

University of the Western Cape

**An empowerment programme for black young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State,
South Africa**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape.

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KEYWORDS

- Key words: Empowerment, widow, widowhood, African, capacity building.



ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to facilitate an empowerment program with African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State province, South Africa, which would capacitate them to deal with their challenges and reduce their vulnerability. The objectives of the study were to explore and describe experiences and challenges of African young widows in Mangaung in the Free State; to explore and describe the customary practices around widowhood in Mangaung Metro in the Free State; and to describe an empowerment process facilitated with young African widows in the Mangaung Metro in the Free State. A qualitative research approach was utilized. This study employed a Participatory Action Research design with critical theory as the theoretical framework. Purposive sampling was implemented, which allowed the researcher to access the relevant participants for the study.

The focus was on two areas, Thaba Nchu, a rural area, and Bloemfontein, an urban area. The study focused on black African young widows aged 18 to 40 years. Data was collected through individual interviews, focus groups and observations using audio recording, and transcribed verbatim. Ethical considerations were observed for the study, including informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify themes and sub-themes. The main themes found were: effects of widowhood on dealing with the loss of a husband; challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows; and suggestions for support groups. Strategies were then developed to deal with issues that made widows vulnerable. The main focus of the guideline is the empowerment of widows to be able to deal with their challenges. It is recommended that the guideline be piloted in one province for a period of six months, and an evaluation study be conducted to assess its effectiveness before a roll out to all provinces. Also, a

research study be conducted on the role of women in the implementation of widowhood rituals, to determine the awareness of the women of the impact they have on widows.



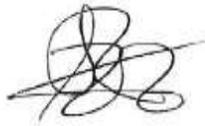
DECLARATION

I declare that *An empowerment programme for African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State, South Africa* is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Shirley Nozipo Hugo

Date: 30 September 2021

Signed.....



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My PhD study has been a learning curve and self-discovery in terms of perseverance and pushing myself to the edge. I thank the Lord first who sustained me and gave me strength to push to the end though I wanted to give up at some stage. I am very grateful to my supervisor and co-supervisor. The support of my supervisor Prof Catherina Schenck and her continued guidance with patience helped me to keep track of my studies. My co-supervisor Dr Neil Henderson helped me to access my inner strength. His support also ensured that I was on the right track and should not give up but work harder and smarter. A word of gratitude to my writing mentor, Feikoab Parimah for his unwavering support. May God bless him. I also want to acknowledge the support from the Erica Theron Trust and HWSETA that supported my studies.

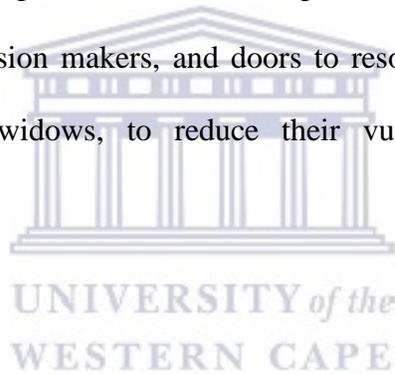
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

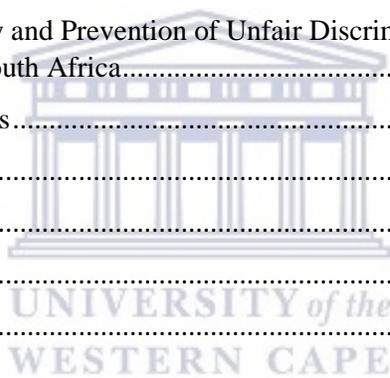
- CEDAW: Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
- PAR: Participatory Action Research
- UN Women: United Nations Women
- UN General Assembly: United Nations General Assembly
- EPCSA: Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa
- PEDUDA: Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000
- CGE: Commission on Gender Equality
- SASSA: South African Social Security Agency



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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Widowhood implies much more than the loss of your partner or spouse. It is the loss of status in society, depending on the cultural practices of the society. All widows must adapt to their new status. In particular, the African young widow finds herself solely shouldering all financial and other responsibilities after losing her husband, who most of the time was the breadwinner. They battle with raising young children, addressing loneliness and isolation, and identity shifting to handling rituals and marker events like anniversaries (Hooyman and Kramer, 2010). Moreover, African young widows battle with adjusting to widowhood, due to the challenges that come with the new status of widowhood.

1.1 Background and context of the study

The UN Secretary-General Ki-moon (2011) highlighted that women tend to experience stigmatization during widowhood, and in many countries they have to deal with the shame of widowhood, in addition to losing a husband for those women whose husbands have died. Widows are seen to be cursed in some cultures or even associated with witchcraft. It has also been noted that poverty amongst widows is further aggravated by lack of or no access to credit or other economic resources, and some lack enlightenment or education.

“All widows should be protected by the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)”, adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and other international human rights treaties (Ki-moon, 2011). The message was given to mark the first International Widows Day, which is observed on the 23rd of June every year. Despite the call for the protection of the rights of widows, it has been reported that in South Africa

most widows are suffering. They experience isolation, degrading traditional practices and stigmatization by their community. They have to wear mourning dresses and be confined to their homes for long periods. In-laws deny them access to their inheritance. When that happens, it leads to widows living in poverty (SABC News, 2018). In addition, Ntuli and Myeni (2014) put forth that the widow is left with the challenges of having to support herself and her children as a single parent. She is usually not supported by her in-laws on suspicion that she caused the death of her husband. Thus, the death of a spouse brings about material deprivation which also increases stress.

In dealing with stress while facing challenges of widowhood with no support from the in-laws, widows need support to deal with their challenges. Wafula (2012) identified that there are many challenges experienced by widows with no support. Widows tend to experience poverty after losing the financial support of the husband, and practices such as property and death benefit money grabbing by the family of the deceased partner. Widowhood rites and practices are enforced on widows, implying a widow will be confined to one place, facing isolation. They are often accused of killing their husbands and thus face stigmatization. Most widows do not get support from the in-laws.

1.1.1. South African widows

The literature reveals firstly that customary practices mostly do not recognize the right of widows to inherit their late husband's property (Mutongi, 2007). Secondly, women who pursue customary courts for protection from property-grabbing usually leave empty-handed (Kafumbe, 2010). It is further noted that widows experience poverty due to little or no access to credit or private property, which is further exacerbated by illiteracy or lack of education (Puri, 2013).

1.1.2. Empowerment

It is hoped that empowerment will make widows stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights. Terre Blanche et al. (2006) describe empowerment as a process of raising awareness in people of their own abilities and resources to mobilize for action. Such an empowerment programme is aimed at building the capacity of the widows and ensuring that they become empowered to deal with their challenges and improve their lives and those of their children. The empowerment will be through group work facilitating awareness and access to resources and the rights of widows to improve their victim situation through capacity building.

1.1.3. Capacity building

It is stated by Aronsson (2012) that South Africa has some of the most progressive legislation on gender equality in the world, yet there is a lack of implementation. Sometimes the changes in capacity we hope to achieve will include individual knowledge, behaviors, skills and techniques.

Eger et al define capacity building as a process aimed at improving and developing the person's skills, knowledge and awareness based on the available resources (Eger et al (2018).

It is to further raise awareness, increase knowledge, build skills, and change attitudes and behaviors to reduce gender-based health inequities. The empowerment of African young widows will therefore be done through the development of a guideline for their capacity building. The capacity building guideline is aimed at empowering the widows to deal with their challenges, like awareness of their rights and knowing how to improve their lives. They will be able to know how legislation can protect them from abuse, and about resources available to them as African young widows. The capacity building will assist them to cope with widowhood, by identifying their challenges and getting empowered on how to deal with such challenges.

1.2. Rationale for a guideline for empowerment of African young widows

There is a gap in research regarding empowerment of widows to deal with the challenges that come with widowhood. It is apparent that widows struggle with widowhood and in dealing with their loss, and there is a need to empower widows in order to change their state of suffering and vulnerability. This empowerment process could also assist widows to deal with other challenges of widowhood exacerbated by traditional practices (Aronsson, 2012), especially in South Africa.

The researcher, being a black woman who is married, has observed how widows are treated in the society regarding cultural practices. In 22 years of social work practice, one has been dealing with cases of widows who are struggling to adjust to their loss while facing challenges of widowhood.

It was in this context that the researcher decided to explore the challenges of African young widows from a social work perspective as part of the Masters' Degree. The researcher is interested in empowering the widows on how to deal with their challenges by developing a guideline with them for their empowerment. The needs and challenges of the widows will be the basis for the development of a guideline towards empowerment.

1.3. Problem statement

The research problem emerging from the review of the literature is that some young widows are vulnerable. Their vulnerability is aggravated by aspects such as lack of support from their in-laws and cultural practices.

Widows appeared to be discriminated against, abused and exploited in many countries worldwide. Previous studies indicated that the vulnerability of widows is made worse by the lack of implementation of policies to protect them. Aronsson (2012) states that South Africa has some of the most progressive legislation on gender equality in the world, yet there is a lack of de facto

equality in this country. Aronsson (2012) only highlights the good laws, like the Constitution as amended (2012), and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act no 4 of 2000, but does not go further to indicate what could be done to address the gap of lack of implementation of such laws.

There is evidence from research indicating the suffering of widows, as highlighted in a study by the South African Commission on Gender Equality (Khulumani Support Group, 2011). The researcher has also researched the needs of African young widows in Mangaung, in the Free State.

In the study, the challenges identified by the widows included issues such as severe poverty, financial burden, marginalization and what is referred to as property grabbing by the husband's family (Hugo, 2003). The studies by Khulumani Support Group (2011) highlighted discrimination and challenges faced by widows. These studies, however, fall short of addressing how widows could deal with discrimination and challenges.

1.4. Research questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

- What are the experiences and challenges of black African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State province?
- What are the customary practices that promote vulnerability around widowhood among the communities of Mangaung Metro, Free State province?
- What intervention strategies can be workshopped with black African widows to change their circumstances?

1.5. The aim of the study

The aim of this study was to:

- Explore and describe the experiences and challenges of black African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State province
- Explore the customary practices that promote vulnerability around widowhood among the communities of Mangaung Metro, Free State province
- Develop guidelines to facilitate young widows' empowerment to deal with the challenges

1.6. Objectives of the study

Specific objectives of this study are to:

- 
- Explore and describe the experiences and challenges of African young widows in Mangaung Metro in the Free State
 - Explore and describe the customary practices around widowhood in Mangaung Metro in the Free State
 - Develop an intervention programme for empowerment of widows in collaboration with the widows
 - Workshop an intervention programme and guideline in order to empower African young widows in Mangaung Metro in the Free State, so that they can deal with their challenges.

1.7. Significance of the study

A gap in social work practice was identified in that there is no policy or guideline for services to African young widows. Widows receive interventions usually when they are in a crisis stage, consulting social workers. The researcher, being a social worker who has worked with widows without a guideline, now understands how critical it is to have a guideline that addresses the actual

needs of the widows. The empowerment process will ensure that widows are not just victims but are empowered to be able to stand up for their families, as well as get support to adjust to their new status.

1.8. Limitations and assumptions of the study

The study may challenge the cultural practices in the communities. The Participatory Action Research (PAR) process needs to deal with the matters sensitively and allow the widows to act in appropriate ways which should not put them into any danger of being socially excluded even more.

The study was done with 16 Sotho, Tswana and Xhosa widows from both rural and urban areas of Mangaung Metropolitan; though a limited sample, the finds of the study can still be transferred to similar settings.

1.9. Operational definition of terms

Black young widow: In the study, it is defined as a young black woman, aged 24-40 years, who has lost her husband through death and has not married again (Ajiboye, 2016).

Capacity building: Capacity building refers to the ability of individuals and institutions to make and implement decisions and perform functions in an effective, efficient and sustainable manner (Garriga, 2019). Capacity building for the purpose of this study will mean the process of empowering widows in order to reduce challenges that make them vulnerable.

Community: Community means a group of people with common interest (Peck, 2016).

Community for the purpose of this study will mean a group of people living in Mangaung Metro.

Community members in this study will mean residents of Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein.

Widow: A widow is a woman whose spouse has died and who has not remarried (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020)

Widowhood: A gendered and cultural experience due to having lost a spouse (Perkins et al., 2016).

When widows are accused of killing their husbands, it does not necessarily imply the physical killing but refers to causing death of the husband

1.10. Value of the study to the population

The expected benefit of the study to the Mangaung Metro community could be the empowerment of widows. It has also led to the development of a framework on how to facilitate the empowerment of widows in the communities. There is currently no framework for social workers to support widows. The empowerment process will ensure that widows are not just victims but are able to stand up for their families, as well as get support to adjust to their new status. They will be able to improve their lives and assist their children in adjusting to the new status of living without a father.

1.11. Organization of the thesis

Chapter 1 captures the background, rationale, context and overview of African young widowhood in Mangaung, Free State, as well as the research setting, problem statement, research questions, aim, objective, methodology and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on African young widows.

Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework utilized in the study.

Chapter 4 encompasses the research design and methodology for the data collection and data analysis processes, including the ethical considerations adhered to in the study.

Chapter 5 discusses the data analysis, research study findings, discussion of the findings, and interpretation of the data that was collected, and the themes that emerged from the data.

Chapter 6 outlines the guideline for empowerment of African young widows, developed with the participants from data collected from the participants and inputs of the social work experts based on the Healy's Dynamic Model.

Chapter 7 covers the findings, conclusions, recommendations, and the limitations of the study.



CHAPTER 2

Literature review

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher discusses the body of literature related to the study. The discussion opens with the definition of a widow and widowhood. An international view is then given on widows. This is followed by an African view on widows, and lastly the discussion focuses on South African widows. The discussion also encompasses the vulnerability of African young widows and violence towards widows. The discussion closes with the exploration of legislation in addressing widowhood challenges and lastly the church support for widows. A summary concludes the chapter.

It can be noted that there is limited research on experiences of young widows in South Africa, and Jones et al. (2019) accede that generally the limited research on widows leads to a scarcity of literature in the field. Social work practice with widows in rural and less resourced areas lacks documented guidelines for social work practitioners to use (Dube, 2019). In spite of the plethora of studies on widowhood, Lowe and McClement (2010 a) asserted that challenges of young widows have not received enough attention in literature, as confirmed by other studies (Dunn, 2015; Jones, 2016). Due to the dearth of literature on the challenges young widows face, it has become difficult to proffer tailor-made solutions to the challenges this category of widows, face in society, especially in South Africa. The missing information could inform policies to address the challenges of widows (Dasgupta, 2017).

2.2. Definition of a widow and widowhood

Soulsby and Bennett (2017) defined a widow as a woman who has lost her husband through death and never remarried, whereas a widower is a man whose wife has died and has never remarried. It should be noted that, for the purpose of this study, an African widow is defined as a black African woman who has lost her husband through death and has not married again (Ajiboye, 2016).

2.2.1. Bereavement

Widows go through a period of mourning after the death of the spouse known as spousal bereavement. The bereavement process has effects on the widows. Its consequences are generally short-term (though not always) and have personal consequences and meanings. On the other hand, “widowhood is a long-term and ongoing state, which not only has personal consequences but carries with its social consequences and meanings (Soulsby and Bennet, 2017)”. Bereavement is characterised by physical effects on the widow like loss of appetite, altered sleep, immune imbalance, including heart rate and blood pressure challenges (Buckley et al., 2012). This implies that the widow must deal with those effects after the loss of her husband.

It has been noted that when the woman becomes a widow, she goes through widowhood, a state of having lost one’s spouse to death and having to re-establish your life and identity as a widow (Bennett and Soulby, 2012). Widowhood is a period characterized by challenges and suffering for the widow and her children, which are largely psycho-social in nature.

The qualitative study of Motsoeneng and Modise (2020) revealed that some of the BaSotho widows in a South African rural setting of Free State, South Africa are expected to be confined in one place, and stigmatized with accusations of killing their husbands, leading to isolation. The widow is expected to withdraw from social gatherings. In addition, widowhood comes with challenges that could lead to widows struggling to balance bereavement and the widowhood

challenges. The widow could be trying to deal with accepting the loss of the husband, but at the same time be accused of killing the same person she is grieving over. Due to isolation and stigmatization, most widows do not get support from their in-laws. Upon completion of the mourning period, the widow remains with the stigmatization and new identity of being called a widow, which identifies her as different from other women. The isolation of the widow could deprive her of the access to support and she may struggle with the challenges of widowhood (Motsoeneng and Modise, 2020).

Widows also battle with raising young children, addressing loneliness and isolation, and the identity shift to handling rituals and marker events like anniversaries (Hooyman and Kramer, 2013). Moreover, African young widows struggle with adjusting to widowhood due to the challenges that come with the new status of widowhood. Women (2000), and Manala (2016) concur that widowhood rites are made uncomfortable and painful by the same in-laws the widow is looking to for support. They indicate that the widow is confined to one place for a period of six months to a year. In her loneliness she might look to the in-laws who should be sharing her pain and who are part of her family. Unfortunately, the in-laws may isolate the widow and offer no support. Even other women isolate her as she becomes a threat in taking their husbands, since she is suddenly available and a threat according to them. The widow does not get support to grieve the loss of her husband and be supported when her body and mind are not functioning well due to grief, known as “widow’s brain”. While dealing with her bereavement, she is bombarded with widowhood rites with no support but left isolated to fend for herself.

Manala (2016) substantiates that widows tend to yield to the widowhood rituals as compliance more than sanctioning them. In South Africa, it is further mentioned that widows are regarded as bringing bad luck which could be detrimental to the community, compelling them to yield to the

painful rites and practices that leave them depressed. In addition, the process leads to suffering for the widows, as they are treated to humiliating cultural stereotypes (Motsoeneng and Modise, 2020).

It is in this regard that Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007), in a study of Zulu widows, established that, because of their situation, widows tend to focus their grief on issues of poverty caused by loss of their husband, more than the husband's death. Due to lack of support from in-laws, widows struggle to move on with their lives after losing their husbands (Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007). While they grapple to accept the loss of their husbands, the widowhood rites start being initiated. The widow is given a mourning dress, which is usually black and to be worn daily without changing it.

The mourning dress becomes the symbol of loneliness and stigmatization. Among Zulu widows, a married woman tries to accept being a married woman without a husband, and the in-laws give her a new identity of a widow, regarded as a woman with bad luck because she lost her husband (Roseblatt and Nkosi, 2007).

In collaborating other studies, Motsoeneng and Modise (2020) revealed that widows lack social support after the death of their partners and tend to be treated to humiliating cultural stereotypes. They are accused by their in-laws and other family members of involvement in the death of their partners, which is observed to occur more in the widowhood experience in rural settings. They get isolated, most of the time even losing their resources to the in-laws who grab her inheritance, which leaves them vulnerable. This situation can lead to poverty for the widow and her children, hence they focus more on poverty than their grief.

It is further mentioned that the situation can become grim for a widow who is not afforded time to grieve, is isolated and stigmatized in a mourning dress, and regarded as a symbol of bad luck in the community. The widow is isolated without any form of support to adapt to widowhood, and tends to battle for survival on her own, sometimes with an added burden of having children (Motsoeneng and Modise, 2020).

2.3. Effects of widowhood

Widowhood is a cultural practice experienced by women who have lost their husbands through death, and in Africa women are subjected to widowhood rituals which lead to their vulnerability. The purpose of the rituals is actually to assist the widow in dealing with the loss by preventing bereavement illnesses in a traditional practice manner. The widowhood rituals are led by men from generation to generation (Nwaoga; Uroko; Okoli and Okwuosa (2021). Manala (2015) further emphasise that, widows seldom benefit from the Ubuntu African values, nor Christian teaching that promote care and support those who are grieving and have lost their loved ones. Ubuntu is described by Lefa (2015) as an African way of life with the expression of support, empathy, respect for others and their dignity and caring for others. Instead widows tend to be ill-treated and do not get the desired support during widowhood. Thomas (2021) accentuated that bereaved spouses, in struggling to adapt to bereavement, counted on their own support networks for different challenges at various stages, and these included family members, in-laws, friends, burial societies, their surrounding communities, religious communities and figures. Thomas (2021), in the qualitative study of social support experiences and needs of spousal bereaved individuals in a South African township, found that widows do not benefit from Ubuntu values, in that they received no support but instead were isolated and stigmatised during their long period of vulnerability, mourning the loss of their spouses.

The Commission on Gender Equality conducted a study on widowhood and gender equality in South Africa in 2006/07. The purpose of the study-Policy Brief was to highlight the negative experiences and impacts of widowhood on women, whose human and gender rights are routinely violated by those close to them and, in some cases, by the judicial and law enforcement systems meant to serve and protect them. Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi, 2013). It can be deduced that widows do not benefit from African values of Ubuntu nor Christian teachings as well as the judicial and law enforcement at times while they are supposed to be assisted with their challenges of widowhood, experienced as part of cultural practices when reporting to seek help.

Widows tend to be made more vulnerable by cultural practices such as ritual cleansing which also leads to sexual exploitation (Kafumbe, 2010). NewAfrica (2012) has noted that when a woman becomes a widow in an African society, she and her children are often exposed to obnoxious cultural practices, and they are ostracized from and by the community, denied any rights to their late husband's property, and their children can also be denied education. Okoro and Nkama (2018) concur that, widowhood rituals tend to be more oppressive to the widow and rather focusing on glorifying the dead man than allowing a widow to grieve, which is not the case when a woman dies. In the case of the widows, the widow is expected to grieve openly and demonstrate her grief accompanied by humiliating rituals in relation to mourning dress, eating habits, personal hygiene, and sexual activity of which is not the case for the widower.

Widows who are living with HIV and AIDS in Africa, following the death of the spouse, are usually stigmatized. According to Evans (2015), such widows tend to endure harassment and verbal abuse from landlords, abandonment by their husband's relatives and refusal to provide care or support for the family, as well as disinheritance. In Tanzania, women tend to be judged about sexual morality, as well as often being blamed for 'bringing' HIV into a family or marriage. This

is complicated by the lack of support from the husband's family, who usually blame the widow for bringing the disease into the family (Evans, 2012).

Ndlovu's (2013) study on Zulu widows revealed that widows experience numerous challenges and discrimination during their mourning period, especially while they are still in the mourning dress, where they are ostracized by their in-laws, neighbours, community members and even by their friends. This indicates that the widow's dress, which is applicable only to women, contributes to the discrimination and isolation of the widows. The situation is affecting a lot of widows, as the census of 2011 revealed that in South Africa there were about 1.5 million widows (Nair, 2014).

This makes transition to widowhood difficult for the widow, as she will have to struggle to rebuild her life without resources that are due her. This suggests that the mourning process is also complicated by the loss of the income from the spouse (Ndlovu, 2013). Ndlovu (2013) found that, where the deceased was the breadwinner, the bereaved may mourn the absence of financial support and the provision of other material resources she had or hoped to obtain from the deceased.

Also, Gwala (2010) indicated that widows in South Africa do not receive any financial support targeting widows from government, but must apply for ordinary grants like child support, disability grants or old age pensions when they reach the required age. There is limited support from the in-laws, except for the widowhood rituals. Moreover, Gwala (2010) found that some of the widows participated in the study of Zulu widows in KwaZulu Natal so that others might learn about their economic difficulties. This implies that the widows also want other people to know about their challenges.

Ajiboye (2016) indicated that the struggles of widows may have similarities but differ from country to country. The emphasis is on similarities and differences of how widows experience

widowhood in their countries. The study aimed to establish a general global understanding of widowhood and how South Africa fits in. This was to identify a framework with similarities to South Africa and adopt it for assisting widows in South Africa. The review looked at the European countries, Africa and comparing South Africa. Widows around the world tend to endure stigmatization, ostracization, abuse, ill health, poverty, violence, homelessness, ill health and discrimination (Ki-moon, 2011; Wafula, 2012).

