, Basotho and Batswana, widows sit on the mattresses immediately after discovering death of their husbands, wear black garments and do not go out of the house for any activity, except to the toilet and even then after daylight hours. This is believed to help safeguard the widow</p>	<p>Empirical research indicates that after finding out about the death, Vhavenda old women prepare a mattress in the couple's bedroom for the widow to stay on during the mourning period. The widow stays indoors, covered in a blanket, with her head wrapped with a cloth wrapper of no any specific color, and she is not allowed to leave the house or participate in feminine domestic chores, such as cooking and cleaning.</p>	<p>The literature of other South African cultures and the empirical research are similar on the practices which take place before the burial or funeral. However, all the other traditions specified black clothing for the widows during the entire mourning period, while the Vhavenda people wear any dark colours. In the Bapedi culture, according to the consulted literature, widows are given a hand belt made out of cow</p>

<p>from suspicions of witchcraft (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Cebekhulu, 2015; Setsiba, 2012; Dlukulu, 2010 & Yawa 2010). Pauw (1990) found that in the Bapedi culture, the widow's body and traditional costume, consisting of the back and front skin aprons, which are usually white in colour, are blackened with a mixture of fat, earth the baked or burnt kernel of the <i>motshidi</i> (<i>Ximenia caffra</i>) fruit, whilst the tips of her double-pointed back apron are cut off. The widow is also given a black head cloth and dress, and wears a special headband made of cow skin. Every widow who is still in mourning is recognized by these clothes, which are referred to as "darkness clothes".</p>	<p>However, she may go to the toilet after the daylight hours, when most people are asleep. Elder women who take care of the widow must also be widows, and no non-widow is allowed to contact the new widow because it is believed that she will bring the non-widow bad luck. On the day that the community men called "<i>Dziphele</i>" dig the grave, "<i>Vhomaine</i>" uproots un-poisonous roots from the grave pit and make a soft porridge as part of the rituals for the widow to consume before burial. The soft porridge is believed to can strengthen the widow before the burial of her husband.</p>	<p>skin. However this is not practiced in their neighboring region, Vhembe. This may not necessarily mean that there is equivalence between literature findings and empirical research. However, that this information may contribute to the existing body of knowledge.</p>
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c. Burial day

The Consulted literature	Empirical study findings	Interpretations
<p>The literature by Cebekhulu (2015); Baloyi (2014); Yawa (2010) & Manyedi (2003) reveal that that traditional Tswana people slaughter an ox, called “mogage” at dawn on burial day. The chime of the ox is held in one hand and thrown into the grave by the mourners. The literature further illustrates that the literature in the Tswana culture, the meat from the ox is eaten without salt, in order to show that it is not for enjoyment because the meat since the family is in a state of mourning.</p> <p>The literature also shows that in the Pedi, Tswana, and Zulu culture after the burial the bereaved are expected to shave their heads. However, due to evolution currently they may resort to at least cutting a</p>	<p>Just like in the literature, the participants confirmed that in Venda culture, the deceased is buried in the early hours of the morning. Before leaving for the cemetery, the widow and closest family members of the deceased queue in front of the casket, with the head side opened for them to view the deceased’s face. Vhavenda people call this process “<i>u tovhowa</i>” The empirical data further indicates that there are no rituals performed on burial day, except that the first born child of the deceased, and in some families both the first and the last born, are requested to do one practice called “<i>u seriswa bogisi</i>”, to help them forget the deceased parent. The empirical data also indicates that the widow and children pick a handful of soil and throw it on the casket</p>	<p>The burial means for the Vhavenda tradition are not entirely different from the other cultures in South Africa. However, the empirical data indicates fewer rituals and activities on the burial for Vhavenda people while the literature indicates more rituals and activities performed on the day of the burial. The burial day for Vhavenda people, seems to be a well-respected day, without any noise and busyness in the deceased’s home. All activities of after burial takes place on the following day in the village resume after the burial.</p>

<p>lock of their hair. In the Tswana culture the mourners are also expected to wear a mourning handmade necklace, apart from shaving their hair.</p>	<p>in the grave, and then follows the other close family members before the men put the soil on the coffin.</p>	
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d. Etiquette and behavior after Burial