In contrary, it has been shown that in most European countries like Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, widows are supported with a widows' allowance, since losing their husband increases the chances of poverty (Biro, 2011). It is different in Africa where widows are left to fend for themselves. In South Africa it is widows of those who were in the police force who receive the widow's allowance after the death of their husbands. On the other hand, it has been established that there is a rise in reporting of robbery, assault and rape of both young and old widows (Biro, 2011). The widows become targeted as they no longer have spouses to protect them. The experiences of the European widows are similar to those in Africa, where Jones et al. (2019) also indicated that the death of a spouse is a stressful event with long-term consequences for health, especially for women with small children, which leaves them vulnerable and could deteriorate into a state of poverty. Alter et al. (2007) in their study of widowhood, family size and post-reproductive mortality in Europe, also found that the death of a spouse is a stressful event with long-term consequences for health, especially for women with small children. The widows in such situations would benefit from support and capacity building, in order to empower them to deal with their challenges of widowhood.

2.4. International view on widowhood

In this section the researcher discusses how widows internationally, especially in India and Asia, experience widowhood.

In a qualitative study aimed at exploring how Chinese women in Hong Kong cope with widowhood, Ng et al. (2016) found that widows are overwhelmed by the situation, without resources and support. Their adjustment to widowhood becomes difficult, as they are expected to move on with their lives without a clear identity, since they regard themselves as married women who have lost their husbands. The irony is that the very same in-laws isolate them and inflict pain on them in the name of traditional practice of widowhood rites. They grab their property and households and leave them vulnerable without any form of protection or support.

The concept of young widowhood is unique, and according to Jones et al. (2019) has received little comprehensive attention in research. That has led to limited literature being available in that regard. Widowhood remains an important risk factor for transition into poverty (Jones et al., 2019). In the United Kingdom, widows do not only deal with the loss of a husband and his income, but there has been an increase in reporting of robbery, assault and rape against both young and old widows (Biro, 2011). The widows become targeted as they no longer have spouses to protect them. Jones et al. (2019) confirm this by demonstrating that the death of a spouse is a stressful event with long-term consequences for health, especially for women with small children, which leaves them vulnerable and could deteriorate to a state of poverty.

Their families regard them as a burden and a sexual threat to others' marriages. Others resort to marrying brothers of their late husbands to escape repeated rapes, while those who do not remarry tend to endure a life of being sexually abused and not being able to report it.

2.4.1. Widowhood in India

It is affirmed by Dasgupta (2017) that India has recorded the highest number of widows in the world, yet there is a conspicuous absence of feminist, scholarly writing on widows in India.

Furthermore, these widows are excluded from communities and may suffer from harmful, degrading traditional practices (Wafula, 2012). Circumstances of widows in India seem to be even worse than in USA and Australia, because widows may suffer from harmful, degrading traditional practices like ritual sati, in which widows burn themselves on their husband's funeral pyre bonfire (Wafula,2012)

According to Dagupsta (2017), widows in India tend to have limited options to make a living and may end up in prostitution due to lack of education and training. Even those who try to work as domestic workers tend to be abused, with long hours without compensation and have no recourses. They tend to endure such suffering as the only option available to them for survival after losing their homes to their in-laws. Dagupsta (2017) further attests that widows in India are driven by financial insecurity and harassment and end up taking refuge in religious sites for protection. Also, according to Corbacho and Barrera (2012), in India, young widows turn to prostitution to earn money for survival. They tend to struggle to deal with the loss of the husband, and for survival after the loss of the husband. According to Wafula (2012), when widows are abused, they do not report this for fear of being accused of bringing shame to their families, and risk being not believed and accusing men of rape. A common consequence of widowhood in traditional societies is the withdrawal of children from school due to economic impoverishment (Dasgupta, 2017), which implies that the suffering of the widows also extends to their children.

Widows remain oppressed by norms, traditions and cultural expectations. Commendable, the study of Dagupta raised the oppression of widows, but these findings cannot necessarily be applied to Africa, since India is a country outside of Africa and there are differences in cultural practices

2.4.2 Widowhood in Asia

In Nepal, Women for Human Rights found that 67% of widows were between the ages of 20 and 30, due to their arranged marriages to much older men at an early age.

In Cambodia, widows sell their daughters for prostitution, while in Bangladesh widows work long hours of unpaid labour in their in-laws' house (Wafula, 2012). In contrast, Mizuho (2017) in Japan in East Asia, observed that widowhood can, for some, come with positive status change, leading to economic independence and increased status. Female-headed households can be relatively well off, composed of younger generations of working women. A widow can gain respect as the main decision maker, a role which she may never have enjoyed in marriage. Widows in Japan can officially break ties with their in-laws and the in-laws have no say on the issue (Mizuho, 2017). This is a notable positive finding about widowhood, observed only in Japan, which could offer hope to widows in other countries.

2.5. Widowhood in Africa

This section focuses on widowhood in Africa. The emphasis is on how culture influences widowhood and experiences of widows in Africa.

According to Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013), widows are the most disadvantaged group of women in Africa and around the world, as supported by Akol (2011) who put forth that, irrespective of ethnicity, African widows are very vulnerable and the most destitute among women. Ude and Njoku (2017), in their study of widowhood practices and impacts on women in sub-

Saharan Africa, established that many widows suffer discrimination, stigmatisation, oppression and deprivation, as well as abuse and powerlessness. This contrasts with the purported purpose of widowhood practices, which is intended to show respect to the dead, but women tend to become victims of abuse during such practices at the hands of their in-laws (Fasanmi and Ayivor, 2019). The strength of the study was to indicate that an empowerment theoretical perspective has the capacity to lift widows out of the shadows and enable them to proactively take charge of their lives. The limitation of the empirical study was that it was conducted through observation, which did not afford widows an opportunity to share their experiences and challenges. Due to differences in ethnicity between cultures in sub-Saharan Africa and South Africa, there is a need for a study to be conducted in South Africa, to understand the challenges and experiences of young widows in this country.

Mwangi (2014) has asserted that many widows in Kenya are faced with numerous psychosocial challenges as they struggled to survive. However, Sekgobela et al.'s (2020) study on widows' experiences of psychosocial support in South Africa revealed that widows experience both positive and negative encounters with their sources of support. The negative encounters frustrated widows and the positive encounters made them happy.

Kapuma (2011), in a study of widowhood within the Malawian context exploring a pastoral care model, found that during funerals culture overtakes the teachings of the church. Also, the church was not there to support widows with pastoral care during their grieving period. In the case of Christian widows, religion is expected to empower Christian widows by supporting widows to rebuild their lives drawing strength from the religious point of view towards personal and social transformation. Moreover, it was found that many women became widows at an early stage, a difficult time of uncertainty and confusion.

The study highlighted the need for some special facilities that would assist widows to heal and liberate themselves. The limitations of the study are that it only focused on one congregation in Malawi.

Ubuntu is described by Manala (2016) as behaving well towards others or acting in ways that benefit others or the community. This implies that being of help to others in need is regarded as Ubuntu. Ubuntu is embedded in African beliefs, emphasizing the need to assist others who are in need without expecting compensation for offering that help. It is however amazing that the traditional practices tend to overlook Ubuntu when it comes to widows. African traditional widowhood rites tend to be used as a basis for the maltreatment and oppression of widows (Manala, 2016). The process of widowhood tends to impact on their human rights and lead to suffering for widows (UNWomen, 2001). The literature does not address the opportunity for debriefing of those emotions immediately after hearing about the death of the spouse.

Adesina (2013), in a study on early widowhood and its effects on rural women in Nigeria, found that many of the psychological reactions are propelled by bereavement. This included experiences such as distress, anger, fear, loneliness, self-accusation, rejection, loss of hope, low self-esteem, weeping, sobbing, wailing, fidgeting and tension. The descriptive survey design study utilised a sample of 100 widows. One of the strengths of the study by Adesina (2013) was that it was able to establish how bereavement relates to other psychological reactions to be monitored by psychologists. A possible weakness of the study was that widows might have provided responses that were desirable or in line with social norms, which might not be the truth.

United Nations Human Rights in Africa reported that there is however a gap in monitoring the implementation of Human Rights in Africa for women (UNWomen, 2018). It was further reported that widowhood rituals are mainly practised in the rural areas in all parts of Africa due to low rates

of literacy, while in the urban areas women tend to be more enlightened and independent. It can therefore be said that women, especially in rural areas, need more support regarding awareness and advocacy for their rights. Literature does not indicate that women are against widowhood rituals, but rather that they voice their concerns about the abuse that is done to them in the name of widowhood rituals.

However, the findings of Ndlovu (2013) on urban widows in Nigeria seem to be different. Ndlovu (2013) discovered that they no longer practice strict widowhood rituals due to modernization and job demands. This implies that job demands are prioritized over widowhood rituals. For instance, after the approved leave, the widow is expected to go back to work in order not to lose her job. Being employed also means she will not lose her income after the loss of the spouse, but that it may be reduced without the spouse's income.

In a cross-sectional study by Ajayi et al. (2019) on gendered violence and human rights, eight widows were interviewed to explore the perceptions of women regarding gendered violence through the practice of widowhood rites in Delta state, Nigeria. Indeed, from the findings it is evident that women's rights, which are also regarded as human rights, were considered trivial issues. Widows were undermined by patriarchy, which led to submission regarding widowhood rites. It would seem that widows submitted to widowhood practices due to fear of consequences of social exclusion, being shunned by the community, expulsion from the house or village of their late husband, and disinheritance of children and themselves from properties left by the deceased.

The rituals tend to be oppressive to women and very restrictive, like when the widow must wear dirty clothes and not wash for weeks, and sometimes a widow is forced to drink the water with which the husband's corpse was washed. Other rituals also tend to be humiliating and unhygienic, all in the name of tradition (Aayi, 2019).

In most cases widowhood rituals in Kenya constitute gross violation of the human rights of the widow (Njoki, 2015). Further, Njoki (2015) indicated that widows were faced with numerous psychosocial challenges and reported few support systems that assisted them in their efforts to cope with grief and loss. Also, although the bereaved experienced similar grief emotions, the grieving process was unique to everyone. Since the rituals are meant to assist the widow to transition to widowhood, they should be consulted, and their human rights should be respected and not used as a vehicle to take advantage of the widow.

It was further found that Shona widows in Zimbabwe are victimized as witches and prostitutes and accused as the underlying cause of the death of the husband (Akol, 2012). It was also stated that widows are isolated and viewed with suspicion, particularly by wives of siblings of the deceased husband, owing to the fear they have for their own marriages in the advent of polygamy through the levirate marriage, a system whereby the brother of the deceased husband takes over the widow as an additional wife (Akol, 2012). Newton-Levinson et al. (2014) support this notion, by suggesting that widows in Ethiopia are stigmatised by the community regarding their sexuality, which leads to lack of support. Widows are regarded as sexy women in an insulting manner that frustrates the widows.

In a study to examine the inhuman treatment toward widows in African communities, Idialu (2012) recommended education of the public, which should include the traditional leaders, to reduce the inhuman practices as well as create awareness on the negative effects of these practices on widows.

Widowhood is therefore not only about the loss of a spouse but also the loss of support from the in-laws and community at large, while being subjected to cultural widowhood rituals that intensify the suffering, as articulated by Idialu (2012). Cultural practices restrain widows from accessing support from other people during the mourning period. Widows tend to be isolated and stigmatised.

This means the widow struggles on her own to rebuild her life as a single parent who is married without a partner, while not being accepted by other married women due to her perceived availability. What could complicate her situation is that, even now as a single woman, she seems not to fit well, as she is still expected to act like a married woman and cannot really do what other single women are free to do like dating, or going out to meet other single women. Other women believe that these widows might take their husbands, because they are available now that their husbands are dead.

2.6. Widowhood in South Africa

This section discusses widowhood in South Africa as experienced by young African widows. The focus is on different ethnic group practices in the different provinces of South Africa.

The discussion covers TshiVenda and XiTsonga experiences of widows in Limpopo province, followed by BaTswana in North West province, Zulu experience of widows in KwaZulu Natal province, Xhosa experiences of widows in the Eastern Cape province, and the discussion closes with a discussion on BaSotho experiences from the Free State province of South Africa.

The literature reveals firstly that customary practices in South Africa mostly do not recognize the right of a widow to inherit her late husband's property (Mutongi, 2007). Secondly, women who seek relief from property-grabbing in customary courts usually leave empty-handed due to hinderances by customary law practices and socialization (Kafumbe, 2010). Izumi (2007) emphasised that the harassment and humiliation that often accompany property grabbing further strip women of their self-esteem, affecting their ability to defend their rights.

The patriarchal beliefs that inheritance revolves around men may be the source of prejudicial treatment toward widows. The belief leads to widows being prevented from inheriting from their

husbands, but rather being inherited as part of the estate by the husband's male in-laws (Radzilani, 2010).

In the study of TshiVenda widows (Radzilani, 2010), it was revealed that the rituals in the Limpopo province of South Africa seemed not to have room for the emotions of the widow, like expression of shock and dealing with the mixed emotions that could come to her mind, like anger, fear, bitterness, etc. Widows tend to suffer during widowhood because of how widowhood rituals are implemented. The challenge presented by the neglect and maltreatment of widows does not receive enough attention, as there is limited research and there seems to be reluctance to reflect on African widowhood rites (Manala, 2016).

Tshivenda widows tend to endure a perpetuation of being treated as minors even by their in-laws at the death of their husbands, hence they are not easily free to make decisions. Radzilani (2010) postulates that in terms of Tshivenda culture in Venda, a woman is considered the property of the man and his family once the lobola is paid to her family, hence the widow becomes the dependent of the in-laws even at the death of her husband. This implies that a married woman is treated like a minor by the in-laws, hence when the husband dies, they depend on their in-laws. According to Radzilani (2010), the dependency comes with the submissiveness to the in-laws, as widows live with the in-laws and get supported financially. The support is offered as a favour, yet it is the inheritance that is due the widow but taken over by the in-laws.

The widows' children sometimes drop out of school in order to get a job to support their unemployed parent. This is also applicable to TshiVenda widows, where the widow as a chief mourner is isolated for the period of mourning (Radzilani, 2010). The qualitative study on bereavement rituals in a TshiVenda speaking community by Radzilani (2010) also revealed that it is important to empower widows, as the widows identified themselves as powerless.

They need to be encouraged to re-construct their positions. A weakness of the Radzilani's study is that the data collected reflected the views of the researcher, meaning a possibility of bias regarding views collected from participants.

The exclusion of widows is respected and understood by members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in South Africa (EPCSA), in the Tsonga community of Limpopo province, South Africa. It is because they believe in respecting people's cultural and traditional beliefs (Khosa-Nkantini and Meyer, 2020). This was established in a qualitative study of Tsonga-speaking widows in Limpopo, using semi-structured interviews and focus groups with a sample of widows.

Even though the study was qualitative and revealed findings that assist in understanding the challenges of widows in Limpopo in relation to the church, the sample used widows aged 20 to 70 years, compared to the current study that is only focusing on young widows. Even though the study utilized a qualitative approach like the current study, due to differences in ethnicity and traditional practices, the study cannot be applied to the Free State widows in the study, who are Sothos, Tswana and Xhosas, due to differences in ethnicity and cultural practices as the Limpopo widows were Tsongas.

Widows are negatively affected by widowhood rituals. There are rules that they receive during their mourning period, which limit not only their movements but also how they express themselves or behave as widows (Khosa-Nkantini et al., 2020). According to Baloyi (2015) in the study of Tsonga widows from Limpopo, it was established that the widowhood rituals had been passed on from one generation to the other, and no one had ever questioned these rituals. It can further be noted that they do not view the community as sympathetic or supportive after their loss, while the community is of the view that isolation of widows is a cultural practice that should be respected by community members and accepted by widows (Manyedi et al., 2003).

This study implemented a qualitative research approach with purposive sampling, and yielded important data for the current study, which is laudable. However, the sampling had a weakness in only focusing on urban widows, as there was no co-operation from rural widows. That means the perceptions on widowhood in North West province in the study excluded the views of widows in rural areas. Although the sample was drawn from both rural and urban areas, only urban widows ended up participating. Therefore, the findings of this study of Batswana widows cannot be generalised, as the findings only focused on certain areas excluding the rural areas.

South Africa consists of different cultural groups, and so South African widows are affected by issues of culture during widowhood in different ways. The challenges of different cultural groups as experienced by widows are highlighted in the studies of Zulu widows by Rosenbalt and Nkosi (2007) as well as Ndlovu (2013); Xhosa widows by Akol (2012); Batswana widows by Manyedi et al. (2003); and Venda widows by Radzila (2010). Korang-Okrah (2015) explains that widowhood rites, considered rites-of-passage, are performed for purification, protection and healing though deeply embedded in the socio-political and cultural beliefs. In order to heal, the widows build their resilience through prayer, fasting and reading the word of God. It is however cautioned that the interventions to assist widows are to be based on the understanding of the interconnections between the culture the in-laws enforce and the religious belief system of the widow, which would help practitioners to provide better services to women who are widowed. This is critical as widows might have traditional spiritual beliefs. However, their socialization does not distance them from accepting the widowhood rituals, hence it becomes critical to assist them to uphold their traditional spiritual beliefs for resilience and healing without creating confusion in them.

The patriarchal societies in South Africa favour men over widows, hence even when widows try to fight the injustices they never win. In traditional Zulu culture in KwaZulu Natal, when a woman marries, she becomes part of the husband's family. It is further mentioned that when he dies, his possessions revert to his family and not to his widow and children (Gwala, 2010).

This implies that widows lose their properties due to property grabbing by in-laws. They seldom get help even if they attempt to fight back. Mutongi (2007) concurs, indicating that customary practices mostly do not recognize the right of a widow to inherit their late husband's property.

In a qualitative study of the mourning rituals of AmaXhosa widows in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, Akol (2011) had a sample of 14 widows from both urban and rural areas, identified through snowball sampling. The data was collected through interviews and revealed that some family members take advantage of the widows and treat them unfairly. The mourning process according to amaXhosa rituals includes a widow sitting behind the door to be excluded from the people and community on the announcement of the death of the husband (Akol, 2011). During the mourning practices, widows are isolated with limited movement, making it difficult for them to look for jobs or get support from other people, which leaves them vulnerable. Ngqangweni (2014) explains that the widow is the focus of the mourning rituals. She is put on strict exclusion from public life and has to observe ukuzila rituals, until ritual cleansing has been performed, as it is feared that she might contaminate other people with bad luck. The strength of this study is the in-depth knowledge that was established on the subject under enquiry. However, Akol (2011) used interviews which have a limitation of bias, especially the semi-structured interviews. The study needed a form of control of the bias from the researcher in getting the story behind the experiences of the widows, like a journal or second form of data collection, including an interview guide, to avoid asking leading questions to confirm data collected and control the biases.

The limitation of the study makes it difficult to apply the findings to the current study conducted in the Free State on widows. Also, Since Eastern Cape is another province with its own cultural traditions and practices, it necessitates a study in the Free State province to understand the challenges and experiences of African young widows in this province.

It is further noted that widows experience poverty due to little or no access to credit or private property, which is further exacerbated by illiteracy or lack of education (Puri, 2013).

Even in democratic countries like South Africa, widows tend to be mistreated regardless of their democratic rights. This is illustrated by Ntuli and Myeni (2014), who suggested that many widows did not enjoy their democratic rights during the mourning process, due to conflicts that develop between them and their in-laws, particularly in respect of the deceased's belongings and benefits.

Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013) identified the challenges of widows of the BaSotho culture in the Free State, in their study of effects of widowhood on women in communities around South Africa. It is commendable that in the limited literature they contributed to the body of knowledge for the Free State province. The study sampled widows and widowers of all ages drawn from Black, Coloured and Indian communities from all nine provinces in South Africa. Their findings included that widows were openly accused of killing their spouses for material possessions, which often led to widows being abused, mistreated and isolated, or even chased out of their homes immediately after the spouse's funeral. The limitation of the study sample was that it was drawn from all ages and from different races, hence the findings are not specific to African young widows.

There is therefore a need for a study to focus on African widows and not all races, with a special focus on the young widows and their needs, in order to understand the challenges and experiences of African young widows in the Free State province, and to develop an empowerment guideline in that regard.

It can therefore be deduced that the rituals contribute to isolation of widows, limiting their support and leading to further victimization by other women who should be of help to them, as they could also find themselves in the same position one day.

Nair (2014) reported that widows face abuse as a result of cultural restrictions placed on them. Such cultural restrictions prohibit them from visiting even neighbours, relatives or other community members who could be of help to them, hence other people could take advantage of their situation of isolation. In a cross-sectional study of widows and widowers, Ntuli and Myeni (2014) found that unequal power relations and the marginalisation and exclusion of widows during the mourning process pose a threat to the underdeveloped democracy of South Africa. The report of the study recommended that the widowhood rituals should be gender sensitive and not oppressive to the widows, who have already lost their husbands, making them especially vulnerable. Secondly, it further recommended that widows should be consulted by government, in order to develop informed interventions that address the needs of the widows. The report ends by recommending the need for consulting widows to develop informed interventions.

Additionally, Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013) identified the challenges of widows in the Free State, but only highlighted the inability of widows to access services during this vital time. In another qualitative study, Sabri et al. (2016) examined the experiences of widows and the barriers in seeking help.

It was revealed that widows experience police insensitivity when asking for help from them. The study then recommended the empowerment of widows, which should include assistance with their individual needs.

Widows reported a range of violent experiences perpetrated by family and community members that spanned psychological, physical and sexual abuse (Lichtenberg, 2017). This has been supported by Jones et al. (2019) in their phenomenological study of the lived experiences of young widows. They suggest that young widowhood is a unique experience that still needs more in-depth attention in research. In terms of clinical implications, findings included the need for more accessible resources for young widowed individuals, such as therapeutic services, finances and childcare to assist them to adapt to widowhood, as well as resources to support widows to cope with their loss and widowhood.

Various studies have been conducted in South Africa on widowhood, most of which were qualitative research studies. The study of Batswana widows by Manyedi et al. (2003) could not implement the intended sampling of both rural and urban widows, due to non-co-operation of the rural widows. The findings of that study can therefore not be applied in the current study of both urban and rural widows.

Another qualitative study by Khosa-Nkantini and Meyer (2020) had a mixed ages sample, meaning both young and old focusing on 20 to 70 years old. Thus, the study findings could not highlight challenges of young widows but rather just general widowhood in Limpopo. The challenges of young and elderly widows are different, for example, young widows are of reproductive age and their challenges would include issues of children (having or taking care of children), while the elderly are passed childbearing age.

Gwala (2010) studied Zulu widows in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa. Due to differences in cultural practices, the finding cannot be applied to the study of young widows in the Free State, who are Tswanas, Sothos and Xhosas.

Although the study of Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013) was conducted among widows within the Free State, it was also not just focused on Free State but rather sampled widows from the nine provinces of South Africa. The study also not only focused on African widows like the current study but included Coloureds and Indians. The findings are therefore not specifically for Free State but for widows in South Africa generally. A phenomenological study would be able to provide depth compared to other qualitative designs that have been conducted for the understanding of challenges experienced by African young widows in the Free State province.

2.7. Legislation in addressing widowhood challenges

In 1966 the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights was signed. The signatories to the covenant were committing to promoting and ensuring equal rights for men and women. According to the Widows Rights International (2010), the aim of the covenant was to ensure equal rights and protection of all persons from any discrimination on any ground in terms of race, colour, sex, language religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Even though there are several UN Conventions, there are few that mention widows specifically. In most of the conventions, widows are covered under the rights of women (Widows Rights International, 2018).

It is important to note that there are laws and United Nation's Conventions that promote and protect the rights of women. The rights of widows are to be promoted and upheld through the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly (Puri, 2013).

South Africa is also a signatory of CEDAW. According to Swingler (2015), the UN CEDAW compelled South Africa to incorporate provisions of the international treaty into its own legislation.

Sections 2, 3 and 4 of CEDAW protect the rights of widows from discrimination, the elimination of harmful cultural and traditional practices, as well as the rights to dignity, life, integrity and security of person. This was aimed at ensuring that women such as widows are treated humanely. This also implies that the widows of Nepal, Russia and Afghanistan, Brazzaville, Nigeria, etc., are protected by CEDAW.

Widows are currently struggling and suffering despite CEDAW enforcing the rights of widows to prevent discrimination. Widows are protected from most of their challenges through CEDAW. It can however be noted that even though there is CEDAW, widows are still victimized and not protected as per the plan of CEDAW.

In some countries, widows are fortunate to get government financial support targeted at them as widows, while other countries do not offer such support. For instance, in the United States of America, Hindenu (2011) indicated that widows receive a widows' and orphans' benefit as part of the Social Security system. Widows experience substantial economic vulnerability, as revealed in their study in Utah, United States of America, hence the government provides them with financial support as a safety net to prevent them slipping into poverty.

It seems that widows in most developed countries are financially supported by their governments. The source and type of financial support may be different in various countries, but ultimately the same purpose is served.

It can therefore be concluded that European countries are supportive of widows financially to ensure their widows do not live in poverty, since they have social security and support systems in place. The financial support received by widows would ensure that they escape transitioning into poverty. Widows in Europe, US and Australia are therefore not likely to end up homeless and in poverty, due to that financial allowance providing a safety net for them.

This means that widows in Australia and the United States of America are in a better situation financially than widows in South Africa, due to continuous support through the widows' allowance.

The study of Biro (2011) revealed that in most European countries, like Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Poland Spain, Sweden and Switzerland, widows are supported with the widow's allowance, since losing their husband increases the chances of poverty. It can therefore be concluded that the European countries are financially supportive of widows, to ensure their widows do not live in poverty.

However, the financial support would not address the stigmatization, ostracization, abuse and discrimination that widows usually suffer. The implication could be that, even though the widows are getting limited support, they would still need support and empowerment in handling other challenges with which they are faced as widows. Financial support alone would not be enough to address the challenges faced by the widows in the process of adjusting to widowhood, e.g. stigmatization.

2.7.1. Legislation to prevent child widows

In India, the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act (2006) was introduced to prevent child widows who get married at a young age.

The age was set at a minimum of 18 years, with no exceptions, for girls to be married in India. It can be noted that there are means of protecting widows from violence, like The Widows (protection and maintenance) Bill, 2015. Widows are also protected by the implementation of international and domestic human rights treaties. The treaties could be applied to address the various challenges that women face when their husbands die, and to help protect the rights of widows.

2.7.2. The Women's Protocol to the African Charter of CEDAW

It was however observed in the United Nations' reports that women continue to suffer more in Africa, all in the name of culture. This necessitated The Women's Protocol to the African Charter of CEDAW, which was adopted on 11 July 2003, in Maputo, Mozambique at the African Union.

The Women's Protocol to the African Charter was developed due to the continued challenges experienced by widows, with a view to protecting women's rights in Africa. The rights are mainly affected by the widowhood rituals, led by men as part of patriarchy in Africa. Article 20 of the Women's Protocol to the African Union states clearly that all member states shall take appropriate legal measures to ensure that widows enjoy all human rights (Adeola, 2019).

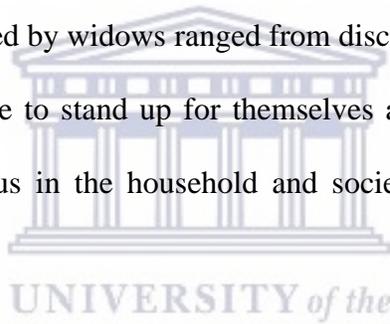
2.7.3 Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998

In response to United Nations CEDAW, South Africa introduced the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, as legislation specifically to protect women and children against gender-based violence. The purpose of the Act was to afford victims of domestic violence maximum protection from domestic violence, which includes the violence experienced by widows. The act was introduced as a commitment of the state, through all its organs, to protecting women, and introduced measures to eliminate domestic violence against women including widows. It is therefore critical to create awareness among widows of the laws of the state that seek to protect them, especially against gender-based violence.

2.7.4 The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA), Act No. 4 of 2000 (the Equality Act) of South Africa

South Africa has gone further to develop PEPUDA, introduced to protect women, especially widows as a group with special needs. The researcher also identified that Article 2(2) of PEPUDA deals with the elimination of harmful cultural and traditional practices which can be used for protection by widows.

In the Free State, the advocacy group Khulumani Support Group coordinated widows drawn from urban and rural areas in the Free State province to share their experiences in a workshop held in Bloemfontein, Free State (Khulumani Support Group, 2011). This was in a bid to highlight the challenges of widows. Issues raised by widows ranged from discrimination against widows to the need for empowerment to be able to stand up for themselves against unjust cultural practices, remarriage, inheritance, and status in the household and society (Khulumani Support Group, 2011).



The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa can be used to protect widows, as it protects human rights and the rights of women. The researcher is of the view that Chapter 9 of the Constitution promotes the prevention of all forms of discrimination against women and their unfair treatment. This also implies that there are enough laws to protect widows, but implementation and monitoring of implementation is lacking. South Africa also has the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE) which is responsible for implementation of gender equality and protection of women's rights. The CGE has a critical role to play in the protection and monitoring of the implementation of the laws to protect women.

It can also be noted that customary law does not recognize the rights of a widow to inherit, hence the abuse in the name of customs and rituals. Even those who try to fight for themselves tend to lose and end up isolated and stigmatized by their families.

There is nothing wrong with the widowhood rituals when implemented properly, as practised by Christians in the Tshivenda communities (Radzilani, 2010). Widows can mourn their husbands in a proper way without being abused and victimized by in-laws and stigmatized by communities, as they had loved their husbands. Families and communities need to be aware that widows are humans with human rights to be respected and implemented. It can be noted that those with Christian beliefs tend to be more supportive to widows. This was observed in the Zion Apostolic Church members in Venda where the bereaved were supported, as was observed by Radzila (2010). This implies that the belief system also plays a role, in that, those with traditional beliefs will not support widows while those with Christian beliefs tend to support the widow.

The major challenge is for widows to be capacitated on the laws that protect them. Once they are capacitated for empowerment, they will be able to prevent and reduce their challenges. There is also a need for awareness in families and communities of the rights of widows. In addition, more work must be done in rural areas in partnership with the Traditional Leaders, as leadership in the community who are also custodians of traditional practices and where widowhood rituals are mainly practiced. It should be about rituals not taking advantage of the vulnerable widow who has lost her spouse or degrading the poor widow. This calls for empowerment of women to prevent the challenges they face during widowhood.

Empowerment will have to be coupled with awareness of community members on human rights and rights of widows. When that approach is taken, it will ensure that when the capacity building process to empower the widows is completed, the community is also aware of what they have been capacitated on, which could ease implementation rather than creating discord in the community. Capacity building will be to empower the widows to deal with their challenges and not necessarily to do away with rituals.

Even though there are laws to protect widows, like CEDAW and PEDUDA, they are hardly implemented to ensure their protection (e.g. property grabbing). This study proposes to address the vulnerability of widows through a capacity building process on available resources to deal with their challenges and the laws available to them. The programme will be developed with the widows to address the challenges faced by widows as identified by them. This study therefore differs from others by focusing on the vulnerability identified by previous researchers, in order to develop an empowerment programme as a contribution to knowledge.

Wafula (2012) identified the challenges of widows, but only goes as far as proposing an empowerment scheme targeting the community and widows directly. Also, UN Women calls for an end to discrimination against widows, opportunities for widows and full participation in society (Puri, 2013). The current study, however, differs from them as it goes beyond identifying the challenges to developing an empowerment programme with widows, which will lead to a guideline to be used by social workers.

2.7.5 Church support for widows

The study of Kapuma (2011) focused on the role of the church in supporting widows, and further recommended that the church had a responsibility to liberate women from the unjust experiences they go through in the community, so that their dignity could prevail.

Kapuma (2011) further recommended that the church should offer pastoral care models to widows to help them to heal, and to show support to the marginalised widows who are in pain. They should find solace in the church.

It can therefore be deduced that even though widowhood rituals contribute to isolation of widows, limiting their support and leading to further victimization by other women who should be of help to them as they could also find themselves in the same position one day, churches have a big role to play. Widows have also benefited from the support of churches when offered. It is further reported by Nair (2014) that widows face abuse as a result of cultural restrictions put on them. The cultural restrictions prohibit them from visiting even neighbours, relatives or other community members who could be of help to them, hence other people could take advantage of their situation of isolation. Widows however benefit from the support of their neighbours when they extend a helping hand. Widows can use all the help offered in re-building their lives.

2.8. Conclusion

This chapter focused on the definition of the widow and widowhood as applicable to the study. Effects of widowhood were discussed as experienced by widows. The discussion further elaborated on widowhood practices internationally. A special focus on the experiences of widows was then on India, followed by Asia and Africa, with special emphasis on South Africa. The current study was planned for the Free State province of South Africa. Even though widows experience challenges all over, internationally and in Africa, it was considered important to focus on and understand the challenges experienced by widows in the Free State, South Africa in order to be able to develop specific guidelines for their empowerment based on the experienced challenges that make them vulnerable.

The next chapter will discuss the guiding theoretical framework for the study. More details will be given on the Critical Theory, which is the theory adopted for the study.



CHAPTER 3

Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework to be followed for the study. The discussion starts with the two dominant paradigms and then focuses on the critical theory. Critical theory is the theory that guided the study. The framework to be followed by the study is given based on Healy's Dynamic Model (Healy, 2015). The Participatory Action Research design is discussed before a summary is given to close the chapter.

3.2 Paradigms

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm fundamentally mirrors the researcher's beliefs about the world that s/he lives in and wants to live in. It is the conceptual lens through which the researcher examines the methodological aspects of their research project, in order to decide which research methods will be utilized and how the research data will be analyzed. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) also emphasize that a paradigm is basically the set of beliefs that guide action for the researcher. Shaw (2020) stated that paradigms assist researchers to acquire theory, methods and standards for their scientific research studies. Paradigms can be described as different ways of viewing the world and the basis from which research is undertaken (Davies, 2018). It is elaborated by Davies and Fisher (2018) that paradigms are mainly beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship between knower and known (epistemology) and assumptions on what is valuable to learn. A paradigm is crucial in guiding the researcher on how to view the world or people and conduct the study.

This implies that the researcher adopts a paradigm to follow and guide the research, and that the paradigm determines how the researcher should think, and that actions are based on such thinking and beliefs. Creswell (2014) emphasized that both ontology and epistemology are critical in research, as they guide how the research will be conducted.

Hathcoat et al. (2019) allude to ontology relating to what exists, whereas epistemology focuses on the nature, limitations and justification of human knowledge. A paradigm is crucial in guiding the researcher on how to view the world or people and conduct the study. The main dominant paradigms are positivism (modernism), post-positivism (post-modernism) and critical theory (Kelly and Millar, 2017). These paradigms assist to guide the research and research approach (Ryan, 2018).

3.2.1. Post-positivism

Bertens (2003) advanced that post positivism is a cultural movement of perceiving the world with its contradictions, errors, failures and blockages in promoting the new. It is the reaction to and critique of positivism. Post-positivism gained momentum in the 1960s up to the late 20th century, focusing on its emancipatory pursuit of heterogeneity and difference. In the late 20th century it became a movement of acute sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining modern political and economic power (Bota,2019). Post-positivists were apprehensive of those who made worldwide truth claims.

According to Mohd and Azlan (2019), advocates of postmodernism, the emergence of postmodernism was as a result of the riots in Paris in May 1968, where students demanded radical transformation and changes in the elitist, rigid European university.

It can be said that post-positivism became a critical reaction to positivism, though not chronologically following positivism. Postmodernism is not an organized movement and many of the theorists, such as Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, who were identified as postmodernists contested the label. The post-modernists believed that post-modernism was a new era, replacing the modernity era as an evolution of ideas. It was a reaction to modernism ideas. The Post-modernism critique claims that there is no such thing as a value-free observation.

Hammersley (2019) argued that post-positivism was characterized by broad skepticism, subjectivism, or relativism; a general suspicion of reason; and a severe sensitivity to the role of ideology in asserting and maintaining political and economic power. Post-positivist writers focused on addressing the power of institutions, like patriarchy in the case of widows, their ability to discipline, how they advantaged some, like men and in-laws while silencing many, namely women and widows. Post-positivism then also promoted the value of qualitative data and qualitative forms of data analysis. This development in post-positivism led to the advancement of the move to qualitative research that gives voice to the participants, specifically those suppressed within the society, like widows, as part of ethical practice.

Strauss (2016), further asserts that post-positivistic truth is not absolute, and it is merely constructed by individual groups, culture and language.

This could also imply that widowhood rituals are constructed by in-laws in terms of their culture and using language and terminology like widow, widowhood rituals, and mourning dress to make them sound like the absolute truth. Post-positivism, therefore, centered its fights for equality in the private sphere of women's lives, such as on the concepts of gender, sexuality, sex and so on (Mohd and Azlan, 2019).

Encyclopedia Britannica (2017) states that, according to postmodernists, language is not just a “mirror of nature,” as the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty characterized the Enlightenment view. Inspired by the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, postmodernists claim that language is semantically self-contained, or self-referential: the meaning of a word is not a stagnant thing in the world or even an idea in the mind, but rather a range of contrasts and differences to the meanings of other words. The postmodern view of language and discourse was attributed largely to the French philosopher and literary theorist Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), the originator and leading practitioner of deconstruction.

According to Karim and Azlam (2019) postmodernism sequentially does not come after modernism but rather a reaction to modernism, that strives for equality in the social life of women, such as on the concept of gender, sexuality and language. Elaati (2016) stated that, “the pioneers of Postmodernism like the French intellectual Jean-Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), (Lyotard, 1984) argue that knowledge cannot claim to be offering truth in any absolute sense; and further argue that enlightenment targets human liberation”.

According to Foucault, a founder of post-positivism, power is the ultimate principle of social reality with those in power controlling language (Strauss, 2015), meaning also that relations in the society are mainly controlled by power.

Post-modernists as advanced by Elaati (2016) argue that knowledge cannot claim to be offering truth alone, but also language used has an effect on what is said and is always relevant to specific contexts. This confirms how patriarchy uses a dominating language favoring patriarchy, that makes it taboo not to follow widowhood practices as they are presented to widows, without questioning, even if they are oppressive.

Strauss (2015) purports that post-positivism promoted new and ‘radical’ postmodern dialogues and practices as a new way of thinking. Some post-positivistic theorists, like Lyotard and Foucault, took it further by focusing on developing alternative modes of knowledge and discourse, while others, like Baudrillard, Jameson and Harvey, emphasized the forms of economy, society, culture and experience. Ryan and Sfar-Gandoura (2018) posit that post-positivism claims that there are fundamental changes in society and history which require new theories and conceptions, and that modernism theories are unable to illuminate these changes, and thereby paving the way for post-positivism after being critiqued as irrelevant. Post-positivists advocated for a non-linear mode of thinking based on subjective observation, rather than the positivist form of relying on numbers according to science (Strauss, 2015).

It can therefore be said that post-positivists believed in a qualitative approach, promoting dialogue with participants rather than just experimenting with the phenomena. The post-positivists do not believe in experimenting with phenomena, as is the case with the positivist approach, but rather observation. Post-positivism proposed that reality is socially constructed based on belief systems and experiences not on scientific experiments (Ahmeti, 2016.). This implies that the oppressive situation the widows find themselves in is based on those in power, mainly in-laws.

Even the social reality is controlled and created by those in power. Power relations control social reality, meaning what is perceived as reality is dependent on the beliefs of those who are in power, who then continue to maintain the status quo.

With post-positivism we are able to explore the different realities of the people we work with. The dialogue with the widows would empower them to understand their oppression. Post-positivism espouses dialogue with participants, observing them during the dialogue, in order to make deductions from those observations.

The mere observation of widows would deny them an opportunity to voice their experiences, meaning decisions would be made based on the observations and denying the widows an opportunity to contribute to their own empowerment. Post-positivism however centers its fight for equality in the private sphere of women's lives, such as on the concept of gender, sexuality, sex and so on (Mohd and Karim, 2019). Post-modernism recognizes the differences and complimentary elements between men and women. Its discourses are positioned to be more on the needs of improving women's living standards in public and not on individualistic rights like the postmodern feminism implies. The post-modernism therefore focuses more on communities than on empowerment of widows as individuals' rights to reduce their vulnerability as the aim of the study. It is in that regard that post-positivism is not chosen as the suitable paradigm for the study.

3.2.2. Feminism in critical theory

According to Thompson (2017), feminism is a political movement, it exist to rectify sexual inequalities, although strategies for social change vary enormously. It is further elaborated by Coezee (2017) that, African feminism is more concerned about the liberation of people and decolonizing knowledges and empowerment of African women.

The major focus for the alliance of feminism and post-positivism became the emancipation of women. Abdul Karim and Azlan (2019) accentuate that feminism centers its fight for equality in the private sphere of women's lives, such as on the concept of gender. Postmodernism and feminism are linked in that feminism dialogues through postmodernism lenses. Secondly, the feminist standpoint is that all knowledge is socially constructed by those in power, meaning they dictate and influence social reality for others. This therefore implies that what widows know is based on their societies, in terms of how knowledge is perceived regarding widowhood rites and challenges.

Feminism theory therefore addresses the concerns of widows by questioning privilege and gender bias in widowhood rituals. It pays special attention to the difficulties experienced by women like widows, and thereby advocates for accurate representation of women to ensure they are being treated with equality in a traditionally patriarchal world.

Mondal (2011), a feminist writer, discussed how Hindu widows challenged power relations by converting to Christianity and thereby gaining power, in order to get the support of feminists for their rights.

Feminism focuses on gender inequality, like how widows and widowers are treated differently during widowhood, and links sexuality to the domination of women by men. It is also critical to note that individual problems reflect community challenges which needed advocacy and should not exclude religion.

This therefore necessitates that social workers should be engaging with religion in dealing with the community challenges, and to transform oppressive structures in the community. The role of church in liberation of women had been recognized back during the civil rights movement in the US. Churches are therefore criticized as a reversal to be allowing oppression of widows instead of promoting liberation (Warkenting and Sawatsky, 2018). Marso (2016) substantiated that women's fight for liberation dates back to the first women's rights convention that was held in the United States in 1848 at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, N.Y. This was organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton who had met at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London but were barred from the convention. Being barred from the convention motivated them to organize a women's convention on the 19 July 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. At the Women's Convention, the declaration of Sentiments and Grievances was adopted and signed by the assembly.

This was followed by an annual women's convention after a larger meeting in Rochester, N.Y. The conventions culminated in the 19 Amendment in 1920, granting American women the constitutionally protected right to vote (Pastorello, 2019) One of the highlights of the feminist movement in liberating women was to attempt to help widowed women, as they were not eligible for Social Security benefits in the US.

The Seneca Falls Convention, New York led to many other world women's conferences organized by United Nations Women which focused on women's rights. There were four conferences organized by UN Women. The first was the World Conference on Women which was held in Mexico in 1975 after the UN had recognized 1975 as the International Women's Year. The second one was in Copenhagen in 1980, followed by one in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. The last of the four was the biggest, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action held in 1995. The Beijing conference built on political agreements reached at previous global conferences on women and secured the equality of women with men in law and practice (UN Women, 2018). There were successes and gains made and noted during the world conferences for women, like the right to vote, equal pay, etc. In most developed nations, women have better opportunities than in developing countries.

According to Marso (2016), women in developed countries take for granted the right they have to work and to earn a wage that is mostly comparable to that of men, to hold seats of political leadership, as is the practice in South Africa, and at times to switch gender roles with their male counterparts, which is still a challenge in developing countries (Knowles, 2012). This highlights the different opportunities women in developed countries enjoyed versus the patriarchy, perpetuating women oppression and male domination experienced by African women, like widows.

In 1979, during the UN General Assembly, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) was adopted by 189 states. Its objective was to abolish discrimination against women so that they can enjoy full human rights, including equal access to opportunities in areas such as public and political life, education, health and employment.

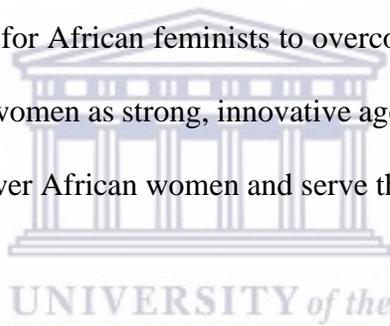
It can also be noted that it was also the first convention to give a comprehensive definition of discrimination against women for a common understanding by various countries. It further outlined a national agenda for national action to end all such discrimination. It can be noted that Sections 2, 3, and 4 of the CEDAW promote the rights of widows, by calling for protection against discrimination, elimination of harmful cultural and traditional practices, as well as advocating for the rights to dignity, life, integrity and security of person.

It was however observed in the United Nations' reports that women continue to suffer discrimination in Africa, all in the name of culture. The suffering of women necessitated The Women's Protocol to the African Charter of CEDAW, which was adopted on 11 July 2003, in Maputo at the African Union. The Women's Protocol to the African Charter was developed due to the continued challenges experienced by widows, with the aim of protecting women's rights in Africa. Such rights are mainly affected by the widowhood rituals, led by men as part of patriarchy in Africa. Article 20 of the Women's Protocol to the African Union states clearly that all member states shall take appropriate legal measures to ensure that widows enjoy all human rights.

It appears that feminism failed to serve African women effectively. African feminist Abrahams stated that the issue of balance is neglected in the one-dimensional Western constructions of African women - usually poor and powerless.

African women have witnessed repeatedly the activities of our overzealous foreign sisters, mostly feminists who appropriate their battles in the name of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called third world. In their enthusiasm, our sisters seize our wars and fight them badly - very badly (Salo, 2001).

According to African feminists like Abrahams, African feminism should not stereotype African women as 'problems to be solved' but should portray them as people who can set their own priorities and agenda (Salo, 2001). A typical African feminism will depict women as strong, reflecting their struggles and how creative they are in solving their problems in their own way. It should empower African women and work for them in ways that they want it to. However, there are clearly still enormous hurdles for African feminists to overcome fighting for gender equality. A pro- African feminism depicts women as strong, innovative agents and decision-makers in their specific contexts. It should empower African women and serve their needs in ways that they want it to.



Ossome (2020) supports the stance that African feminism as a tradition had been blurred by Western feminism. The reality is African feminism has been largely shaped by African domination and its legacy within African culture and is not based on patriarchal control over women within capitalist industrializing societies, as portrayed by Western feminism. Dobrota (2019) further emphasized that African feminism still has a need to re-claim language, like promoting empowerment and gender mainstreaming, and analyzing how they are currently used for their effectiveness. One of the challenges facing African feminism as revealed in the study of African Feminism by Dobrota (2019), is that patriarchy influences traditional concepts of culture, especially within households.

African women however continue reshaping the feminist agenda while tackling the challenges they come across (Tripp, 2017). Feminists are determined to change the oppressive situation for women in South Africa. It can be noted that, there is a firm commitment to gender equality, a painful awareness that such equality is far from achieved, and a continuing desire to work toward such equality. African feminist Abrahams had noted that balance is neglected in the one-dimensional Western constructions of African women, as they portray African women as usually poor and powerless (Ossome, 2019). It is therefore critical for African feminists to define their movement in their own terms and be in control of it. It can however be noted that African feminism exists, and the lived experiences of African women should define it (Yemisi, 2020).

African feminism will be an effective force against patriarchal dominance and beliefs as a united movement. Amina Mama, former Director of the African Gender Institute, said that women's movements must remain united in the face of a global grid of patriarchal power, and all the social, political and economic injustices that delivers to women. This is most true in Africa, where women are adversely affected by patriarchy as demonstrated by the challenges experienced by widows. Widows tend to be oppressed during widowhood. According to Ossome (2019), the effects of the patriarchal socio-political system should be included in discussions of all aspects of life to address feminism.

It is further noted that power relations influence the relationship between men and women, as sex is a status classification with political implications. Chiweshe (2019) therefore advances that it is only through collaborations between African women and men that issues of gender can be addressed. According to Gatwiri and McLaren (2016), such collaboration would assist African feminists in also systematically dealing with the highly discriminatory system.