Literature consulted	Empirical research	Interpretation
<p>In many contemporary African villages in South Africa, the widow is ‘... required to wear black clothes ... and behave in a manner that shows that she is grieving’ (Kotzé <i>et al.</i> 2012). She is also expected to give way to other road or path users whom she meets when walking by kneeling down. Kotzé <i>et al.</i> (2012) further add that the widow on black clothes also has to sit at the back seat of any public transport to prevent other</p>	<p>Vhavenda widows are expected to sleep on the floor instead of kneeling down, to show respect, and to give right of way to the elders who meets her on the road. She is expected to keep as far away as possible from other people when she is still wearing the mourning clothes. She has to sit near a window at the back seat of a car or bus, in order to protect other people from being affected by her bad luck. She also eats separately and bathes separately.</p>	<p>The literature and empirical research describe the same etiquette among widows. There are no differences at all, except that the Vhavenda widow sleeps on the floor, while widows in other South African groups kneel.</p>

travellers from the possibility of a ‘bad omen or bad luck’.		
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e. Cleansing rituals for young widows

The Consulted literature	Empirical study findings	Interpretations
<p>The literature consulted reveals that the cleansing of certain South African cultures such as Basotho, Bapedi, Batswana, Zulus, Xhosas and Colored people, cleanse the widows for about a year after the death of a husband. The cleansing rituals differ according to cultures, although there are major similarities. The beliefs and meanings regarding the cleansing rituals are also similar (Baloyi, 2015), also see (Kotzé, Els & Rajuili-Masilo, 2012; Pauw, 1999; Setsiba, 2012 & Gumede, 1990). Central to the cleansing rituals is a belief that an uncleansed widow carries bad luck with her, and she is</p>	<p>Findings from the empirical study reveal that every Vhavenda widow should be cleansed traditionally after her husband’s death. In the Vhavenda culture, the cleansing is done a day after the funeral, by following instructions from a traditional healer. It is initially done at the river, although the empirical study indicates that it seems that nowadays it is also done in the house and strictly in the early hours of the morning. Central to the cleansing rituals is the practice that the elderly widows wash the newer widow while she is naked with traditional medicines and instructions from the traditional healer</p>	<p>The meanings of the cleansing rituals for young widows are common for all cultures in the consulted literature and the empirical data. The only slight difference is that Vhavenda widows are cleansed a day or two after burial. Thus, the belief systems are same regardless of the cleansing practices that widows in each culture go through. Seeking consent from the widows seems to be a national problem during the bereavement activities. Thus, the literature indicates that following the declination of cleansing rituals is the stigma from the community and disapproval, isolation by other married women, specifically</p>

dangerous to the society (Manala, 2013).	chosen by the family. The young widow is expected to comply with the instructions without comment on the practice.	and the widow is regarded as disrespectful of the cultural norms.
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6.3 Challenges faced by young widows at Tshikombani Village

The study outlined noteworthy challenges encountered by young widows in Tshikombani village found in Nzhelele. The study confirmed that traditional bereavement practices of South African citizens are still predominant in the rural areas. Dehumanization of young widows during the cleansing rituals was prevalent and that the instructions are not to be questioned by the widows. However, these practices condescend the Human Rights Act 108 of 1996 in the constitution of South Africa, which stresses the inclusion of women in decisions that concern them and a full protection over their rights in general. Furthermore, the study showed how rife property fights are in homes of young widows. Most in-laws seem entitled to assets which were owned by their deceased relative, the widow's husband, and which should under the ownership of the widow and children afterwards. Most outrageously, the study revealed the limited education that young widows have regarding human rights. This was confirmed by the higher proportion of widows who indicated that they had to be cleansed traditionally because culture cannot be questioned. In addition, the young widows in the current study confirmed that they are not fully aware of their rights as young women and widows of South Africa.

The study also indicated that financial difficulties were faced by all participants, with an exception of one. Therefore, there is a difficulty of raising children resulting from lack of finances and emotional support. The study further highlighted the limited support from the law sector and the Social and health welfare officials for young widows in the rural areas of Nzhelele. This was observed through the single young widow who sought psychological support from health

practitioner and four widows who got free assistance from the law representatives out of the thirteen young widows interviewed.

Most of the young widows in the current study were still suffering emotional pain. The empirical results indicate inability to move on for most young widows because of fear of losing another loved one, fear that the new man might abuse their children and, not being able to let go of the memories of their deceased husbands for a new companion.