Furthermore, this system is designed to keep women submissive and subordinate but controlling them ideologically, economically, socially and politically, and functions perfectly to form a highly discriminative but effective system. The oppression would encompass the challenges widows experience through widowhood rituals and practices, and that manifest economically, sexually, structurally, emotionally and physically. According to Chibba (2015), such manifestations take away the dignity, rights and bodily integrity of widows.

African Feminism exist and lived experiences of African women should define it, as advanced by Akinbobola (2020). African feminism is of great importance to African women, not only with regards to their identities, but also regarding issues that affect them and their role in the feminist movement. Feminism has made progress in mobilizing for reproductive rights, affordable health care and improved working conditions, amongst many other causes. One can assume that, African feminism as a paradigm and movement, is shaped by African contexts and experiences. It is also clear that feminism has not attained the desired liberation for African women, especially widows. It appears that feminism has not achieved the representation and to cater effectively for African women and address their cultural concerns. This could be accredited to the various activities of foreign sisters, mostly feminists who appropriate wars in the name of fighting the oppression of women in the so-called third world, without the proper understanding of Africa women's struggle. In order to be efficient and win in fighting for African women, the researcher suggests that those who are interested in assisting African women should educate themselves further and gain a better understanding of the struggles, strengths and needs of African Women.

Okome (2005) believes that African women, like any other group, are able to articulate their needs, evaluate the alternative courses of action, and mobilize for collective action where necessary.

A distinctively African feminism should emphasize the power women have as mothers versus children, queen mothers in some ethnic groups like the Akan of Ghana, and first wife in the polygamous marriage and not only portray the African women as weak and helpless. It will empower African women and work for them in ways that they want it to. This also implies that African women understand their challenges and are able to articulate them. It therefore becomes critical to observe what feminism means for African women, thereby addressing women's challenges in Africa like cultural issues, gender equality, issues of inheritance, economy for women and illiteracy in women, which are challenges for widows.

Feminism in Africa needs to be reinvented as feminists are not united yet. It can be noted that African feminism has failed to achieve a gender consensus due to the different views on feminism. In the 20th century, African feminists were largely engaged in shaping their course and directing the course of their struggle and correcting what white-western feminism had brought to women's narratives. It becomes necessary to assess to what extent feminism is able to enforce the laws available to advance African feminism, like the CEDAW agreements, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Amendment Act of 2002, and the Constitution of the country. The enforcement of those laws by the Commission on Gender Equality would also benefit widows, whose human rights are ignored during mourning rituals, although entrenched in the constitution supported by PEPUDA. Accountability will ensure that such laws are implemented for the benefit of widows. Chibba (2015) underpins that empowerment of widows therefore becomes critical to prevent their violation, by rather than just rescuing them from each challenge they experience, but rather working towards their total liberation from oppression as women.

3.2.3. Intersectional theory

Intersectionality is a theory used to make sense of complexities of lived experiences in relationship to systems of domination (Crenshaw, 2011). According to UN Women (2020), an American law professor who coined the term in 1989 explained intersectional feminism as a spectrum in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. Intersectionality, according to Smooth (2013), encourages the acknowledgement of differences that are present among groups, taking dialogue beyond seeing only the differences between groups. Smooth (2013) further explains that intersectional theory originates from discontent with treatments of “women” as a homogenous group, and intersectionality has evolved into a theoretical research paradigm that seeks to understand the interaction of various social identities and how these interactions define societal power hierarchies.

Bose (2012) emphasizes that the development of intersectional theory significantly advanced the research on women who experience multiple forms of oppression in society. Also, that an understanding of intersectionality suggests that we should endeavor, on an ongoing basis, to move intersectionality to unexplored places, like research on African young widows. Thus, intersectionality is critical in the current study in that focusing on the process of developing social science research, social scientists argue that scholars can and should draw from a wide range of empirical research that is not necessarily defined as intersectional, but which nevertheless enables an intersectional analysis.

3.2.4. Critical paradigm

The critical paradigm was started by Georg Hegel in the eighteenth century, who was followed by Karl Marx in the nineteenth century. Paulo Freire developed the paradigm further in the twentieth century, focusing on critical pedagogy.

Their major focus with the critical paradigm was the elimination of injustices in society and other marginalized in society. Ultimately, the point of critical theory is to raise the consciousness of people, in order for them to be able to liberate themselves by providing the intellectual tools (i.e., ideas) to do so (Warkentin and Sawatzky, 2018).

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the aim of critical research is to transform society and address inequality especially issues of gender. This would benefit widows who tend to be marginalized during widowhood. It allows for collaboration without discrimination. This implies that the paradigm allows for collaboration on equal terms for the researcher and the research participants. Given (2008) explains that the researcher learns from participants, not only how they live in terms of their challenges, but also what it feels like to live that way. The engagement of participants assists the researcher and participants to understand the needs of the participants.

According to Du Plooy-Cilliers (2014), the epistemology of the critical realists' research is focused on transforming society. Critical realists do not only look at widows' experiences and what meaning they attach to such experiences but go further by addressing social issues leading to their widowhood challenges, in order to eliminate their oppression. This therefore implies changing people's lives, and the research has an element of emancipation of widows' lives through the study.

According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), the driving force behind the research of critical realism is the need to giving voice to the voiceless or those less powerful, and to expose the myths which perpetuate the oppression of widows and empower them to transform society radically, which would benefit widows in dealing with their challenges and empowering them for change against oppression.

According to Du-Plooy Cilliers (2014), the critical realists believe that there are dominant ideologies to which members of society ascribe, due to socialization, like widowhood rituals. In the case of the current study, the ideology would be referring to how men facilitate widowhood rituals, driven by patriarchy and socialization. This means that the whole society accepts the practice as a norm. The ontological position of critical realism is that communities practice ideologies to which members of a society ascribe due to socialization. This perpetuation renders widows vulnerable, as it is an accepted practice in their communities. This statement is supported by Maree (2013), when indicating that society tends to produce inequalities from generation to generation.

In order to break the chain of vulnerability for widows, the critical paradigm will be adopted to guide the study. The theory that will be used is critical theory, based on the ideas of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. Freire views the person as capable, knowledgeable and possessing the ability to analyze their own realities (Freire, 2000). They can engage in self-reflection and make their own decisions. This implies that widows can do such self-reflection on their current situation and make decisions based on this.

The implication of Freire's belief in people is that change will take place through dialogue based on deep trust and respect for people (Freire, 1972). One person cannot decide and act on behalf of the other, but rather work with each other. This implies that, for this study, those being researched should be actively involved in the research process as participants. The researcher will not be deciding on behalf of the participants but rather work in partnership with the participants.

Critical theory has been chosen because it focuses on society and opposing the dominant order of the society (James, 2021). In addressing society as a whole, issues like masculine bias are observed and discussed.

According to Warkentin and Sawatzky (2018), critical social work theory emerged from post-modernism after positivism, with the understanding that social reality is created and constructed according to that specific society. Also, that it became evident that language is power to those reinforcing social reality.

The study proposes the facilitation and development of an empowerment programme to capacitate vulnerable widows with strategies to deal with their vulnerability. The most important element of critical theory is that knowledge is power. It becomes therefore necessary for widows to understand the ways that they are oppressed, in order to be able to take action to change oppressive conditions that affect their lives. Critical theory critiques the social structure in order to bring about positive change which relates to the abuse and discrimination of widows.

Habermas as a critical theorist, states that critical theory is emancipatory. It can empower otherwise powerless groups like widows, hence it has been chosen to guide this participatory action study (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2015).

It can be noted that power relations aim at a particular sort of goal, namely, control over the conduct of another actor. That is, where Foucault's formulation is "direct and control" (Warkentin and Sawatzky, 2018); in the case of young widows, it would be the in-laws directing the widow over the mourning rituals and controlling how she should conduct herself.

Chevalier and Buckles (2013) stated that Freire is of the opinion that the oppressed, which refers to widows in the current study, should regain their sense of humanity, and through re-education overcome their condition, meaning be empowered to deal with their challenges. Critical theory emphasizes dialogic engagement with co-researchers during the development and implementation of plans. This implies widows in the study had to be engaged in an interactive dialogue that

informed the implementation plan. In terms of this study, through reflections by participants, a decision on the action was taken by them to change their situation. It was also envisaged that the empowerment programme developed based on their decisions would assist to overcome their challenges. Morley and Ablett (2019) highlight that for social work, critical social work is not just about criticizing the unjust and undemocratic social arrangements, but also about engagements to address the marginalization of the powerless and oppressed like widows. It can therefore be said that the planning with the participants was aimed at addressing their oppression and marginalization during the widowhood rituals. In order to address the marginalization of the widows as the powerless and oppressed, the participatory action research method was chosen.

3.2.4.1. Framework for the empowerment of African young widows

Freire promotes praxis, meaning informed action. He stated that theory without action is worthless. He also argued for research participants to be treated as subjects rather than objects. The co-learning approach in critical theory assumes that “the world out there” is defined by the participating stakeholders as they understand and perceive it (Muhittin, 2012).

Freire’s informed action will be followed to ensure the widows benefit from the study according to their own needs, as they will be actively involved in decision making, in line with informed action. A framework is therefore proposed for the empowerment of the widows based on Healy’s (2012) Dynamic Model, which will assist social workers when providing services of intervention to widows, implementing the framework.

The framework will be based on Healy's (2012) Dynamic Model as illustrated below:

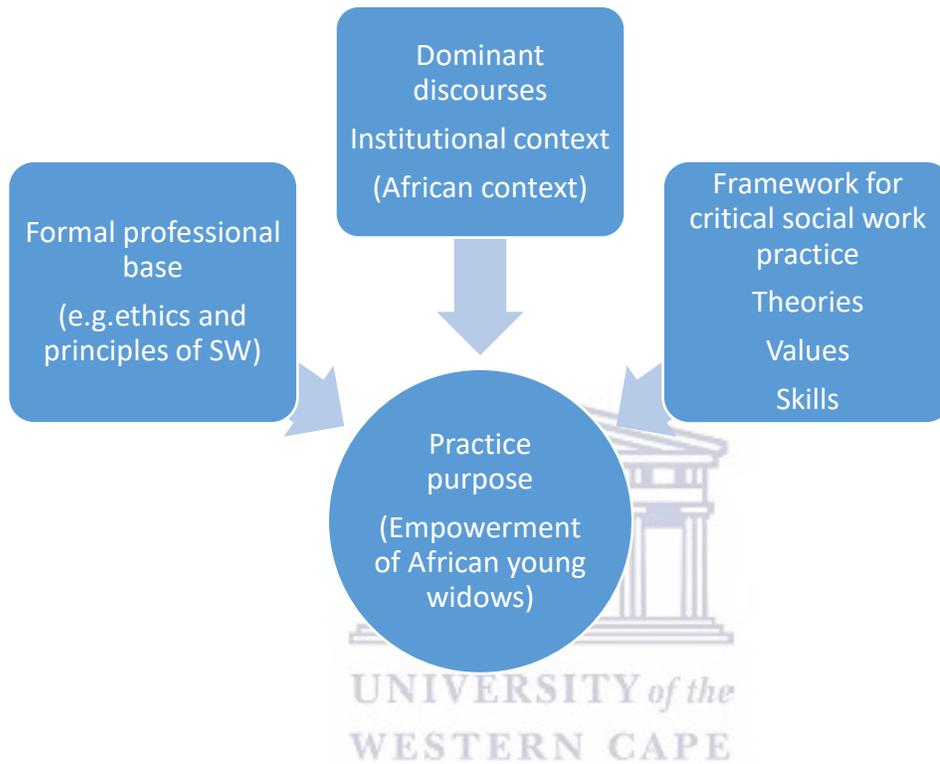


Figure 1: Framework for empowerment of African young widows

3.2.4.2 Formal professional base

The formal professional base analyses the ethics and principles that guide social work practice and focuses on the principles to be followed for critical social work practice in the empowerment of African young widows. Some of the critical principles include acceptance and individualisation.

During consultation with social workers, widows expect to be accepted as they are and not be stigmatized like their in-laws and community do. Even though they all experience challenges, each widow's challenges are different from another widows. This implies individualisation and not a one size fits all approach to widows' challenges. The fact that they are vulnerable should not lead to social workers forgetting the self-determination principle. Widows should be allowed to make choices during interventions and make their own decisions in dealing with their challenges. Social workers should guide them on the available options. That is the time when they try to deal with their loss, but due to the mourning rituals they are not given the space and time to grieve.

3.2.4.3 Ethical principles of social work

Healy (2012) emphasizes five principles which have been identified as relevant principles in dealing with widows, as outlined below.

3.2.4.4 Critical reflection on self in practice

The emphasis in the critical reflection on self is on assessing how our membership of professions shape our practice relationships. The focus should be on how the social worker, as a service provider and the widow as a service user, influence the practice relationship. This principle looks at how service providers utilize the power assumed by being providers, when dealing with people like widows, who have been isolated, stigmatized and are feeling vulnerable, while also being blamed for the death of their husbands.

It becomes therefore critical for social workers to utilize their power appropriately so that widows do not feel secondary victimization after the experiences with their in-laws, who had power over them, to instruct them on the mourning rituals. Professionals should therefore guard against behaviors of oppressive authority. This also implies that widows choose to consult social workers for counselling and help when they feel vulnerable, isolated and stigmatised. They look for comfort and help from social workers, without being judged. Widows expect social workers to be welcoming and treat them as humans, women who have lost their husbands, and not stigmatise them or treat them as sub-humans because of power they hold as service providers.

3.2.4.5 Critical assessment of service

The second principle outlines the importance of assessing the service user's experience of the oppression. The assessment is on how the widow experienced the oppression, considering that she is from a disadvantaged group, being an African woman and mostly unemployed, while some are also from rural areas.

In this principle, Healy (2012) calls for going beyond the usual principle of being objective or ensuring that services are responsive to the service user's needs. It is also about looking at how the experiences of the service user affected her mentally, and the general impact of the oppression on her, based on her gender; for example, widows who have to wear mourning clothes for a certain period, while men do not wear mourning clothes. Of importance is for the service provider to consider the options for action available to the service user. This includes attending to the experiences of oppression. The social worker needs to understand the changes caused by the oppression of the widow and assist her to deal with such experiences. Social workers should therefore be mindful of this during interventions, in their positions of power as they service the widows.

3.2.4.6 Empowering service users

This principle focuses on seeking to overcome the structural, institutional as well as personal obstacles to clients for greater control of their lives. In this principle, Healy (2012) highlights the need to empower widows by encouraging them to share their feelings of powerlessness, for example during property grabbing or while blamed for the death of their husbands and the rest of the mourning rituals. Once the widows have shared their feelings of powerlessness, the process of consciousness raising should begin, to enable them to comprehend how structural and cultural injustices mold their experiences, where cultural injustices are accepted as the norm. The idea should be to show the widows that they are not alone in experiencing cultural injustices as a widow, as all widows go through the same experiences in their community. They are then to be empowered on how to deal with injustices, in order to be able to move on with their lives, highlighting their rights and the resources available to them.

Problem solving skills become critical for the widows on how to deal with mourning rituals, while trying to mourn the loss of the husband, and guarding against disregard for the human rights of the widow.

3.2.4.7 Working in partnership

The principle of working in partnership is in line with the social work principle of self-determination. The widows would be sensitive and vulnerable due to their experiences of oppression. Idialu (2012) found the treatment of widows in Africa to be inhuman and contributed to dehumanizing the victims, while Manala (2016:3) highlighted that “in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribes that originate from Limpopo province believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbours, attending family and community functions”.

Radzilani (2010) postulates that in terms of TshiVenda culture, a woman is considered the property of the man and his family once the lobola is paid to her family, hence the widow becomes the dependent of the in-laws, even at the death of their husbands, and gets support in that regard as a dependent. According to Healy (2012), it is important however to include widows in decision making process which will affect their lives, after they have been oppressed through patriarchy. This also helps in building their self-esteem after they have been excluded in decision making about the funerals of their husbands. Assisting them to rebuild their lives as widows and involving them in decision making would be a step towards their empowerment.

3.2.4.8 Minimal intervention

Healy (2012) advocates for intervening in the least intrusive and oppressive way possible. The focus should be on risk reduction first, with the aim of preventing the escalation of risk of harm to the service user. The anti-oppressive practice is about reaching out to the widow, to increase her knowledge and options to access a particular service to improve her current situation that led her seeking help. Thus, social workers should guard against further victimizing the widow through minimal intervention as recommended by Healy (2012).

3.2.4.9 Dominant discourses in the African context and client's needs

Critical realists believe that there are dominant ideologies to which members of society ascribe due to socialization, such as cultural issues (Du-Plooy Cilliers, 2014). In the case of the current study, the ideology would refer to how men facilitate widowhood rituals, driven by patriarchy and socialization (Manala, 2016). Women and the general community tend to support the widowhood rituals without assessing how the widow will be affected. This means that the whole society accepts the practice as a norm, as it accepts the mourning process.

Regarding the accounts of widows, social workers need to understand the dominant discourses in the African context, in order to understand what the widow is going through and has experienced. This would enable the social worker to understand the widow's needs better. Widows get isolated by their in-laws as part of the widowhood rituals and that tends to be accepted as a common practice. The widow's welfare and that of her children is not considered. Widows lose their husbands in different ways, some traumatic.

Throughout history women have always been subjugated and oppressed by culture in most African societies (Chiazor et al., 2016). This inequality is based on their gender driven by patriarchy. Feminists critique patriarchy. It tends to give men authority and power over women, especially during the mourning rituals, as they are led by men. One of the priorities of African feminism is gender equality (Salo, 2001). The needs of the widow are not considered in the process. In the case of widows, patriarchal power is demonstrated through the mourning rituals which lead to the isolation of widows, leading to them struggling on their own with their children, without support from the in-laws while being isolated from other people.

Women are expected to obey the oppressive mourning rituals that are led by men (Chiazor et al., 2016). Mkhize (2005) warns against the oppression of widows. He states that there are oppressive social languages which represent the social position of the speaker and thereby denote the dominance of men over widows. Mkhize (2005) then cautions that even the language of psychology is consistent with the values of dominance. Further emphasizing the need for psychologists to conduct reflexivity, meaning a process of explicitly turning one's critical gaze on oneself as well as the professional, historical and cultural discourses that empower and ensure social scientists understand and interpret other's lives meaningfully.

He calls for vigilance and cautions against oppressive ritual practices, stating that critical social science has no room for oppressive cultural practices.

3.2.4.10 Critical social work practice

The critical social work theory asserts that macro–social structures shape social relations at every level of social life (Healy, 2012).

According to this theory, the oppressed tend to be complicit in their oppression. The modern critical social work theory therefore calls on social workers to empower oppressed people to act collectively in order to achieve social change (Healy, 2012). In practicing anti-oppressive social work, modern critical social work theory makes a core assumption that social workers must recognize and be familiar with various forms of oppression, and acknowledge them as harmful. Widows tend to experience abuse and limited movement during the mourning period. Widows may find themselves helpless while facing restrictions on movement associated with mourning rites, which tend to confine widows within a designated residence for many months or years (Cattell, 2003). According to a report by Thapa (2007), many rural widows receive nothing from their in-laws and are often victims of violence, are evicted from their homes and robbed of their household possessions.

MacDonald (2012) states that Participatory Action Research is a qualitative methodology that is life enhancing, that allows participants to be active and make informed decisions, hence it was chosen as suitable for the proposed research study. PAR would allow the widows some self-determination after being oppressed. Thus, PAR was used to conscientize the widows regarding their oppression and dominance, that even though the oppressive mourning rituals are accepted as a norm, it is still oppression and continues because of acceptance in the society.

PAR allowed widows to understand what causes their vulnerability. Mohindra (2010) states that widows, particularly younger widows, face social stigmatization and restrictions such as not being welcome at weddings, isolation, limited employment opportunities, as well as limited participation in social and community activities.

Gwala (2010) further adds that in her study findings widows reported that the isolation was the most torturous experience they have ever gone through, and that such restrictions and complications render widows vulnerable and can further complicate the process of adjusting to widowhood.

Ndlovu's (2013) study on Zulu widows revealed that widows experience numerous challenges and discrimination during their mourning period, especially while they are still in the mourning dress, where they are ostracized by their in-laws, neighbors, community members and even by their friends. It is in this regard that working with them in partnership for decision making is critical and would avoid secondary victimization.

The anti-oppressive practice is about reaching out to the widow to increase her knowledge and options to access a particular service to improve her current situation that led her to seek help.

The widow is to be assisted with minimal intervention to decide on what is critical for her and what her needs are, and not to be told by the social worker, as that would disable her instead of empowering her.

3.2.4.11 Practice purpose

The practice purpose is the empowerment of African young widows. The purpose is to liberate them from the oppression and social injustice they experience as widows.

Healy (2012) emphasized the need to practice critical social work when dealing with widows who have lost their property through property grabbing, leaving them homeless.

Widows are to be encouraged to be themselves in a safe professional environment where they can share their experiences that made them vulnerable. After sharing what made them powerless, widows should be conscientised to understand patriarchy and how it leads to cultural injustices. They are then to be empowered to understand what makes them powerless and how to deal with the challenges that makes them powerless, in order to adapt to their widowhood. In the Free State, both from urban and rural areas, widows shared their experiences ranging from discrimination against widows and the need for empowerment to be able to stand up for themselves against unjust cultural practices, remarriage, inheritance, and status in the household and society (Khulumani Support Group, 2011).

3.3. Conclusion

The chapter opened with discussion on the four dominant paradigms, namely positivist, post-positivist, feminist and the critical paradigms. It highlighted the critical paradigm as the guideline for the study. The discussion then followed with a focus on theories. The discussion on theories opened with highlights on postmodernism, criticizing the modernism theorists. Postmodern theory is seen as a challenge to modern theory and politics, which contains both promising new perspectives and problematic aspects. The critical theory highlights emancipation of women and gender equality as their focal area.

Intersectional theory highlights the intersection of injustices experienced by widows as women and as widows. Intersectional theory further seeks to understand the interaction of various social identities and how these interactions define societal power hierarchies.

A framework is therefore proposed for the social workers for the empowerment of the widows based on Healy's (2012) Dynamic Model. The framework is aimed at guiding social workers when providing services of intervention to widows. The framework outlines the practice guideline, including values to be implemented when assisting widows. The model is based on critical social work for the empowerment of widows.



CHAPTER 4

Research methodology

4.1. Introduction

The study aimed at developing guidelines for the empowerment of African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State. Mangaung Metro consists of urban and rural areas, with the majority of people speaking Sotho (53.3%) and others speaking Tswana (12.6%), Xhosa (9.9%) and Afrikaans (16.2%) (Ncube, 2019). In this chapter the discussion opens with the research methodology followed for the study. An outline of the research design is then given, followed by the aims of the research study, sampling procedures, gaining access, and the research ethics followed in the study. This is followed by the data collection approach and closes with the trustworthiness of the study. A conclusion for the chapter is given at the end.

4.2. Research approach

There are two approaches that can be used in social work research, namely quantitative and qualitative approaches. Qualitative research gives us an in-depth understanding of people in their own natural setting. According to McLeod (2019), qualitative research is exploratory and seeks to explain “how” and “why” a particular phenomenon or behavior operates as it does in a particular context. Qualitative description research studies are those that seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved. The main aim of qualitative research is to understand individuals, groups and cultures, by studying participants in their natural settings in order to understand their reality. This approach was ideal as the researcher needed an in-depth understanding of the needs and challenges of African young widows to be able to develop an “empowerment” program with them. It is affirmed by Farnsworth (2019) that qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of the situation of the widows.

It is for that reason that a qualitative approach was chosen over a quantitative approach. The researcher aimed to understand the challenges of young African widows and get an in-depth understanding, and not just quantify them in numbers as in quantitative research, as the ultimate goal was to develop a guideline for empowerment to address such identified challenges.

4.2.1. Research design

A research design refers to a plan or blueprint of how a researcher intends to conduct the research. The design outlines the research plan, selection of research participants, data collection process and how data was analyzed. In order to achieve the goal of this research study, Participatory Action Research (PAR) was utilized.

Participatory Action Research is a qualitative methodology that allows participants to be active and make informed decisions, hence it was chosen as suitable for the proposed study. The collaboration becomes the empowering feature that empowers the widows, by doing research with them rather than on them. The process allowed widows to share their experiences and knowledge of the subject and developed the guideline for their own development.

Kemmis et al. (2014) state that Participatory Action Research is a qualitative methodology that is life enhancing, that allows participants to be active and make informed decisions, hence it was chosen as suitable for the proposed research study. It allowed the widows to be actively involved in the study, working towards changing their lives and their emancipation.

The collaboration became the empowering feature for the widows, by doing research with them rather than on them, as active participants. Participatory Action Research is known as emancipatory research (Kemmis et al., 2014).

Participatory Action Research focused on building the capacity of widows, which lead to consciousness raising (or conscientization) and a state of readiness for action to deal with their challenges. The process allowed widows to share their experiences and knowledge of the subject at hand and influence the research process as experts.

4.2.1.1 Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research has been chosen as the suitable design for the empowerment of the widows. According to Morales (2015), the aim of PAR is to advance knowledge and action directly beneficial to a group of individuals, through research, adult education or socio-political action. This is mainly in collaboration with the participants, and utilizes the work to champion for needed change (Stoudt, 2009). Raynor (2019) articulated that Participatory Action Research is a give and take that seeks emancipation and empowerment of the participants.

Some of the distinct features of PAR are that:

- It is participant driven
 - It suggests a democratic model of who can generate, own and use knowledge
 - It is collaborative at each stage, entailing discussion, pooling skills and working together
 - It is projected to result in some action, change or improvement on the topic being studied
- (Morales, 2015).

The Participatory Action Research approach of Freire was concerned with empowering the poor and marginalized members of society about issues pertaining to literacy, land reform analysis, and the community (Freire, 2000).

Freire was an adult educator and author of critical works of pedagogy who challenged social relationships in traditional education that were based on dominance and power (Freire, 1970). He further emphasized the significance of critical consciousness to social change (Maguire, 1987).

Critical consciousness development requires the individual to be knowledgeable about political, social, and economic contradictions, and to take action to change the oppressive elements of reality, thus liberating oppressed individuals (Freire, 1970). Participatory action research has also developed as a movement that focused on ways of freeing society from domination.

Feminist researchers have utilized participatory by analyzing power differences based on gender and emphasizing the necessity for a partnership between the researcher and participant during research (Maguire, 1987). The aim of PAR is the empowerment of oppressed individuals and the collaboration for social change which contributes towards capacity building and development of the oppressed.). The PAR process is potentially empowering, liberating and consciousness-raising for individuals, as it provides critical understanding and reflection of social issues.

In terms of PAR, even though participants become equal partners, there is somehow a segregation of responsibilities, whereby the researcher is expected to lead in the area of data analysis, utilizing theory whereas community members may be required to lead in implementing strategies for improving the identified social issue based on their lived experiences.

4.2.2 Research population

Population refers to the entire collection of entities one seeks to understand or, more formally, about which one seeks to draw an inference and to whom the results will apply (Statistics Solutions, 2020).

The population for the purpose of this study consisted of all widows in the Free State from the five districts of the province, in the database of the Department of Social Development. The population consisted of widows of various ages of Mangaung. The database is kept and maintained for widows receiving social services from Social Development. It was accessed as the readily available list of widows in the targeted area, Mangaung. The participants were accessed through the Department of Social Development Community, Development Practitioners as gatekeepers. The study was conducted in Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu Municipalities of Mangaung, Free State province of South Africa as shown in the map below.





Figure 2: Map of Mangaung Metro (Source: Mangaung Metropolitan Municipalities.co.za)

The researcher had enquired from the local NPO about the traditional council contacts for Thaba Nchu, in order to brief them before the study was undertaken. On contacting the traditional council, the researcher was offered a meeting with the administrator of the council. The purpose was to brief the council on the study aims and how it was to be conducted. The briefing was to get permission to conduct the study in Thaba Nchu, which is the traditional council area.

This was to prevent any misconceptions about the study, as the study would be looking at the challenges of widows which are, according to literature, complicated by cultural practices. It was critical for the researcher to outline what the study focus was. The administrator in turn briefed the council who gave the go ahead for the study. It was also indicated that should the researcher experience any challenges during the field work, the council should be informed in order to assist. The researcher also promised to share the results of the study with the council.

The first meeting with the participants was arranged by telephonically contacting all the widows who met the criteria, to invite them to a meeting scheduled for a Saturday in a local conference centre in town. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the study to the potential participants and form a research team with those who were willing to participate in the study.

4.2.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was utilized to select the participants. The purposive sampling technique is a form of non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select a sample based on the purpose of the study and knowledge of a population, and not just the willingness of the participants. It is emphasized by Palinkas et al. (2015:533) that, “purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest”.

Researchers choose subjects because of certain characteristics. The purposive sampling technique therefore allowed the researcher to choose relevant widows for the study, based on the set criteria towards achieving the objectives of the study. Based on the criteria, the number of participants selected from the database was not enough. As a result, in addition to purposive sampling, snowball sampling was also used to include those not on the data base according to the inclusion criteria for the study.

Snowball sampling is often used because the population under investigation is 'hidden', either due to low numbers of potential participants or the sensitivity of the topic, as is the case with widows. Snowball sampling also ensured that the desired numbers of participants for the study were achieved.

The sample consisted of two groups of African young widows. There were eight widows from Thaba Nchu aged 24 – 40. Thaba Nchu is a rural area. The second group was also eight widows from Bloemfontein, aged 24 -40. Bloemfontein is an urban area in Mangaung. The study only focused on widows from the Free State for convenience and thereby excluding other provinces. This was also because the previous study to identify challenges had been conducted in the Free State. Thus, there were 16 participants in total, with the youngest being 24 years old and the oldest 40 years of age. This indicates that the widows lost their husbands at the prime age in their lives, meaning at the reproductive age.

The inclusion criteria for the widows were as follows:

- Black young widows from Mangaung Metro (8 from Thaba Nchu, a rural area & 8 from Bloemfontein, an urban area)
- Widows between ages 24-40 years old
- Widows widowed for a minimum period of six months and maximum of 5 years
(Six months is chosen because in most African countries it is a minimum period for mourning)
- Widows who are willing to voluntarily participate in the process.

Criteria for research participants

The participants were chosen from the database received from the Department of Social Development. The researcher called the ones who met the criteria in terms of age. Since the number that met the full criteria was not enough, a local non-profit organization was requested to assist with further names. The researcher then contacted all those who met the full criteria to a meeting at a local conference centre to explain the study and why they were chosen, i.e. meeting the criteria in the database (See criteria above). They were briefed about the study and requested to confirm their consent to participate in the study by completing the consent forms. A total of 16 African young widows, for two groups with eight per group, in both urban and rural areas were recruited to participate.

4.3 Participatory Action Research Process

Participatory Action Research was implemented according to its four phases (Kemp et al., 2019) including the following:

4.3.1 Step 1: Reflecting

Objectives of step 1:

- To explore and describe the experiences and challenges of African young widows in Mangaung in the Free State
- To explore and describe the customary practices around widowhood in Mangaung Metro in the Free State.

During the initial phase of reflecting, the research team consisting of the researcher and widows was constituted.

During the initial phase of the study, the researcher first met the traditional leadership council through their representative in order to explain the intention to conduct the study in Thaba Nchu, the rural area. This was to prevent any misunderstanding, as the study was exploring challenges of young African widows which included traditional widowhood rituals. This was to ensure that the traditional leadership understood the intention of the study. Their role as leaders was outlined to indicate that if there were things that were found to be against the law, the participants and other widows would consult the traditional leadership for assistance as local leaders, to ensure that traditional practices were done correctly, in terms of the law without abusing the widows.

The representative gave feedback to the council and the study was given the go ahead, and a venue was even offered for one of the sessions. The researcher then invited the widows to a meeting by first calling them.

During the first focus group sessions, which were held separately as morning and afternoon sessions, the researcher formed the research team consisting of the researcher and the participants. The role of the researcher was outlined to the research team after they had consented to form part of the research team. The researcher emphasized to the research team their role as equal partners and their responsibility to achieve the goal of the study. The research team members explored the experiences and challenges of the widows, as well as the customary practices around widowhood as the focus of the first session. This was done using some techniques like a problem-solving tree, mapping and circles. They then analyzed the problems and re-conceptualized the issues they needed to address.

African young widows as participants who had experienced the problems were regarded as the experts and more knowledgeable than the researcher regarding the issues they experienced.

They defined the problem together with the researcher, according to how they experienced it and not as directed by the researcher. Individual interviews were also conducted as a way of confirming issues raised in the focus groups (see under data collection methods).

4.3.2 Step 2: Planning

- To workshop an intervention programme to empower young African widows in the Mangaung Metro in the Free State so that they are able to deal with their challenges.

The second step is where planning is done by the participants and the researcher. During the planning phase, the plan is clearly outlined by the researcher and participants, including a contingency plan for problems that might be experienced if their plan does not go accordingly.

During the planning phase, participants talked about how they would handle issues that made them vulnerable.

The research team discussed how to address the vulnerabilities identified during the reflection stage. This included buy-in of communities, how to create awareness in the community, identifying resources, and creating awareness of legislation available to widows.

4.3.3 Step 3: Action

- To workshop an intervention programme to empower young African widows in the Mangaung Metro in the Free State, so that they are able to deal with their challenges

This is the stage where the plans are implemented according to the strategies developed during the planning phase. All participants are engaged in the implementation of the plans in order to achieve the desired intervention and results.

The phase of action for the study entailed activities such as conducting awareness raising workshops with the widows. These workshops included awareness raising for young married women on important issues in their marriage, e.g. a will, resources available to widows and legislation available to protect the widows. The discussions highlighted the needs of the widows, including support from social workers and non-profit organizations, and the need for the support groups. Widows shared how they benefited for women's groups.

These workshops allowed participants to express their ideas and thoughts in a non-threatening and supportive environment. The only activities conducted and planned were the ones which the widows felt safe to implement.

4.3.4. Step 4: Observing

Observations have to take place right through all the stages of the study and have to focus both on verbal and non-verbal communication.

It can be noted that the stages are not linear, as there might be a need to re-plan or re-strategize when observing that the original plan is not going accordingly. This can be illustrated in the figure below:

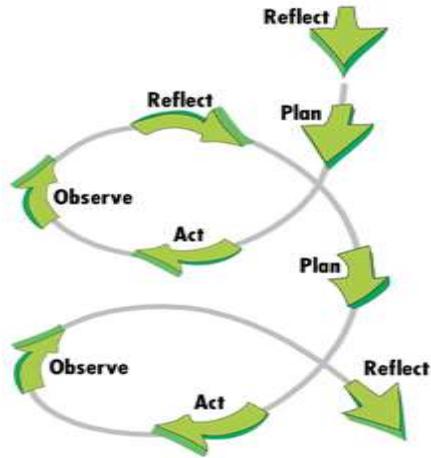


Figure 3: Illustration of the stages of PAR

Observations took place throughout all the stages of the study and focused both on verbal and non-verbal communication. A journal was kept recording observations during all the stages. Widows were made aware of the journal in order not to cause anxiety during the discussion.

4.4 Data collection methods

4.4.1 Data collection tools

During the focus group sessions, the sessions were recorded to collect the data, with the permission of the participants. Observations were also made and recorded in the reflective journal immediately after the sessions. An interview guide was utilized for the unstructured interviews, to facilitate the discussion with the widows. Recordings were also made during the workshops, with the permission of all the participants, which was obtained before the sessions started.

Data was collected in the following ways. The researcher arranged the two meetings for Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein to form the research teams. The first meeting was held in Thaba Nchu with the Thaba Nchu widows in the morning and lasted three hours.

All invited widows attended. In the meeting the researcher explained that they would participate voluntarily and were allowed to leave the study group at any time, without any penalties. The study was explained to the widows, emphasizing the aims, objectives and procedures to be followed. The widows were allowed to ask clarity seeking questions to ensure they were clear about the study. This was followed by issuing them with information sheets and consent forms.

It was explained to the widows that if they were happy to participate in the study, they were requested to sign the consent form, which would confirm that they were joining the research team. The widows were very happy to meet and started exchanging contact numbers. They also indicated that they were struggling to socialize and were largely excluded from social gatherings. The prospect of joining the research team, where there would be follow up gatherings, seemed to be exciting to the widows. Meeting times were also negotiated with the widows to ensure their full participation. It was agreed that Saturdays were convenient and would also accommodate those who were working. The researcher offered to start a WhatsApp group to facilitate communication with the research group. The WhatsApp group was created to enhance communication. This was important as the researcher had moved to the Eastern Cape, and also for the booking of the venues for sessions.

The second group was from Bloemfontein. The meeting of the second group was held in a local day care centre. The aim was to utilize venues that were accessible regarding transport. The meeting was held in the afternoon, also for three hours. The afternoon was to allow travel time between Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein.

The researcher repeated the same information with the Bloemfontein group. This also included negotiating the research meeting times, and all the invited widows signed the consent forms.

They also indicated that they were grateful for the group, as it gave them the chance to ventilate their frustrations and share experiences. The WhatsApp group was also offered to the Bloemfontein group and was warmly accepted.

4.4.1.1 Individual interviews

Individual interviews were utilized to gather information regarding the situation of the widows which they might not have freely shared during the focus group discussions. The interviews assisted in gaining in-depth insight into the challenges of the African young widows. Unstructured interviews were conducted as needed, utilizing an interview guide. The interview guide was in English, but questions were translated into the language of the widow. The interviews were conducted in the language preferred by the participants and in the comfort of their homes, a space where they felt safe.

4.4.1.2 Focus groups

Focus group discussions were utilized due to their advantage of providing detailed information about group feelings and opinions as sought for the study.

A variety of participatory techniques and activities were utilized during focus group sessions, to facilitate the participation of the widows in the reflection, planning and action process. Activities such as brainstorming, mapping, drama and poetry may be utilized if found appropriate for the selected group (Fouche et al., 2021). Such processes may help to understand issues as experienced by individuals, families and the community at large. The widows felt comfortable with brainstorming, problem trees and circles during the focus groups.

A series of three focus group sessions were conducted for the two groups in each town, with eight members in each. Three half day sessions were held for each group.

The research team decided on half day focus groups to accommodate if the women still needed to do house chores. The focus group sessions were held on Saturday as decided with the widows, to accommodate the availability of those who were working. The time and place accessible to the widows were negotiated and determined after the first meeting.

The focus groups were facilitated in Southern Sotho and Xhosa, which are the home languages of the participants. They are also the local languages and the languages in which the researcher is fluent, with Xhosa being her home language. The researcher has stayed in the Free State for 23 years.

The first session was aimed at forming the research teams for both Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu focus groups. The focus groups also entailed discussion of how the widows were experiencing widowhood and its challenges. The widows seemed to be very eager for the focus groups. The groups tended to be a platform for socializing and meeting other widows with similar challenges and experiences. Most widows voiced that they were happy to have the group, as they were experiencing loneliness and struggling to make friends due to their change of status.

A WhatsApp group was established to facilitate communication. The group chat was aimed at reminding the widows of the scheduled sessions in advance, and in case of change of venue as venues were booked in advance. This was to limit challenges in communication with the widows as the researcher had moved to another province (Eastern Cape).

It however turned out to be a much-appreciated social platform for the widows, where they started chatting with each other and sharing other information e.g. when they have funerals, inviting each other to other events like small business seminars. The researcher allowed this communication as the widows had already raised the issue of loneliness.

The workshop sessions were held for awareness raising and community by-in as determined by the widows. The workshops were joined by other relevant invited stakeholders like young married women, social workers and members of NPOs (Non-Profit Organizations). The widows shared how they experienced widowhood and warned young married women of what to have in place in their marriage to avoid other challenges; how they were treated as widows by other married women, families and community at large; the attitude they got from other women; and their need for resources like legal support during their battles with the in-laws.

At the beginning and end of each session a reflection on the process was facilitated to determine the way forward (planning-action-reflection process).

4.4.1.3 Workshops

Community education and awareness was conducted through the workshops. Recording of the proceedings was also done to collect data.

Two workshops were held for each group. They were aimed at community awareness to ensure that the empowered widows had a conducive environment after their empowerment process. The workshops were conducted in partnership with the participants as active participants. The researcher facilitated the workshops. The participants opened the workshops, led discussions and did the closing of the sessions. Workshops were attended by the participants, young married women, social workers and non-profit organization members.

4.4.1.4 Observations

Observations were done during the reflection, planning and action process. Observations were recorded systematically in a diary to enhance trustworthiness of the observations. Recording of observations of sessions was done directly after the sessions, including how widows expressed themselves when sharing their experience, including facial expressions and emotions portrayed.

These observations assisted in the reflecting and understanding of the data collected regarding what was being shared by the widows and how the information was shared.

4.5. Data analysis

An independent coder was utilized to do the analysis of data. Data was analyzed to identify themes. Data analysis was conducted according to the following six steps, as proposed by Creswell (2014):

1. Becoming familiar with data:

The data from the individual interviews, focus groups, workshops and observations was organized and prepared for analysis. This entailed transcribing data from interviews, focus groups and workshops, and identifying preliminary themes that were emerging from the data. This included noting non-verbal communication including silences. Notes from the observations were also analyzed.

2. Generating initial codes:

Coding of data began in phase 2 with the identification of items that were recurring from the data collected. The idea was to make meaning of data. Terms used by participants formed the basis of the first coding, in order to reflect their own experiences. Coding was according to the data themes, labeled in line with the research question. A professional coder was contracted to confirm the themes.

3. Search for themes:

According to Creswell (2014) this phase is about searching for themes. The previously coded information is analyzed to see how it forms themes and sub-themes. Data analysis was focusing on information that would guide the development of the programme for empowerment of African young widows. Some codes would be combined, and an explanation will be given for combining them, while trying to understand the information coming out of the data.

4. Retrieving themes:

In this step, coding was about combining created categories to form themes. It also entailed combining and condensing similar themes into one theme. The whole data set was categorized into themes. The process was done in such a way as to tell a story through themes from the data.

5. Defining and naming themes:

Defining the themes assisted the researcher with data analysis under each theme. Some themes had sub-themes. The researcher explained each theme, in terms of contents and importance to the research study. The themes were given names for better understanding of their stories.

6. Producing the report:

Once the whole data set was organized into themes the final report writing began. The focus was on the themes which directly responded to the research question. The report is an analysis of the developed themes, telling a story in answering the research question.

Member checking was also done to ensure that the researcher captured the participants correctly, and that the final report reflected the views of the participants as deduced from the data recorded. The draft report and the action of the development of the programme were taken to the participants for comments and feedback in support of its credibility.

The inductive approach in thematic analysis, which involved allowing the data to determine the themes, led to identification of three major themes being retrieved from the data; namely the effects of widowhood, challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows, and support strategies for widows to prevent vulnerability. Themes will be discussed incorporating sub-themes identified within the themes.

4.6. Trustworthiness of the study

Guba (1981) proposes four criteria that he believes should be considered to address trustworthiness of qualitative studies; namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

- a) Credibility addresses how compatible the findings of the study are with reality. Adoption of well-established research methods, e.g. specific procedures employed should be like those used before in similar projects. It is in this regard that for data collection, the study utilized interviews of widows, workshops and continuous observation, which had been used in previous studies on the topic. This would also assist with data triangulation.
- b) In terms of transferability, Guba (1981) proposes that the researcher should clearly outline the boundaries of the study. It is in this regard that the geographical area and the rural nature of research area are clearly outlined for transferability purposes by other researchers. The study was done in the two towns of Mangaung Metro, namely Bloemfontein and Thaba Nchu. Thaba Nchu is the rural town of Mangaung Metro. These details should help when the study is being duplicated or compared with similar studies (Shenton, 2004). Purposive sampling chosen for

the study is ideal for transferability purposes, since specific information is maximized in relation to the context in which data collection occurs.

- c) In promoting the dependability of the study, detailed information is given on what was planned for the focus groups, individual interviews and workshops as well as observations. The workshops were held in community conference centers.

Documentation of what happened in the field regarding what was planned and what got implemented is given under the research design. Individual interviews were conducted in the comfort of the expert's home at a time and date agreed with them. Observations were recorded and analyzed.

- d) Conformability was addressed by ensuring that the research findings reflected the experiences and information provided by the participants in the study. This implies that the data was not the ideas and preferences of the researcher. In emphasizing this aspect, the notes and reflective commentary generated by the researcher assisted in this regard as a reflective journal. The focus groups, individual interviews, workshops and observations were recorded with the permission of the participants to assist with this process. A session was held with the participants to share the research findings and allow them to verify if they reflected their views. The participants were happy with the results and made additions. Under counselling they added a need for peer counselling where they expressed that, there is a need for peer support. Participants indicated that the peer support is critical for new widows when fighting with the in-laws while isolated by other family members and community at large. This was cited as common when the widows are accused of causing the death of their husbands. The addition was incorporated as recommended by the participants. It was agreed by the researcher and participants that the results should be shared with Social Development and Non-Profit

Organizations in order to create awareness of the need and facilitate formation of support groups facilitated by social workers. In terms of the ethical dilemmas in PAR, the dialogues and participation to discuss sensitive and controversial issues could lead to alienation of the widows. In order to prevent that, the study was explained in detail to the widows as well as the Basotho Traditional Council through their administrator. This was to prevent any misunderstanding of the study that could lead to the alienation of the widows as participants. The research study and its goals were explained in detail to the Basotho Traditional Council to show respect to the culture while standing up for the widows in a respectful manner by empowering them.

PAR is particularly well suited to addressing controversial issues because of its emphasis on dialogue and participation. Working with widowhood in a traditional setting – and as described by the researcher is sensitive and controversial.

It suggests cultural sensitivity and emphasizes the gap in legislation. This might alienate participants from cultural belief systems and leave them in the process of acculturation. A further ethical dilemma could stem from insider-outsider issues. The researcher had a insider membership in the study in terms of her context relating to gender and ethnicity, meaning as a young black woman from the Xhosa ethnic group. Since the research was started when the researcher's age was within those of participants. This gave her a background information on what the widowhood entailed. The researcher assumed the role of a guide in the process to be followed while participants had knowledge which was valuable for the study. The fact that the researcher is not a widow, gave her an outsider status who had to rely on the widows for information based on their experiences, as subject experts. The potential conflict between insiders and outsiders was resolved by assuming an equal status in the research process.

In order to ensure that the study is not fulfilling the researchers' interest, the research reminded the participants in all the sessions that the study is about empowering the participants based on their experiences, meaning the participants were regarded as subject experts who would direct the study on how to capacitate them. The researcher had to constantly remember and constantly remind herself, that the process depended on the subject expects regarding their needs and the success of the study depended on addressing the actual need as identified by the participants. In order to keep objectivity, a journal was kept for all sessions to record observations. This was important to guard against preconceived ideas and ensure the actually needs of the widows are addressed in order to address their challenges.

The findings were shared with the participants as part of community ownership. who recommended that they be shared with social development to facilitate that widows be supported with support groups and counselling.

4.7. Ethics considerations

Gilchrist and Schinkel, in Grinnell (2001), cite that ethical considerations help us to protect our clients, delineate our professional responsibilities, direct our data gathering and guide our change efforts towards acceptable and worthwhile goals. In keeping with ethics and professional guidelines, the researcher protected the identities and interests of all the participants and would not compromise the participants' rights over the research. In order to protect their identities, participants were allocated code names with a confidential key.

In the meeting the researcher explained to the widows that they would participate voluntarily and could leave the study group at any time without any penalties.

The study was explained to the widows, emphasizing the aims, objectives and procedures to be followed, including confidentiality. The widows asked clarity-seeking questions to ensure they were clear about the study. This was followed by issuing them with information sheets and consent forms.