6.4 Coping strategies of young widows

The Ubuntu practice is prevalent in the rural areas of Nzhelele; widows depend on sharing and caring from their family members and the community. It is an automatic practice that when death has fallen one member's household, the bereaved immediately gets surrounded by people who must then take care of and support them. However, the coping and healing mechanisms of bereavement are not based on the decision of the bereaved. The traditional beliefs and rituals of bereavement are set to be the only directive for coping. However, this study uncovered severe physical and emotional pain still experienced by young widows. The bereavement rituals are respected and prominent in any culture, however, the stress emanating from financial deprivation, inability to move on, loneliness, parenthood roles adjustments and property adversaries with the in-laws after a death of a bread winner and a companion, are an impossible case for rituals to unravel. Furthermore, the Majority of young widows who participated in this study were still not coping with the death of their husbands when the period that interviews took place.

6.5 Support systems for young widows

The major palpable support for the young widows who participated in this study was the support from the community members and the automatic support from the widows, original family. However, few participants mentioned the assistance from the Social and welfare sector. The findings also indicate that the in-laws' families are mostly the widows' enemies after death of the

husband. Thus, the support system from the in-laws' families is, low compared to the support from the widows' original family and the community at large.

6.6 Human rights and legal policy issues for widows

Rural areas are still deserted by the service providers from government to date. In her study, Cebekhulu (2015) argued that in 2015 “the South African Government has failed to fulfill ensuring convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women [CEDAW] 10, modifying laws and the social behavior in eliminating customary practices that discriminate against woman [CEDAW 2f & 5a]”. This was also established in the findings of the current study. Most of the young widows' challenges in Nzhelele resulted from lack of knowledge about where to get assistance. Moreover, the rights of widows are still overlooked by the traditional norms which are dominated by patriarchy and traditional values above the country's constitutional law.

6.7 Implications

6.7.1 Research implications

During the process of this study, the researcher realized that the literature in the area of the lived experiences of premature spousal bereavement and the actual bereavement processes undergone by the rural widows are not well documented. Thus, data analysis chapter of this study raised a number of questions that would provide the basis for further research into this topic.

There is a belief in almost all South African cultures about bereavement; namely, “if a widow does not mourn for her husband through traditional rituals something bad will happen to her”. This opens the door for verification of this belief and explains the reasons why almost all cultures believe it.

Young widows seem to be struggling with cutting bonds and remarrying according to the results of this study. A study based on cutting bonds in this regard can be conducted. It would have the specific aims of exploring ways in which the participants may be assisted in moving on.

The women in the current study identified the value of making connections through memories, thus, it would be wise to conduct some research, focusing on how and why this is important and beneficial to women who are widowed early in life.

Support systems and social support have been identified as being vital to the adaptation and adjustment of bereaved individuals from all ages and life circumstances. However, several questions could be answered through further research in this area. In addition, spiritual support could be investigated by asking, “Why do some women find support in faith and spirituality while others belief in God is a hindrance?” Support groups were identified as contributing to adaptation, therefore, perhaps one could ask the question, “what is it about support groups that is helpful or not helpful?” and, “what type of group support contributes most effectively to the adjustment of young widows?”

The study participants identified their ideas on how the health care system could provide support to young widows. Thus, research on health care providers such as hospitals, counsellors, and social workers could identify areas of concern and methodologies which could help young widows to adapt to the encounters in their lives.

Finally, similar studies need to be completed with larger samples in other rural settings of Limpopo, among groups such as Balobedu and Vatsonga. The current sample consisted of participants from Nzhelele. Possibly, women from other cultures, with different belief systems in the literature would present different experiences.

6.7.2 Educational implications

Social workers need to be educated to meet needs of individuals who experience specific issues in their lives, in this case. Widowhood at a young age. Higher education should include instructions on death, dying, grief, and loss, as well as opportunities for senior social work, Law, Sociology, psychology, youth , gender as well as development studies, to interact with individuals during their practicals. Situations in which students could work with bereaved young widows and their children would be effective educational and practice opportunities. Working with experienced social workers, students would be able to directly experience the needs of these clients and identify ways to assist them to adapt to their new ways of life.

6.8 Recommendations

A thorough study is required to investigate support systems for widows by in-laws, as well as how lack of support impacts on the widows' bereavement process. Such a study may also centre its attention on how the death rituals come to be decided upon by the elders of the family and the consequences for refusing to participate in the rituals.

Another study on the processes of bereavement amongst widowers should be conducted. The study may include "who decides the bereavement rituals on their behalf. It can also be on how men undergo bereavement rituals and the impact of bereavement rituals on men. These would explain the reasons why patriarchy is still prevalent in South Africa, and most of the decisions in family gatherings or events are taken by men. Such a study would also reveal the different types of power that men and women have and showcase the difference according to gender during mourning periods.