It was explained to the widows that if they were happy to participate in the study, they were requested to sign the consent forms, which would confirm that they were joining the research team. In order to provide the participants with privacy, focus groups and workshops were conducted in the community conference halls and interviews were held in the residences of the widows, away from curious community members.

4.8. Permission to conduct the study

The following procedures were followed for this study. Ethics approval was received from the HSSREC Ethics Committee of the University of the Western Cape. The ethical certificate is attached as Annexure F. Debriefing services by a senior social worker were made available to the participants from the first session to use, whenever necessary should they need it as they had to revisit their experiences which made them vulnerable. Furthermore, a request was made to the Department of Social Development to work with the black young widows in their database. The request was supported and the database was availed to choose the widows who met the criteria.

4.9. Limitations and assumptions of the study

The study may challenge the cultural practices in the communities. The PAR process needed to deal with matters sensitively and allow the widows to act in appropriate ways which would not put them in danger of being further socially excluded. The awareness workshop was also intended to deal with the sensitivity of the matter and preventing any damage that could come from the empowerment of the widows in the community.

4.10. Conclusion

The discussion in this chapter focused on the research approach and design. This was followed by an outline of the population for the study, as well as the sample utilized and how it was drawn for the study. The study setting was also discussed, indicating the rural and urban areas utilized for the study. This was followed by the data collection methodology, starting with the data collection methods, highlighting the focus groups, interviews and the use of observation, through recording in the reflective journal that was kept with the knowledge of the participants.

The trustworthiness of the study was also discussed in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability to aid duplication of the study. Permissions sought for the study were also detailed in the chapter, including how privacy and confidentiality were maintained during the study.

CHAPTER 5

Findings and discussion

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the data analysis process followed. The study followed a content analysis process, utilizing a thematic analysis approach. The steps followed are outlined. The chapter will open with the biographical details of the participants, in order to understand the data. Three major themes have been retrieved; they will be discussed with their sub-themes. The sub-themes will be discussed in terms of the identified categories. A summary and conclusion for the chapter will be given subsequently.

5.2. Biographical details

The tables below indicate the biographical details of the widows.

Table 1 Bloemfontein participants

| # | Urban participant | Age | Highest qualification |
|---|---------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| | Bloemfontein | | |
| 1 | Widow AB | 40 | Grade 8 |
| 2 | Widow BB | 38 | Grade 8 |
| 3 | Widow CB | 24 | Matric |
| 4 | Widow DB | 24 | Diploma |
| 5 | Widow EB | 40 | Matric |
| 6 | Widow FB | 40 | Matric |
| 7 | Widow GB | 35 | Matric |
| 8 | Widow HB | 38 | Grade 8 |

Table 2 Thaba Nchu participants

| # | Rural participant | Age | Highest qualification |
|---|-------------------|-----|-----------------------|
| | Thaba Nchu | | |
| 1 | Widow AT | 24 | Matric |
| 2 | Widow BT | 33 | Matric |
| 3 | Widow CT | 33 | Matric |
| 4 | Widow DT | 35 | Diploma |
| 5 | Widow ET | 24 | Matric |
| 6 | Widow FT | 28 | Matric |
| 7 | Widow GT | 27 | Matric |
| 8 | Widow HT | 24 | Matric |

Sixteen widows participated in the study, with eight from the rural area (Thaba Nchu) and eight from the urban area (Bloemfontein) of Mangaung Metro.

The ages of the widows ranged from 24 to 40 years old. This indicates that the widows lost their husbands at the prime age in their lives, meaning at the reproductive age. Thirteen widows had Matric as their highest qualification, while two had post-Matric diplomas and the remaining two had no Matric. Statistics South Africa (2016) revealed in the Community Survey for Mangaung that the percentage of those who have completed Grade 9 or higher is 71.7 %. This is about 30 % higher than the rest of the Free State at 39.69%.

5.3. Identified themes from the data analysis

Quotes from the widows will be provided to support the themes.

Table 3 Themes and sub-themes

| Theme | Subtheme |
|--|---|
| Theme 1: Effects of widowhood in dealing with the loss of a husband | Sub-theme 1.1: Experiences in dealing with the loss of a husband |
| | Sub-theme 1.2: Effects of widowhood on relationships with in-laws |
| | Sub-theme 1.3: Support received after the death of the husband |
| Theme 2: Challenges and experiences that cause widows vulnerability | Sub-theme 2.1: Being blamed for the death of their husbands |
| | Sub-theme 2.2: Rejection by in-laws |
| | Sub-theme 2.3: Stigmatisation by community members |
| | Sub-theme 2.4: Financial vulnerability |
| | Sub-theme 2.5: Social isolation within the broader community |
| | Sub-theme 2.6: Experiencing vulnerability as a parent |
| Theme 3: Strategic interventions for widows to prevent vulnerability | Sub-theme 3.1: Support groups as an intervention |
| | Sub-theme 3.2: Counselling as an intervention |
| | Sub-theme 3.3: Community education as an intervention |

Source: Research data

5.3.1. Theme 1: Effects of widowhood in dealing with the loss of a husband

In this theme, the effects of widowhood in dealing with the loss of a husband, three sub-themes were identified, namely experiences of dealing with the loss of a husband, effects on relationships with in-laws, and support received after the death of the husband.

The majority of widows in this study reported that widowhood had negative effects on their lives, as they had to rebuild their lives as single persons after being married and then losing a husband. Some reported that they felt overwhelmed by the situation as they lost their husbands at the prime of their lives.

This included losing financial support from their husbands. Other widows also reported that they were not afforded time to deal with the loss of the husband as they had to undergo mourning rituals, which tended to be oppressive and restrictive. Even though the mourning rituals were meant to give widows time to mourn, they did not assist, because the rituals were forced on them without consulting them on how they would be affected in their daily functioning, coupled with conflict with the in-laws, as widows tended to be accused of killing their husbands.

5.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Experiences in dealing with the loss of a husband

The sub-theme discusses the experiences of what the widows went through in dealing with the loss of a husband. According to Manala (2015), widows experience maltreatment instead of the traditional African teachings, which promote 'ubuntu' principles of communality, mutual respect, caring, and so forth. Becoming a widow implies that she may lose in many instances. According to the widows they were not afforded time to mourn the loss of their husbands and tended to be given instructions and restricting rules of mourning rituals, as well as losing decision making, which disempowered them. When young widows lost their husbands, they were accused of killing their husbands.

They reported that during the mourning process their movements were restricted. Widows explained that they could no longer wear their ordinary clothes and work clothes, as they shared that, after the funeral, they were expected to wear mourning clothes, and were given rules for the mourning process by their in-laws. The mourning period ranged from three months to twelve months.

They were also not allowed to attend social gatherings, including parents' meetings at school, as they were not allowed to mingle with other people during the mourning period. Widows emphasized that they felt neglected and left on their own to fend for themselves, as the in-laws mostly withdrew their support from the widow and their children.

Widow HT shared that:

“I can say I did not have a lot of people to share my frustrations. My in-laws decided to keep away from me. I never saw them again after the funeral. It was only relatives that visited to check me, relatives of my in-laws. Sadly, my in-laws don't know where I am staying even today as they have never visited me. I guess they were serious when they said “sene serekopanya sefedile” – meaning what brought us together has ended. It is sad cause they do not even visit their grandson. I was just lonely most of the time as people were isolating me and my family is in another country.” (Widow HT)

Widow GB explained that the family blamed her for the death of her husband in front of her own family:

“I was accused of killing my husband. The funeral was organized in my presence without a say, but just confined to a mattress. I was just told to pay for whatever they were planning. After that the in-laws treated me so badly. I actually think they really believed that I killed

him. They were so negative to me afterwards. They did not talk to me formally to instruct me about the mourning process, except to say I must mourn for a year.” (Widow GB)

The widow was therefore left to figure out the mourning process on her own.

According to Italie (2015), widows felt as if they were thrown out in the cold and their lives had been turned upside down by the loss of their husbands. Evans (2012) supported this by emphasizing that such widows tend to endure harassment and verbal abuse from landlords, abandonment by their husband’s relatives, and refusal to provide care or support for the family, as well as disinheritance.

NewAfrica (2012), in the work they do with different widows’ organizations in Ghana, noted that when a woman becomes a widow in African society, the widows and their needy children are exposed to obnoxious cultural practices and they are ostracized by the community, denied any rights to their late husband's property, and their children can also be denied education. This is because widows are considered as bringing bad luck for losing a husband. Their property gets grabbed by in-laws who believe that it belongs to their son or brother. This is supported by Akol (2011), who indicated that in Africa and even worldwide the root cause of the negative experiences of widows may be based on the gender roles influenced by culture and tradition. NewAfrica (2012) and Akol (2011) are referring to the different challenges (variables) as experienced by widows during mourning rituals.

Such gender roles are highlighted by widow HT, 24 years old, who was deserted by her in-laws after her loss. She shared her experience of the intersection of various variables that acted upon her as a widow.

Being a young woman (age and gender) of Sotho background, (ethnicity) she was expected to observe the mourning rituals as a norm. She experienced being accused of killing her husband while trying to make sense of losing her husband. Being a young widow of Sotho ethnic group, who was a student (economic background) when her husband passed away, she also experienced being restricted in her movements, while having no support from the in-laws, and her family was in another country, Lesotho (immigration). The young widow also experienced the cutting of ties by the in-laws after the death of the husband, who used to be the link between her and the in-laws.

Widow HT experienced the intersectionality of different variables like age, gender, ethnicity and economic background and immigration, while being isolated by the in-laws and community, with a child to fend for, and also being unemployed.

Widow GB had similar experiences of being accused of killing her husband. She was also isolated by her in-laws after she was told to mourn for a year. Being a 35year old young woman she was not even given instructions on how to mourn. The widow, of Sotho origin and married to a Tswana family, experienced the intersection of gender, age and ethnicity. Thus, as a young woman she was abandoned and isolated by the in-laws, who also decided to cut ties with her after her husband had passed away. The in-laws did not see the need to continue the relationship with her when the husband was no longer present. Even though she was unemployed with two children, she still faced restrictions on her movements, which made it difficult for her to look for a job to support her children.

She therefore had to suffer and struggle for the duration of the mourning period, which was a year. Magudu and Mohlakoana-Matopi (2013) assert that a decrease in social status has implications for women's livelihood, economic status and quality of life, and increases vulnerability to discrimination, abuse, harassment and gender-based violence, as well as the inability to assert their rights.

According to Saeed and Naz (2019), Crenshaw's Intersectional feminism examines the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination that women face, based not just on a single category, for example gender, but on ethnicity, sexuality, economic background, and a number of other axes.

The experiences of widow HT illustrate her experiences of the intersectionality of gender, age, ethnicity and family status, which she had to deal with while making sense of the death of her husband, who she was accused of killing, and had no time or support to adjust to her new status of widowhood. The table below of generic intersectionality illustrates the different variables as experience by widows.

| A Generic Intersectionality Template | | |
|---|---|--|
| Social Categories | Discrete consideration (1st step) | Intersectional consideration (2nd step) |
| Gender | How gender informs this individual account? | How gender interacts/intersects with other social categories in this individual account? <i>Or</i> which dimensions of the experience are interacting with gender? |
| Class | How class informs this individual account? | How class interacts with other social categories in this individual account? <i>Or</i> which dimensions of the experience are interacting with class? |
| Race | How race informs this individual account? | How race interacts with other social categories in this individual account? <i>Or</i> which dimensions of the experience are interacting with race? |
| Ethnicity | How ethnicity informs this individual account? | How ethnicity interacts with other social categories in this individual account? |
| Religion | How religion informs this individual account? | How religion interacts with other social categories in this individual account? |
| Sexual Orientation | How sexual orientation informs this individual account? | How sexual orientation interacts with other social categories in this individual account? |
| Age | How age informs this individual account? | How age intersects with other social categories in this individual account? |
| Handicap | How handicap/ablebodiness informs this individual account? | How handicap/ablebodiness intersects with other social categories in this individual account? |
| Other relevant categories (immigration status, family status, language, etc.) | Are there other relevant social categories/reasons informing this individual account? | How gender interacts/intersects with other social categories in this individual account? |

Table 4 Generic intersectional template (Blige, 2009)

The generic intersectional template facilitates understanding of different intersections that impact on widows. The template indicates different intersections like age, gender, ethnicity, religion, family background and others which impact on the widow who is already going through the loss of a husband and undergoing restrictive and oppressive mourning rituals.

The generic intersection template according to Blige is utilized to discuss the different intersections and how they impact on the widows. Manala (2016), in a study of Bapedi widows in South Africa, indicated that some of the Bapedi tribes that originate from Limpopo province believed that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbors, or attending family and community functions. The Global Widows Report (2015:14) revealed that, “once widows have been acted against by various social, political and religious actors due to their status as widows, for the majority of widows globally, day-to-day poverty is the defining issue that makes all other outrages perpetrated against them possible”. However, Lim (2011) established that contrary to the African widows, in Asia, for young Korean and Japanese widows, widowhood brings about a positive status. They become heads of the households, decision makers and inherit the property from their late husbands, unlike African widows who are excluded in decision making, especial during mourning rituals and who also lose their properties to the in-laws. Moreover, they do not struggle and suffer poverty because of unemployment or losing their property to the in-laws, as in South Africa and other African countries.

5.3.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2: Effects on relationship with the in-laws

This sub-theme discusses the experiences of widows regarding their relationship with the in-laws. The relationship can be positive or negative.

Less than fifty percent of the widows had positive stories to share on the effects on their relationship with the in-laws.

Widow AB shared how her mother-in-law and sister-in-law stood with her to fight the brother-in-law who was trying to grab her house and households. This happened despite the widow having been accused of causing the death of her husband.

On the negative side, other the in-laws were reported to have withdrawn their support. The affected widows indicated that they struggled to accept that they were not supported by in-laws after the loss of their husband, even though they had a good relationship when the husband was still alive.

Widows shared the following experiences:

“I had a bad relationship in my marriage with my in-laws. When my husband died it was me who had killed him. I know they did not like me but to accuse me of murder was too much. My in-laws were so negative towards me. They even wanted to force me to take a lie detector test to proof I did not kill. What devastated me was to discover that the death benefits of my husband were only for the child from outside marriage and that excluded me. It was very frustrating because I was legally married to my husband. My in-laws did not even care for me instead they were busy fighting me. I did not even have time to cry for my husband and mourn him, instead we were busy fighting with his parents.” (Widow DT)

This widow found herself facing various challenges at the loss of her husband, including her husband choosing the child from outside marriage to be the only beneficiary, and thereby disadvantaging her financially. She also had to undergo the mourning rituals as a traditional practice, which were forced on her amidst the fights with the in-laws, while being stigmatised as a killer.

Widow DT was trying to say her experience of the relationship with the in-laws after the loss of the husband changed drastically. She was a young widow, 35 years old with a diploma in education qualification.

She was however not aware of her rights as a married person and a widow. In her fights with the in-laws she could not use the resources available to her, like the Domestic Violence Court or Social Workers. She was of Sotho origin married to a Sotho man with a child outside marriage. The fact that she was from the same ethnic background as her in-laws did not count to her advantage. It turned out that she was not the preferred daughter in-law, but her husband had chosen to marry her over the woman who had a child with her husband. She had been having problems with her in-laws in her marriage. She struggled financially because she was not working before the loss of her husband and depended on him financially. It turned out that the death benefits of her husband were given to the child born outside her marriage, as a beneficiary nominated by her husband. The situation left her vulnerable without means of survival, even though she was educated, isolated by in-laws and disadvantaged by her husband through the death benefits.

The young widow experienced the intersection of age as a young widow and gender as a woman who had to undergo traditional mourning rituals. The widow was fairly educated from a good family background, a working-class family that practices traditional rituals as a norm. The fact that she was unemployed and excluded on the death benefits contributed to her vulnerability through the intersection of all the various variables that she had to face.

In contradiction to the literature on ill treatment of widows and findings on lack of support by in-laws, there were positive effects reported by other widows. Some widows reported that their in-laws assisted them with their children, by supporting the general welfare of the child, looking after the child while they went to look for jobs, and paying for their school fees.

One widow reported that although her in-laws were not talking to her, the mother-in-law was looking after her daughter, whom she fetched from the gate every Sunday afternoon, and then she also had to fetch her from the mother-in-law's gate every Friday afternoon. The mother-in-law was treating the child well, despite not speaking to the mother.

Widow DB also shared a positive experience:

“I was however surprised when my mother-in-law instructed that the mourning period will only be three months because I am a student. This was after being accused of killing my husband and fighting with my in-laws. I was also allowed not to wear mourning clothes as I attend part-time classes in the night. It was however indicated that I must choose a set of two clothes which I had to wear during the mourning period and not change for other clothes. This was an adjustment to the normal mourning practice. (Widow DB).

Ndlovu (2013) found that the situation was different for urban widows. They no longer practiced strict widowhood rituals due to modernization. This was also observed when comparing the mourning rituals of widows from Thaba-Nchu (rural) versus that for widows from Bloemfontein (urban) which tended to be shorter in Bloemfontein.

This was also the case when comparing unemployed widows, who were given a longer mourning period of a year, versus the widows who were working who were given shorter periods of mourning rituals, in order to return to work sooner. The situation of widows tended to be different in TshiVenda communities that are more Christian in orientation. They tend to support the bereaved (Selepe and Edwards, 2008). This could be considered an example of implementing the rituals without any form of abuse, but rather providing support, in the name of the biblical belief that you should do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Radzilani (2010) found that TshiVenda widows tended to endure a perpetuation of being treated as minors by their in-laws at the death of their husbands, hence they were not easily free to make decisions. Radzilani (2010) further postulated that, in terms of TshiVenda culture, a woman is considered the property of the man and his family once the lobola is paid to her family, hence the widow becomes the dependent of the in-laws at the death of her husband, and gets support as a dependent.

Even though Widow DB received a reduced mourning period, variables of intersectionality were still at play. She was not involved in decision-making that led to a reduced and adjusted period of mourning, favoring her. She was not consulted on how the mourning process and mourning clothes would impact on her studies, considering that she worked full time and attended part-time classes in the evening. She was instructed what to do and did not participate in decision making about the implementation of the mourning rituals, which surprised her. This was after she had been accused as a killer and was in conflict with her in-laws.

It was also noted that the widows from Bloemfontein, though they tended to have a shorter period of mourning, still had to adhere to the stipulated rules of mourning during that short period, like wearing mourning clothes even at work, as well as having restricted movement.

Motsoeneng and Modise (2020), in their study of widows' social isolation and the stigma experienced in rural South Africa, found that the widow is expected to be confined in one place, and is stigmatized with accusations of bewitching her husband, which lead to isolation. According to the study by Khan (2018), it was found that the death of the husband becomes a double tragedy for young widows. Unaware of their rights and stigmatization by tradition, they are often left to live in poverty and alone.

The Loomba Foundation (2015) also revealed that widows in India, Nepal, sub-Saharan Africa and Papua New Guinea are often erroneously accused of causing the death of their husbands. According to Idialu (2012), the accusations are geared towards dehumanising the widow.

5.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Mixed support received after the death of the husband

This sub-theme discusses the mixed support received by widows after the death of their husbands. Regarding support from their own families, it was discovered that widows received support mainly from their own mothers and sisters. It was indicated that the support was in the form of emotional and financial support, beginning with the funeral costs, and also after the funeral. The majority of widows relied on their mothers for support, especially financially.

Widow IT quoted that:

“It is like you are thrown in a deep end because you lose financial support from your partner and this has a negative effect on your finances.

You get so stressed and have no one to share your challenges. You only get support from your own family. If it was not for the Employee Aid Programme I would have lost even my job.” (Widow IT)

Another widow shared the following:

“There was no help from people I had regarded as family. It was difficult to bury my husband because we were fighting over the funeral and that made me sad. I struggled a lot financially. Fortunately, my sister and mother came to my rescue. The neighbors were more supportive. I was disappointed that the neighbors were more supportive than my in-laws, especially that we had a very good relationship when my husband was still alive. The sudden change of attitude was difficult to accept.” (Widow FB)

Widow ET also reported that, as she was struggling without support from the in-laws, the church Women's Society came to her rescue and assisted her with Christmas clothes for herself and children. They also bought her groceries when she was in real need. In contrast to the lack of support from in-laws, Widow KB was protected by her father-in-law when she was being forced to sit on the mattress (without moving around, except for the bathroom), as part of mourning rituals despite her injuries from a car accident.

This means the widows did not get the expected support from their in-laws. The majority of widows were supported by their own families, while others were supported by neighbors and church women.

Widow FB reported being happy that her neighbors were supportive but was saddened by the lack of support from her in-laws, who had been so loving when her husband was still alive. She thus found it difficult to accept the change of attitude from people she had regarded as her family, the in-laws.

Widows then experienced mixed support in that, even though the mother in-law would be enforcing the mourning rituals, some widows were protected by the father-in-law from doing other rituals, like Widow FB, who had sustained injuries from an accident but was being forced to sit on a mattress in pain, which her father in-law prevented as being inhuman. Other widows reported being supported by neighbors. About half of the widows reported receiving support from their churches.

According to Kapuma (2011), part of the mourning rituals is that the widow in African society is stripped of her dignity. The woman is made vulnerable and feels marginalized, with very few to turn to for support as she can no longer participate in cultural issues due to her presumed bad luck.

The death of a man marks a period of imprisonment and hostility to the wife or wives. This treatment may be out of malice, and in most cases, women suffer and are subjected to rituals that are health hazards and heart-rending. It is explained by Korang-Okrah (2015) that widowhood rites, considered rites-of-passage, are performed for purification, protection and healing, and deeply embedded in socio-political and cultural practices. Widows however experienced the rituals as oppressive, as the in-laws, especially mothers-in-law, were enforcing them, without consulting them or involving them in decision making. The in-laws also did not support the widows during the time of mourning rituals when, for instance, their movements were restricted.

5.3.2. Theme 2: Challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows

In this theme, the focus is on the description of the challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows.

The challenges have been described by some widows as creating difficulty for them to move on with their lives. The theme also has sub-themes to describe the challenges and the experiences; namely, being blamed for the death of the husband, stigmatisation by community members, financial vulnerability, social isolation and experiencing vulnerability as a parent. The sub-themes will be discussed to illustrate the various ways widows felt vulnerable.

5.3.2.1. *Sub-theme 2.1: Being blamed for the death of their husbands*

In this sub-theme widows, as previously mentioned, shared their experiences of being blamed for the death of the husbands. More than half of the widows who participated in the study reported that they were blamed for the death of their husbands. The widows reported that they found the accusations very hurtful. They reported that in-laws accused them of killing their husbands, thereby influencing the community to view them as killers, leading to stigmatisation.

According to the widows, being blamed for the death of their husbands became the source of continuous fights with the in-laws. The current study found that ten of the sixteen widows were blamed for the death of their husbands. Widows were blamed for the death of their husbands, even in instances where the husband was sick prior to their death, as illustrated below.

Widows DT shared her experiences as follows:

“I was forced by my in-laws to take a lie detector test with the hope that I will confess to killing my husband”.

The in-laws thought she would eventually confess by forcing her to take a lie detector test. The widow reported that she felt humiliated and realized the extend of hatred of her in-laws.

Another widow also shared:

“Every time we met with my mother in-law it would end up in a big fight as I was referred to as a killer. They really believed that I killed my own husband. I could see that they hated me and there will never be peace again hence I changed my surname to cut the ties with them” (Widow AT). The widow reported being disappointed at being accused of killing her own husband. The continuous fights with the in-laws forced her to decide to change back to her maiden name to cut ties with the in-laws.

The findings in this theme are similar to those of previous researchers. Alyson (2013) found that Nigerian women had to deal with the ordeal of being accused of killing their husbands while dealing with the husband’s loss, and this was not just limited to Nigeria but extends to other countries. Idialu (2012) also indicated that widows go through all the harmful widowhood rituals, whereas widowers are not expected to do those rituals.

Critical theory describes the degrading of widows in terms of infringement of women's rights, self-preservation and dignity through gender-based violence, according to Chiazor, et al. (2016). In contrast, Saeed and Naz (2019) indicate that widowers, being male, are treated differently from widows, and do not observe mourning rituals and even enjoy the right to re-marry.

The views of the widows are supported by the study findings of Banford et al. (2019), which revealed that widows experienced trauma, which potentially led to distress through the weight and challenges of stigma. Widows experience the intersection of variables like age, gender, ethnicity and family status. Each axis of inequality interacted significantly with at least one other (Veenstra, 2011).

In terms of age, because they are young widows, they are unable to stand up for themselves when mourning rituals are forced on them by elderly in-laws, without consulting them or involving them in decision making about the rituals. In terms of ethnical practices, young widows are expected to do mourning rituals as a norm, which restricts their movement, disabling them from reaching out to others outside the circle of family, whereas widowers are free and not subjected to widowhood rituals. The gender inequality is even reflected by families encouraging widowers to remarry soon after the death of the wife. This inequality leads to trauma for the widows, based on their culture, gender and society, resulting in oppression of widows (Saeed and Naaz, 2019).

According to the widows, the trauma does not afford them time to mourn the loss of their husbands. They find themselves isolated as the widowhood rituals are accepted as a norm in the community without being queried. Widows are not given an opportunity to talk about the rituals or their views.

The views of the widows are supported by the study findings of Banford et al. (2019), which revealed that widows experience trauma which potentially led to distress through the weight and challenges of stigma. According to the widows, the trauma does not afford them time to mourn the loss of their husbands. They find themselves isolated as the widowhood rituals are accepted as a norm in the community without being queried.

These findings are also supported by Jones et al. (2019) in their phenomenological study of the lived experiences of young widows. Idang (2015) posits that negative and harmful traditional practices that dehumanize people should as a matter of urgency be discarded, since culture is an adaptive system, together with values that play a central role in giving the society its uniqueness.

5.3.2.2. Sub-theme 2.2: Stigmatization by community members

The sub-theme stigmatization by community members is part of the theme dealing with challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows. Stigmatization by community members was reported by some widows as one of their challenges. According to the widows their mourning clothes which identify them as widows contributed to stigmatization:

“People look at you funny with pity. Community members start treating you like you are sick or mad or infectious. Even when you pass people, they always remind you that you are different because you are a widow. Some don’t even want to be seen talking to a widow. As a widow its painful. You are not even invited to social gatherings.” (Widow GB)

“It is difficult to clear your name because you do not have an opportunity to explain to everybody that you did not kill your husband. This leaves you with stigma forever, hence we need to prevent it through awareness.” (Widow FB)

The focus group discussion reported the challenge of being stigmatized by other women:

“They treat you like you are smelly or infectious. Also not being allowed by other married women in the family to participate in cultural issues because you are a widow who will cause bad luck.

People should stop the stigma against widows and believing all the accusations. They must also stop the negative comments when we pass them because they hurt us.” (member in the Bloemfontein Focus Group).

In this study, it was observed that stigma was greater from other women than men. Parker (2016) also indicated in the study of stigmatisation of widows and divorcees in Indonesia that widows are routinely stigmatized in everyday Indonesian social life. Manyedi et al. (2003) found, in their study of Batswana widows in North-West province of South Africa, that widows are expected to wear black mourning clothes (dress) for the duration of the mourning period, for up to a year. The mourning clothes are to be distinguishable to prevent men approaching widows for sexual relationships. The black mourning clothes lead to the stigmatisation of widows, as they are identified by these clothes in the community and get isolated too. There are however no mourning pants or clothes for widowers. Chiazor, et al. (2016) further postulated that women have been subjugated and oppressed in most African societies in the name of culture.

5.3.2.3. Sub-theme 2.3: Financial vulnerability

The majority of widows raised the issue of financial vulnerability after losing their husbands. It was also found that most widows worried about financial challenges, as they had children to raise whilst being unemployed. According to the widows it was difficult for them to make ends meet, coupled with isolation by the in-laws.

It was also found that without a will being left by their husband, widows tended to struggle even more. It was also mentioned by the widows that the fights started over funeral arrangements and continued thereafter. The in-laws reportedly grabbed property and household contents from the widows, who were mostly unemployed, with children to take care of. According to Dube (2017), culture has been customized and used to oppress women and to silence them from expressing their inheritance rights. Widows stated that due to the mourning restrictions and the in-laws teaming up against them, they found it difficult to get help. Some were not aware of their husbands' debts, as they were unemployed and the husbands as breadwinners were handling their finances, so that they only realized after the loss of the husband when they had to settle the debt:

“I was so frustrated even when I go to town people would look at me very funny as if there was something wrong with me. I ended up locking myself because I felt like God has forgotten about me. I struggled even financially to make ends meet.” (Widow BT)

“It was very bad. Actually, I was excluded in the funeral arrangements but told to pay for the funeral. I did not even wear the mourning clothes as I was told that they want nothing to do with me. I was told that from now on am no longer part of that family.” (Widow BT)

“The problem is while you are trying to deal with the loss of your husband so many other challenges crop up. You suddenly have debts with no income. Your in-laws isolate you even though they know you are not working. They don't even offer you a cent.” (Widow IT)

Another one of the widows (Xhosa) indicated that:

“My in-laws took everything from me and I did not fight back. The in-laws use traditional medicine and I was scared that they might bewitch me or my child.” (Widow AB)

In the study of AmaXhosa widows, Akol (2012:86) also found that some family members took advantage of the widows and treated them unfairly. There was however no literature to confirm that widows do not fight in-laws who use traditional medicine because of fear of being bewitched.

The Global Widows Report (2015) revealed that loss of income from the death of the male head of the household, which drives widows and their children into extreme poverty, is often compounded by disinheritance. Disinheritance consists of the widow being dispossessed by her late husband's family. They become homeless, sometimes with their children, other times on their own as the children can also be confiscated by in-laws. It is further indicated that the risks to these women's well-being after their disinheritance then becomes acute malnutrition, rape, prostitution, debilitating and fatal diseases, as they get exposed to adverse weather after disinheritance of their home.

These findings are supported by Korang-Akrah and Haight (2014), who emphasized that property ownership is fundamental to women's economic survival, empowerment and liberation. In addition, Jamadar, et al. (2015), supported by Newton-Levinson, et al. (2014) and Manala (2016), also found that many women around the world, especially those in developing nations, lose their rights to own, inherit and manage property following the deaths of their husbands.

5.3.2.4. Sub-theme 2.4: Social isolation within the broader community

During the mourning period, the movements of widows are restricted. The restricted movements of widows are reportedly accompanied by isolation by in-laws, leading to lack of the needed support to deal with the loss. The mourning period for Zulu widows, according to Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007), starts with the sitting on a mattress or mat, from announcement of death until after the burial. She then wears black clothes as a symbol that she is grieving properly and respects her husband.

Others of Christian belief may wear blue or another color for a period of up to a year, are isolated and not allowed to socialize with other people. Manala (2015) reported that the widows are not happy with the traditional practice of being confined in their homes and therefore experience it as imprisonment. Mohindnkayira (2012) concurs that widows suffer a social death in that they face social stigmatisation and social exclusion. Also, Motsoeneng and Modise (2020), in their study of grieving widows' lived experiences in a rural South African setting, found that there was a lack of social support after the death of the partners of the widows, and widows tend to be subjected to humiliating cultural stereotypes. About half of the widows in the study reported that they were excluded from community events such as wedding anniversaries or birthday celebrations. They regarded this as social isolation. They also mentioned that even their friends did not mix with them after the mourning process. Widows reported that they were surprised to hear that their friends were attending events such as music events, without informing or inviting them, as they would have before the passing of the widow's husband:

“I had bad experiences. Because my in-laws had accused me of killing my own husband, even my neighbors changed and became negative to me and most people in the community. I think they viewed me as the murderer. My neighbors became negative and accused me of having a child with another married man. They isolated me. Yet this was a child of my late sister but I took her from my mother because she is old and would not cope with a baby. I was happy that some community members were also supportive emotionally.” (Widow GB)

“The way community members treat widows! They start treating you like you are sick or mad or infectious.

Even when you pass people, they always remind you that you are different because you are a widow. You get isolated. Some don't even want to be seen talking to a widow. As a widow, that becomes painful.” (Widow DT)

Ntuli and Myeni (2014), in their study, found that widows do not enjoy their democratic rights during the mourning process because of the conflict that develops between them and their in-laws, particularly in respect of the deceased's belongings and benefits. Some need to relocate for their own safety and security, as widows have no protection from in-laws, who often influence the community to isolate the widow as the killer of their son.

According to Manala (2016), widows get stigmatized even in public transport which they may have to use to escape to safety. The widow wearing black clothes has to sit at the back of a bus or taxi, so as not to expose other travelers to her back and the possibility of a ‘bad omen or bad luck’, as a widow who has lost her husband is considered to bring bad luck. This implies that even in their time of desperation they are isolated, while they worry about their safety.

The experiences of widows in this study seem to be similar to the experiences of widows in other studies. According to Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007), in the Bapedi tribe[s] from Limpopo Province in South Africa, some people believe that in the event of the demise of a married man, his widow is prohibited from visiting neighbors, coming home after sunset, or attending family and public functions. Thus, the widow is isolated. This is said to help protect the widow against suspicions of witchcraft as Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:78) state, ‘for the widow in inzila (mourning), a danger is that if something happens to someone in the community, for example, if a child dies, she might be blamed’. The widow is confined to her home, a tradition which is experienced by some widows as imprisonment as they find isolation as a terrible experience.

It is further mentioned by Houston et al. (2016) that little research exists on social isolation and health among widows despite their marginalization.

NewAfrica (2012) noted that widows experience isolation even when the mourning period has ended, and they are allowed to mix with other people. Other researchers had similar findings in their studies. Ndlovu's (2013) study also confirmed such findings, as they reported that Zulu widows experience numerous challenges and discrimination during their mourning period, especially while they are still in mourning dress, where they are ostracized by their in-laws, neighbors, community members and even by their friends.

This indicates that the widow's dress which is applicable only to women, contributes to the discrimination and isolation of the widows, as also confirmed by Manala (2016), who stated that restrictive and oppressive environments are surely responsible for their quiescence. It can however be mentioned that widowers are not subjected to mourning rituals. They also are not expected to wear mourning clothes.

It was also confirmed by Cebekhulu (2015) that widows were alienated and viewed with suspicion, especially by wives of the brothers of the deceased husband, because they feared for their own marriages in the advent of polygamy through the levirate marriage.

In terms of critical theory, Martinez-Avila, Semidao and Ferreira (2016) are of the opinion that people perpetuate what is expected of them without questioning, hence you will find widows isolated by people who do not even know why they do this, but are just perpetuating culture.

It is also worth mentioning that the current study, however, also found that some widows were not isolated but received support from their neighbors, where neighbors would even look after their children while they went to look for jobs. Emotional support was also received from neighbors, while in-laws isolated the widow (Widow GB).

Mothers-in-law, even if they were not on good terms with the widow, still looked after the children, and offered to take care of the children during the week and provided them with lunch boxes for school (Widow CT). According to Widow CT, she was also accused of causing the death of her husband even though he was sick before he died. That led to stigmatisation in the community. She was then isolated by in-laws during her mourning period. The widow was unemployed having depended on her husband, who then left her with a child. In order to survive she had to look for a job but was struggling as there was no one to look after her child and that limited her job search. The mother-in-law suddenly volunteered to take care of the child during the week, after learning that the widow was going around with the child to look for a job, which assisted the widow to end up securing a job.

The mother-in-law however did not change her negative attitude towards the widow. She would stand outside the gate to fetch the child on a Sunday afternoon without chatting to the widow, except sharing critical information about the child, like bring extra jersey. Even when the widow went to fetch the child on a Friday afternoon, she would not be allowed inside the house. The mother-in-law would take the child to the gate and not even greet the widow, but the widow would still thank her for taking care of the child.

5.3.2.5. Sub-theme 2.5: Experiencing vulnerability as a parent

Experiencing vulnerability as a parent was expressed by the majority of widows. Widows indicated that they needed social workers' support at the stage when the in-laws grabbed property. About half of the widows had children to take care of, and they found themselves helpless while sometimes also being unemployed. These losses could include loss of the child(ren)'s parent and loss of the future children one had planned with the spouse.

Widows reported that they had difficulty in mourning while dealing with other challenges. One of the challenges that the widows faced was that they were expected to sit on the mattress with other female elders from the husband's family and were not allowed to speak to anyone.

The widows emphasized that they found this depressing, because it also did not allow them space to grieve when losing their husband. They reported that the morning rituals were oppressive, and they lost decision making in the process. They reported that they were controlled, like not being allowed to stand up except to go to the bathroom. When they needed something, they had to ask for it to be brought to them. They sat on the mattress with the elderly women of the family until the day of the funeral. They had no privacy or even time for private conversations on the phone with friends or their family who might be checking on them.

Widows shared the following:

“You get so stressed and have no one to share your challenges. Your partner is gone forever. The problem is while you are trying to deal with the loss of your husband so many other challenges crop up. You suddenly have debts with no income.” (Widow GB)

Another widow, Widow FB reported:

“The mother-in-law was fighting with me over the funeral. She wanted me to be excluded and not attend the funeral because in her mind I killed my husband. I had to remind her that we are talking about my husband the father of my children. She still did not believe me and argued that I killed him. It was like some people were believing her because the other in-laws, isolated me and decided to withdraw their support. It was very hard for me being unemployed to cater for the needs of my kids.” (Widow FB)

Widows shared that while they were observing the mourning rituals, they also experienced challenges that made them vulnerable as parents, like the misbehavior of teenage children. This happened while being restricted, stigmatised and isolated, without any support to deal with their challenges of widowhood. Widows experienced intersection of variables like cultural restrictions and gender, whereby they had to mourn and struggle to attend to children’s behaviour, as they could not shout or ask for help and go to look for their children when they were not home on time. Culturally, such challenges are not addressed to indicate who would assist or consult the widow to discuss how such issues should be handled. When the widows approach brothers-in-law for assistance they are accused of trying to attract them to be their partners as they are seen as single and available.

Also widows reported that when they were seen with other males, be it colleagues, friends or cousins, they were accused of having relationships with them. In addition to such variables, they also experienced issues of class, struggling financially as unemployed young women who had depended on husbands. All these variables made widows feel vulnerable as parents without any form of support.

This study however also found that where the in-laws were involved by widows from the time the death was announced, in the form of disclosing their financial situation, the widow and in-laws worked together to make funeral arrangements.

It can however be noted that not all the widows who had children experienced vulnerability as a parent, since this study found that some widows were supported by their church members, which included buying Christmas clothes (Widow ET), while others were supported to keep the house and household goods for their children if the brother-in-law was trying to grab them (Widow AB). Widow FB was protected by her father in-law from doing some of the widowhood rituals in favor of visiting her hospitalized child, and Widow BB had full support of her in-laws since she had been a breadwinner before her husband's death.

Zaroba (2012) had also found that one of the greatest challenges faced by widows is the care of their children. The Global Report on Widows (2015) further adds that widows experience disinheritance that takes several forms, differing in combination across developing countries. It may include loss of control of the family land, housing and ordinary household property, as well as farm assets of all kinds, outright eviction and complete loss of all property, resulting in abandonment of the widow and her children. Similar findings were discovered by other researchers, as Brenman (2019) emphasized that widows experience other challenges. There is also the compounding of loss experienced by young widows, as they realize that losing their spouse snowballs into losses large and small that spread through their lives, adding to their grief.

Rodriguez and Kerrison (2018) state that critical theories critique social injustice and assume that existing oppressive structures are changeable. Widows suggested community awareness to highlight their plight and in order to reduce their vulnerability.

5.3.3. Theme 3: Suggestions for support to widows to prevent vulnerability

The majority of widows acknowledged their vulnerability based on their experiences and challenges, like being blamed for the death of their husbands, rejection by in-laws, stigmatisation by community members and financial vulnerability, and made suggestions to prevent/change issues that make them vulnerable like isolation and discrimination.

This theme will discuss the suggestions for support groups, counselling, and lastly community education.

5.3.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Suggestions for support groups

In this sub-theme a suggestion for support groups is discussed. Half of participant widows made suggestions for support groups. Widows indicated that they needed peer support groups, where mutual support and advice could be shared amongst them. They said they benefited from receiving support from the church women and women's societies in the community, which they found welcoming and valuable. They reported that the support from those groups assisted them to cope with their situation and move on with their lives:

“We need a widows’ support group. We need to continue with the group and ensure that new widows join support group in order to get support from those who have already experienced their challenges. Also, for support when they have no one to talk to the support group will be there to support the widows.” (Widow AT)

“We need to continue with this group as our support group. The sharing in this group has helped us to see that we have similar problems and share ideas on how to solve them. It is therefore important to continue with our group beyond the research period.” (Widow ET)

It was in this regard that widows suggested a support group where they could socialize without being judged:

“I think a widows’ group or widow’s forum is necessary. This is where widows can socialize freely, offer support to each other and advice. We could even celebrate Valentine’s Day and Christmas together instead of being alone in your own corner.”

(Widow GB)

The support groups were recommended by the majority of widows who had benefited from church women groups and social groups for money saving and realized that the support groups were beneficial in dealing with isolation and loneliness. Widows saw the support group as a way of dealing with the intersection of various variables they act upon them as widows who have no support to deal with their challenges. Widows gained information to deal with challenges of widowhood, especially the newly widowed.

The researcher had also created a WhatsApp group for research purposes, which the widows decided to keep for socializing and sharing of information afterwards.

It is worth mentioning that the widows enjoyed the research group. This included sharing information when a widow or her child was hospitalized, and the other widows would visit and send messages of support.

Zaroba (2012) noted that the other reason for joining clubs for widows was mainly therapeutic. Widow club activities also enable widows to do various income generating activities, in order to fend for their families.

In addition, NewAfrica (2015) noted that support groups have been seen as useful for widows, in the Widows Alliance Network (WANE) in Ghana, where widows integrated economic, social and cultural transformation tools into an educational package to alleviate their hardship.

According to Salo (2001), women's movements need to unite in the fight against patriarchal power, another form of peer support as recommended by widows. A further example of support groups in South Africa is the Khulumani Support Group, supported by the Foundation for Human Rights, which organized to explore the difficulties that widows in South Africa face every day (Khulumani, 2015). It allowed widows to speak about their frustrations and challenges, but there was no empowerment program in place to deal with such challenges as experienced by widows (Free State Times, 2013).

5.3.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Suggestions for counselling

Widows suggested counselling for widows based on their experiences of the counselling from social workers and religious leaders. Social work counselling was reportedly critical, especially when the widow experienced grabbing of property and other belongings by in-laws, and also when feeling isolated while in need of help.

Support groups were suggested to provide the needed peer counselling by those who have gone through similar experiences.

One of the widows, Widow CB related the following about her experience:

“It was difficult at that young age. There were many challenges with no support. They took the house; my in-laws took even the household goods and all the death benefit money. They took also the death benefit money for my child. I had to see what to do with my child with no money and I was just a student. My child was attending a child day care centre and

I had no money to pay on monthly basis. I decided to go to the social workers for help because no one was supporting or protecting me. The social workers told my mother in-law to pay the school fees and pay for all the welfare needs of my child until I finish school.” (Widow CB)

The American Centre for Addiction (2015) views peer counselling as learning from people who have been where you are. Peer counselling is not advising, but rather seen as the counselling of the person depending upon how the “blocks” have been treated because blocks can cause irrational behavior. The counselling process enables the person to sort out unpleasant experiences and erase “blocks” in order adapt to the new life of a widow. In addition, Malate (2014) indicated that counselling can look at the client’s experience like the memory bank of a computer. The experiences could be assessed as pleasant or unpleasant processes. Unpleasant experience relates to pain, unhappy feelings, hurt, trauma, etc.

Peer counselling was also suggested by the widows, who felt that the newly widowed could benefit from the experiences of those who have been there before and gone through the same situation. Widows also suggested that social workers should guide the peer support groups.

5.3.3.3. Sub-theme 3.3: Community education

Community education was suggested because of the negative attitude of the community. Widows reported experiencing negative attitudes from the community, like people avoiding the widow in a line at a shop, or people moving away from the widow, or being treated like they were infectious, or asking them to leave when they join a group of people who are chatting. Widows reported experiencing an attitude of pity from the community, which made them feel weak when trying to move on with their lives.

Community education was recommended by many of the widows. The widows had reported that they mostly experienced stigma from other women. They then identified a need to educate other young married women, to prepare them for the possibility of widowhood, and to make them aware of what widows go through. This was aimed at empowering young married women for the future should they become widows. Some widows indicated that in-laws had a negative attitude, which influenced other community members to also adopt a negative attitude towards the widow. The following are some of the quotes from the widows:

“Community members’ attitude need to change. Just because you lost a husband does not make you different or infectious. They should stop treating widows differently, with pity and isolation.”

“Those things make you weak all the time because you just rush home to go and cry and take time to get out of your house again because you are scared of how people will treat you outside.” (Widow DT)

“We need to change perceptions of the public, we need to create awareness to the public that widows are normal people who have just lost their spouses and that they are hurting because of the loss but are still normal. People should stop isolating widows and treating them in a negative way and avoiding them.” (Widow IT)

Widows reported that they felt isolated by their own friends even when the mourning process was over, and they were allowed to associate with other people and move on with their lives.

It is reported by Nair (2014) that widows face abuse as a result of cultural restrictions imposed on them.

Such cultural restrictions prohibit them from visiting even neighbors, relatives or other community members who could be of help to them, hence other people take advantage of their situation of isolation. According to Healy (2012), it is critical to consider how membership of specific social divisions within the community, widows in this case, and their historical and geographical context shape their experiences and the options available to them.

Healy (2012) indicates that social workers when providing services need to be anti-oppressive and include considering the impact of major social divisions experienced by widows such as gender, discrimination, mental distress and employment status. Such social divisions intersect with each other and become challenges that make it difficult for widows to move on with their lives.

Widows indicated that they need support groups to support each other in dealing with their discrimination. The isolation could also place them at high risk for sexual abuse, as they would not have anyone with whom to share their abuse, which could lead to repeated sexual abuse of the widow without protection, as their movements were limited during mourning.

Burke and Harrison (2009) suggest that anti-oppressive social workers when conducting the assessment of widows should be theoretically informed, holistic, empowering and challenging. In addition, Healy (2012) emphasized that, in terms of critical social work, anti-oppressive social workers (practice by social workers focusing on reducing effects of structural inequalities) need to assess how personal, cultural and structural processes shape the problems of the widows.

5.4. Discussion

The study findings illustrated that widows experienced challenges during widowhood, which made it difficult for the widows to move on with their lives and adjust to widowhood after the loss of a husband.

Three major themes were identified; namely, the effects of widowhood, challenges and experiences that cause vulnerability among widows, and support strategies for widows to prevent vulnerability.

Widows articulated that widowhood had a negative effect on them. Widows also reported that they were not afforded time to deal with the loss of the husband, as they had to undergo mourning rituals, which tended to be oppressive and restrictive. The rituals started immediately after the announcement of death, when the widow was expected to be confined to a mattress.

In a study of AmaXhosa widows in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, Akol (2012) revealed that some family members took advantage of the widows and treated them unfairly. Manala (2016:3) also highlighted that “in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribes that originate from Limpopo province believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbors, attending family and community functions”.

It is noted that in Africa, and even worldwide, the root cause of the negative experiences of widows may be based on gender roles influenced by culture and tradition. Mwangi (2014) further adds that many widows were faced with numerous psychosocial challenges as they struggled to survive, and many lived in poverty due to lack of resources, skills and education and with no access to justice.

The findings of Mwangi (2014) are also supported by Lichtenberg (2017), who highlighted that widows reported a range of violent experiences perpetrated by family and community members that spanned psychological, physical, and sexual abuse.