6.9 Conclusions

This chapter discussed in detail the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study and the recommendations that were made. Furthermore, the recommendations were made in a similar way, to make allowance for critical thought, better service delivery from the field of social work, traditional leaders, Lawyers, Public works programmes, as well as to enable further research to establish new facts. This is because bereavement in Venda culture is complicated by different factors. For example, bereavement is sometimes perceived as an inconvenience due to its demands. As such, some death rituals tend to be adapted to accommodate the practicalities of societal demands and lead to the extinction of significant cultural practices.

The struggle of black rural young widows in transitional societies in finding new scripts to express their feelings associated with their bereavement will thus often remain invisible in their daily lives and to people around them, although it is ever present. In line with new developing ways of living in modern times, most participant couples had their own ways of doing things that were different from the rituals practiced by their families of origin. This may explain why participants experienced conflict of some sort with their in-laws. It again highlights the impact of weak scripts of transitional societies, which affect some aspects of the participants' mourning negatively. Ritualistic behaviours are often associated with ceremonies for the deceased although in passing the rituals from generation to generation, the meaning may be lost (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006).

In conclusion, the thoughts and experiences presented by these young widows have provided information which is intended to benefit other women who experience spousal loss at a young age. Additionally, for health care professionals providing care for young widows and their families, the present researcher hopes that they understand the urgency of the needs of young widows, so that they can quickly identify the widows' needs more effectively and find the most beneficial ways to address these needs.

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Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

1. As a young Vhavenda widow, what were your experiences during the period of death and bereavement?

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2. What were the challenges that you encountered during the period of bereavement?

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3. How were you treated by your immediate family during that period?

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4. What kind of treatment did you receive from the community during the period?

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5. During the death and bereavement period, what sort of coping strategies did you adopt to deal with the situation?

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6. From the lessons learnt during the time of death and bereavement, what should the family, social work professionals and community do to assist the bereaved?

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7. How has the period of death and bereavement impacted on your future?

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8. Would you choose the traditional bereavement rituals if you were given a chance to do so? Please explain

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9. Is there anything you would like to add based on the conversation we had?

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THANK YOU VERY MUCH



Appendix 2: Informed Consent

School of Human and Social Sciences

Department of African Studies-Sociology

Date: 2 August 2016

Dear participant

My name is Itsweni, P. I am a student at the University of Venda, registered for a Master's degree in the Sociology section of African Studies Department, in the School of Human and Social Sciences. I am conducting a study titled, ***The Experiences of Death of loved ones and Bereavement Amongst young Vhavenda Widows in Vhembe District, Limpopo: A case study approach.*** I would like to request you to participate in this study. Any information you provide will be valuable in the study and treated as confidential. Please note that your participation is strictly voluntary, this implies that you can choose to withdraw from the study for any reason personal to you.

RESEARCH INFORMATION

Principal researcher: Itsweni Pelewe

Supervisor : Dr Tshifhumulo

Co-Supervisor: Dr Elias Cebekhulu

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The key focus of the enquiry is to identifying the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during the period of death and bereavement. This study objectives revolve around establishing whether these women are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during the process of death and bereavement; understanding the coping strategies employed by young widows in dealing with death and bereavement; understanding their expectations about the role that needs to be played by the

family and the community during the process of death and bereavement and ascertaining the overall impact of death and bereavement on their future lives.

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Signature of Researcher _____ **Date** _____

I.....have read and understood the contents of this invitation to participate in this study. I hereby confirm my voluntary consent to participate in the study.

Respondent signature _____ **Date** _____



Appendix 3: Letter of Information

School of Human and Social Sciences

Department of African Studies-Sociology

Date: 2 August 2016

Dear participant

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: The Experiences of Death of loved ones and Bereavement amongst young Vhavenda Widows at Vhembe District in Limpopo, South Africa.

Principal researcher: Itsweni Pelewe

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s: Dr Tshifhumulo, Dr Mukwevho and Dr Elias Cebekhulu

Brief Introduction and Purpose of the Study: The key focus of the enquiry is to identifying the challenges experienced by young Vhavenda widows in Vhembe District during the period of death of their loved ones and bereavement. This study objectives revolve around establishing whether these women are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion during the period of death and bereavement; understanding the coping strategies employed by young widows in dealing with death and bereavement; understanding their expectations about the role that needs to be played by the family and the community during the process of death and bereavement and ascertaining the overall impact of the process of death and bereavement on their future lives.

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