The situation is exacerbated by the fact that widows reported that they were not consulted about the rituals, and tend to find themselves overwhelmed, isolated, stigmatized as killers of their husbands, and facing discrimination and restrictions imposed by the in-laws.

Widows also emphasized that they were not against widowhood rituals but rather how they were practiced, as they tended to ignore their human rights and be oppressive.

They emphasized that they felt neglected and left on their own to fend for themselves, as the in-laws mostly withdrew their support.

There is also a need to educate the community and make them aware of the challenges experienced by widows and their rights as humans, as a way of reducing the widows' vulnerability. Support groups should also be established to ensure that widows support each other, as a form of peer support where they can also share their experiences.

5.5. Conclusion

This section provides a summary of the discussions in this chapter, ending with a conclusion for the chapter. In the data analysis, the three themes identified highlighted the effects of widowhood, where widows reported the negative and some positive changes in their lives. They reported having to deal with the mourning process which restricted their movements and led to isolation. The effects included having to rebuild their lives without the support of the in-laws.

Widows reported financial challenges while dealing with the loss of the husband, ranging from funeral costs to caring for themselves and their children, sometimes as an unemployed widow. Widows also described their experiences and challenges. They cited isolation as a major challenge, as it also prevented them from accessing help from others, while their in-laws withdrew their support, leaving them to mainly rely on their own families. Churches and women's groups sometimes supported them.

The widows also reported that moving on with their lives was further complicated by the fact that the in-laws blamed them for the death of their husbands. This led to widows being stigmatised in the community.

They also mentioned that in-laws grabbed their property, making them vulnerable, especially as parents, who were sometimes also unemployed. The implication of this was that they would be unable to provide for their needs and those of their children. They also reported that they felt stupid and were treated abnormally by people in the community. The widows made suggestions to deal with their vulnerability. They suggested support groups for sharing information, support, socializing and counselling to be supervised by social workers. Widows also suggested community education focusing on the education of young married women, based on their experiences, but to prevent the same happening should they be widowed.

It can therefore be concluded that widows experienced challenges that made it difficult for them to deal with the loss of their husbands. They struggled to adjust to their new life without a husband, due to having to deal with the mourning process that did not allow them to grieve, because of the restrictions that came with it. They reportedly got blamed for the death of their husbands, leading to stigma even in the community. Such stigma was notably more from women. In-laws withdrew their support leaving them vulnerable, whilst other in-laws also grabbed the property left to build a new life. The withdrawal of support included the children of the widow also not getting support from the in-laws. They did however get support from their own families.

The widows also called for support groups to share information and get counselling to assist in adjusting to widowhood, as well as community education to reduce the stigma, and to prevent bad experiences and challenges for future widows.

It is in this regard that the recommendations made by widows are viewed as a possible way to end the oppression of the widows by in-laws and the community at large.

CHAPTER 6

Guideline for the empowerment of African young widows

6.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the guideline for the empowerment of African young widows. There is a gap in terms of empowerment of the widows to deal with their challenges that come with widowhood. This study has revealed that widows experience isolation, stigmatisation and financial challenges. The guideline was developed with the widows as the participants of the study. The guideline focused on the themes identified during data analysis. Healy's (2012) Dynamic Model was used as a framework to develop the guideline. The Healy's Model was used because it is about critical theory and conscientization of the widows of their oppression. Healy's Model helps as a theoretical approach for the guideline. After developing the guideline, it was taken back to the participants for member verification. They made inputs, like that the Department of Social Development should include widows in skills development and provide bursaries or work opportunities. The guideline outlines the tasks for social workers at each stage of need as recommended by the widows. This is to ensure that social workers are not reactive to the needs of the widows, but rather proactive to prevent the challenges experienced by widows, which also make widows vulnerable. The chapter closes with a summary of the discussion.

6.2. Development of the guideline

6.2.1. Identification of widows

Firstly, a criterion for the participants of the study was developed as indicated in Table 1. A database of widows was then solicited from Free State Department of Social Development. Widows who met the criteria were identified.

Additional widows were recruited through a local non-governmental organization to get eight widows from Thaba Nchu and eight widows from Bloemfontein.

6.2.2. Needs assessment

In order to understand the needs of African young widows from the Free State for their empowerment, a needs assessment was conducted first. The identified needs were later to guide the development of the guideline for social workers for the empowerment of young widows.

Three focus group sessions were held with the widows who participated in the study, meaning both the Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein groups. The first session focused on identifying the challenges and experiences of the widows that led to their vulnerability. In the first session, widows brainstormed their individual experiences of widowhood. This was followed by identifying major challenges that were common amongst the widows as priorities to be addressed. The focus group sessions were coupled with individual interviews. In the second session the widows planned around identified issues, agreeing on actions to be taken to reduce their vulnerability.

In terms of planning, a consensus was reached to address the challenges experienced by widows in three forms, namely individual, group and community levels.

6.2.3. Implementation stage

The implementation stage followed the planning stage. The widows had already identified a need for intervention at individual, group and community levels. Workshops were then held for the two groups. The widows had agreed on inviting other young married women, social workers and non-profit organizations to the workshops.

The aim was to create awareness of their challenges and experiences in the community. Widows wanted the young married women to know what they had to go through as widows in order to prevent the same experiences, like what happens when a husband dies without living a will. They also shared with the workshop attendees the need for support groups. The widows first shared their frustrations and experiences of widowhood which called for support groups. They based their need for support groups on the experience of the support they received from the church women's group and the women's social groups for saving money.

According to the widows that was a critical time when they felt isolated and stigmatised for being widows. They explained that the process left them with financial constraints as they struggled to access support, since their movements were also restricted, and the majority of the widows were unemployed. The widows expressed that they felt neglected and isolated by their in-laws who were not offering support to assist with the challenges brought about by widowhood. Most widows reported that they were supported by their own families, like sisters and mothers, from funeral costs to food for survival as a widow with children.

6.2.4. Challenges and experiences of widows

Challenges and experiences that made widows vulnerable were identified through focus groups, individual interviews and workshops. Widows reported the following challenges:

- Mourning rituals which tended to be oppressive and restricted movements
- Losing financial support from their husbands
- Being accused of causing the death of a husband
- Being isolated by in-laws, neighbors and the broader community

- Discrimination and stigmatisation for being a widow
- Rejection by in-laws

6.3. Guidelines for services needed by widows from social workers

The guideline presented here has been developed to proactively render services to address the needs of African young widows, based on their needs and experienced challenges during widowhood. It can be used in settings where widows are in an oppressive situation. The intervention stages have been identified by widows to guide the services. The interventions are according to the Critical Social Work Theory and based on Healy's (2012) Dynamic Model.

6.4 Structural elements

Actors identified in the study for the interventions are social workers, community development practitioners, Department of Women Youth and Persons with Disabilities staff, religious leaders, traditional leaders, non-profit organizations, church women's groups/societies, and widows as peer counsellors.

6.5. Goal of the guidelines

The goal of the guidelines is to empower African young widows to deal with their challenges and experiences of widowhood which makes them vulnerable. The guidelines can also be used for Whites, Indians and Coloureds where widows are in an oppressive situation.

6.6. Values and principles

The guidelines are to be implemented using the social work values and principles, namely, service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person; importance of human relationships; integrity and competency as part of normal social work practice.

The Batho Pele principles are to be taken into consideration when rendering services to vulnerable widows and not be taken for granted because they are vulnerable. The Batho Pele principles are service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress and value for money.

6.7 Structure of interventions

6.7.1. Counselling as an intervention

Counselling was suggested by widows as an intervention. This was based on the experiences they had regarding the identified theme, namely effects of widowhood in dealing with the loss of a husband.

The role of the social workers was seen as critical by widows in dealing with the loss of a husband, widowhood and relationships with in-laws, as well as dealing with support received after the death of the husband.

6.7.1.1. Preparing for the funeral

During preparations for the funeral, widows reported that they tend to be accused of causing the death of their husbands. This makes it difficult to prepare for the funeral, as they get busy defending themselves from the in-laws. Participants recommended the support of a social worker to provide counselling. According to Healy (2012), a non-oppressive social worker is needed by widows to show empathy, be non-judgmental and support the widow to help her cope with her situation.

6.7.1.2. Tasks to be performed by a social worker

Continuous counselling of the widow becomes necessary in preparing the widow for the funeral.

- Discuss the actual challenges identified with the widow for needs analysis. Healy (2012) calls for going beyond the usual principle of being objective to ensuring that the service user's needs are met through the service.
- Conduct a problem-solving approach for identified needs. It would be important to allow the widow to make her own prioritization of her challenges, and undertake problem solving together, rather than for the social worker to decide what is important for the widow.
- Provide psycho-social support, including services to the children where there are children involved, if identified as part of the needs.
- Referral to religious leaders and traditional leaders on issues beyond the social worker's scope, like mediation with the in-laws where there are identified issues with the in-laws during the needs analysis in preparation for the funeral, with the aim of building the family even for after funeral, especially in cases where widows are accused of killing their own husbands.
- Support the in-laws in dealing with the loss of their son and guide them on supporting the daughter in-law who has lost the husband by outlining her needs.
- Prepare and support the widow for the day of the funeral, focusing on emotions, and working on acceptance of death for the widow, to consciously start preparing for the funeral emotionally.

6.7.1.3. Support the widow in preparing for life after the funeral

The participants indicated that the conflict with the in-laws started with being accused of killing the husband, which then leads to the stigma of being treated as a killer by in-laws and the general community.

The widow is usually then excluded in the decision making in preparing for the funeral. According to Akol (2016), the root cause of the negative experiences of widows in Africa and even worldwide may be based on the gender roles influenced by culture and tradition.

Magudu and Mohlakoana-Matopi (2013) assert that a decrease in social status has implications for women's livelihood, economic status and quality of life, and increases vulnerability to discrimination, abuse, harassment and gender-based violence, as well as the ability to assert their rights. The role of the social worker was identified as to support and to capacitate widows to deal with identified challenges, like the effects of the relationship with the in-laws in dealing with the loss of a husband.

6.7.2. Counselling for challenges and experiences that cause widows' vulnerability

Widows shared experiences of the challenges that caused their vulnerability. The vulnerability was identified to be caused by being blamed for the death of their husbands, rejection by in-laws, stigmatisation by community members, and financial vulnerability. Widows shared that they tended to be excluded in the decision making after being blamed for causing the death of their husbands. Some of the widows were dependent on their husbands, but once they died, they became vulnerable without any source of income and financial support. According to the widows they tend to struggle as their movement is also restricted by mourning rituals, thereby limiting them from accessing other people for support. The support of the social worker was identified as necessary to assist the widow in dealing with the challenges.

6.7.2.1. Roles and responsibilities of the social worker

□ The social worker is to assist the widow in dealing with the experience of the oppression from the in-laws. Widows may find themselves helpless while facing restrictions on movement associated with mourning rites, which tend to confine them within a designated residence.

- Consider the options for action available to the widow, to ensure her needs are addressed.
- Social workers are to treat each widow in a caring manner, mindful of all the cultural and ethical practices surrounding her, and not use their power of authority in a negative way to oppress the widow, as that would lead to secondary victimization. According to critical theory, the oppressed tend to be complicit in their oppression. The modern critical social work theory therefore calls on social workers to empower oppressed people, to act collectively, by forming support groups in order to achieve social change (Healy, 2012).
- In practicing anti-oppressive social work, the modern critical social work theory makes a core assumption that social workers must be able to identify various forms of oppression and recognize them as harmful.
- Encourage the widow to share her feelings of powerlessness, for example during property grabbing or while being blamed for the death of their husbands. Once the widows have shared their feelings of powerlessness, the process of enabling widows to understand structural and cultural injustice should resume, like understanding that they have to be restricted while wearing mourning clothes and be isolated from other people, experiences of injustices.
- Explain to the widow that this is a cultural injustice accepted as a norm, without taking into account the challenges that come with the loss of the husband, for instance loss of financial support and having to raise children alone.

The idea should be to show widows that they are not alone in experiencing cultural injustices as a widow, as all widows go through the same experiences in their community.

It is important to understand the relationship between patriarchy and gender for the better understanding of women's subordinate position. This culture of patriarchy is a very strong determinant of male dominance over females. Those are critical aspects to be explained to the widows by the social worker, for the widow to have a better understanding of the oppression during mourning rituals.

- Widows are then to be empowered on how to deal with injustices, in order to be able to move on with their lives. Critical social theorists argue that the aim of knowledge is enlightenment and liberation.

- Share information and resources available to them to deal with their challenges.

- Work in partnership with the widow in line with the social work principle of self-determination. Take cognizant of the fact that the widows would be sensitive and vulnerable due to their experiences of oppression.

- It is important to include widows in decision making processes which will affect their lives, after they have been oppressed through patriarchy during mourning rituals. This also helps in building their self-esteem, after they have been excluded in decision making about the funerals of their husbands. Most widows were excluded in the decision making as reported by the widows. In assisting them to rebuild their lives as widows, involving them in decision making would be a step towards their empowerment.

6.7.3. Strategic interventions to reduce the vulnerability of widows

The strategic interventions to reduce the vulnerability of widows focus on community awareness and education.

Such interventions are aimed at the role players and stakeholders who can contribute to reducing the vulnerability of widows, like community leaders, religious and traditional leaders, non-profit organizations and the Department of Women. The interventions are to be made in collaboration with the communities to assist in mobilizing the relevant stakeholders.

Role of social workers:

- Conduct community awareness workshops on challenges experienced by young widows. This would include a buy-in of community members in reducing the vulnerability of young widows.
- Create awareness of the challenges experienced by young widows as well as mourning rituals applicable when one loses a husband, for the young married women to understand and prepare to prevent such challenges.

The social worker should partner with the widows in hosting the workshops, who will in turn be actively participating in the workshop.

- The workshop is opened by the social worker, who then requests one of the widows selected during planning to lead the discussions and give a briefing on their challenges and experiences. She can then invite other widows to share additional information if necessary.

6.7.4. Support groups

Regarding group intervention, widows identified a need for support groups. They indicated the benefit of the support group, to be a support from peers who understand what you are going through, based on their experiences.

Support groups were also identified as good for peer counselling and support, where widows could socialize without being stigmatized and get support from their peers who have similar experiences.

6.7.4.1. Tasks for the social worker

- Establish a support group for the widows identified
- Train the support group on peer counselling, including peers visiting the new widows for support
- Facilitate peer groups support, especially when the widows fight with the in-laws over property and funeral preparations, so that affected widows can learn from the experiences of others. Share information on legislation available to assist widows with their challenges.
- Encourage group sharing of special days such as birthdays, Valentine's Day, Christmas and Father's Day
- Monitor the functionality of support groups and guide on topics for discussion in the group.
- Invite experts to share information with the widows on wills, rounding of estates, the role of Master of the Court, social workers, SASSA, Domestic Violence Court and other critical information for the widows.

6.7.5. Policy issues

According to Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013), African widows, irrespective of ethnic group, are viewed as among the most vulnerable and destitute women. It can be said that culture and cultural practices applicable to African widows make them more vulnerable. Widows suffer a loss of income when they lose their spouses who are usually the sole providers (Ndlovu, 2013).

This makes transition to widowhood difficult for the widow as she will have to struggle to rebuild her life without resources that are due to her.

Advocacy role for the social workers:

The social worker must advocate for the following:

- In terms of policy, the Department of Social Department has to prioritize widows as a vulnerable group for work opportunities, Expanded Public Work Programs, co-operatives and learnerships, to ensure widows address the gap created by the loss of the spouse.
- The challenges and experiences of African young widows also need to be shared with traditional leaders, with the aim of advocating for widows, highlighting how they can be assisted while mourning, like wearing traditional attire instead of the black clothes which cause them stigma, and some even lose their jobs while mourning.
- Traditional leaders should be engaged on the period of mourning, especially for working widows, during engagements on other programmes with traditional leaders. This negatively affects the uniformed widows like security, domestic workers, nurses, police, part-time students who must attend evening classes, and widows with school going age children, who may need to attend parents meeting. The community need to be engaged through dialogues to review the implementation of some of the customs that negatively affect the widows.

6.8 Conclusion

The chapter outlines the guideline for the interventions of social workers for empowerment of African young widows. The guideline highlights the needs of widows, starting from preparing for the funeral. The tasks for the social work intervention are outlined. This is followed by a description of the role of the social worker in preparing the widow for life after the funeral.

The interventions extend to community level with strategic interventions to reduce the vulnerability of widows. Support groups have been identified as integral to the interventions to address the challenges of widows. The role of the social worker in the support groups is also clarified. The advocacy role of social workers for policy change is explained in support of empowerment of African young widows. The guideline ends with the advocacy role of social workers for cultural issues in preparing for the empowered widows.

CHAPTER 7

Conclusions, reflections and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The study was motivated by the need to proactively capacitate African young widows through development of a guideline for their empowerment. The literature study showed that some young widows are vulnerable due to the lack of support from their in-laws. Their vulnerability is aggravated by cultural practices. Widows appeared to be discriminated against, abused and exploited in many countries worldwide and also in South Africa. The outcome of the study was to develop a guideline to facilitate young widows' empowerment to deal with their challenges.

In this chapter, the researcher presents the outcomes of the Participatory Action Research, which was utilized in this study to achieve the aim and objectives of the study, as guided by the qualitative research approach. The findings that emerged in response to the four objectives of this study will be summarized. The chapter will also highlight the contribution to knowledge, and further make some recommendations on how this research study could add value to policy and interventions. The chapter concludes with identified challenges in respect of this research project, and further, identifies emerging research areas which could be explored for future studies on young widows.

7.2. Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the experiences and challenges of young African widows, in order to develop a guideline to facilitate the young widows' empowerment to deal with their challenges.

The specific objectives that guided the study were as follows:

- 1) To explore and describe the experiences and challenges of African young widows in Mangaung in the Free State
- 2) To explore and describe the customary practices around widowhood in Mangaung Metro in the Free State
- 3) To develop an intervention programme for empowerment of widows in collaboration with the widows

7.3. Summary of the research methodology

The implementation of the Participatory Action Research Model assisted to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. The Participatory Action Research Model was implemented according to its four phases (Kemp, Bailey and Barnard, 2019).

Below is the summary of the implementation of the PAR Model used by the researcher in order to achieve the intended objectives:

Phase One: Reflecting - First session of the focus group

Operationalization of the PAR Model

The first sessions (Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein sessions) of the focus groups focused on forming a research team and then reflecting on the challenges experienced during widowhood, including customary practices for widowhood, in order to define the problem. A qualitative research approach was used, implementing a PAR Model. Focus groups were utilized with an interview guide for the analysis of the problem.

Phase Two: Planning

The second sessions focused on planning for action to be taken to empower African young widows. During the planning phase, the research team planned how to address the vulnerabilities identified during the reflection stage (phase one) focusing on three major issues as priorities by the group. All participants were engaged in the implementation of the plans in order to achieve the desired intervention and results.

Phase Three: Action – Implementation stage

In the third phase the focus was on implementation of plans according to the strategies developed during the planning phase. The implementation was around conducting workshops, both in Thaba Nchu and Bloemfontein.

After the three steps of the PAR were implemented and completed, the guidelines were developed with the participants. The guidelines were developed for social workers in empowering young widows. The guidelines were finalized and taken back to the widows to verify if they were a true reflection of the discussions on their development after the workshops. The results were also presented as preliminary results to the annual International Widows Day seminar on the 23 June 2021, organized by Department of Women.

7.4. Summary of Findings

Table 5 Summary of findings

| Themes | Research findings |
|--|--|
| 1 Effects of widowhood in dealing with the loss of a husband | Even though the mourning rituals are meant to give widows time to mourn, they did not assist because the rituals are forced on them without consulting them on how they will be affected in their daily functioning. The conflict with the in-laws started with widows being accused of causing the deaths of their husbands. |

| | |
|--|---|
| 2. Challenges and experiences that cause widows' vulnerability | <p>Widows felt overwhelmed by the situation as they lost their husbands at a prime time in their lives.</p> <p>The young widows who participated in the study reported how the discrimination was mostly from other women. Young widows were not allowed to participate in other traditional practices because they were widows, for example the naming of the new daughter-in-law. This is a privilege given to an older daughter-in-law, but as a widow it got taken away and the widow was not given an opportunity to participate, as widows were assumed to bring bad luck which would affect the new daughter-in-law.</p> <p>Without a will being left by their husband, widows tended to struggle.</p> |
| 3. Strategic interventions for widows to prevent vulnerability | <p>Widows indicated that they needed support groups where mutual support and advice could be shared amongst them on dealing with their challenges.</p> <p>Widows lacked information on resources available to assist them to deal with their challenges and suggested that this be shared in the support groups.</p> <p>Continuous counselling from social workers was needed to support the widow to deal with the oppression by in-laws and isolation by the community.</p> <p>Community awareness was recommended to reduce the vulnerability and stigmatisation of widows in the community.</p> |

7.5. Significance of the study

7.5.1. Contribution to the body of knowledge

- The study adds to the existing knowledge of widows' experiences in that some fathers-in-law were supportive of widows, compared to other previous studies that had found that it was all negative; also, that widows in this study reported receiving support from the father-in-law, mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

- The findings of the study are comparable to findings of similar studies, previous research and therefore the findings can be applicable to widows from similar settings.

7.5.2. Contribution to policy

The Department of Social Development does not have a policy, framework or guidelines for interventions to widows. The study has developed guidelines with the widows, thereby making them relevant and pro-active interventions.

7.6. Limitations of the study

The following have been identified by the researcher as the limitations of the study:

- The Department of Social Development does not have policies or services focusing on widows, and therefore there is no literature from the department regarding policies, guidelines or protocols, although there are directorates for women development and victim empowerment programmes.
- The researcher made use of telephonic individual interviews for some participants who were not available to be present during the scheduled time, for example, those who had a child admitted to hospital, who had to travel for work outside the province, and as the researcher had to move to the Eastern Cape and was not granted time off during the time re-scheduled for interviews.
- The sample for the study was limited to 16 widows from Mangaung Metropolitan, Free State, South Africa.

7.7. Recommendations for future studies

- Participatory Action Research is relevant in social work as social workers focus on bringing about change, especially social justice. PAR then becomes an enabler for social workers.
- Utilizing PAR facilitates investigation and exploration of the challenges as experienced by people, according to how they experienced them and education of the participants to reduce their vulnerability and oppression.
- Future studies could focus on older widows and how they experience mourning rituals.
- Studies on widows could also focus on other cultures and investigate experiences of the widows and how they are impacted by such experiences.
- The study observed that some widows were oppressed by mothers-in-law who were supposed to be supporting them as women. It would be interesting to conduct a study on the role of women in the implementation of widowhood rituals, to determine the awareness of the women on the impact they have on the widows.

7.7.1. Recommendations for policy

It is recommended that government policies should accommodate the needs of widows. The Employee Wellness Policy should accommodate support to widows who are isolated and stigmatised and might be relying on the employee wellness to adapt to widowhood in order to adapt to widowhood. The Human Resource Development Internship and learnership policy prioritizes previously disadvantaged and should be reviewed to add vulnerable groups like widows and children of widows.

7.7.2. Recommendation for practice

It is recommended that social workers be orientated on the guidelines before implementation.

It is also recommended that social workers should note that cultures will be different in each area, and that the guidelines are aimed at fostering a culturally relevant practice.

7.8 Concluding remarks

The research study aimed at developing guidelines for the empowerment of African young widows. The goal was achieved through Participatory Action Research. The study was very interesting and a learning curve for the researcher. The researcher learnt from the participants through the sharing of their experiences that made them vulnerable. It was also observed that widows were not against widowhood rituals, but the challenge was how they were implemented without consulting or involving widows in decision making. Idialu (2012) had found the treatment of widows in Africa to be brutal and oppressive to the victims.

All widows should be protected by the rights enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and other international human rights treaties. Widows need to be educated on their rights and the legislation that protects them. In addition, the Commission on Gender Equality should monitor the implementation of the laws that protect widows, like the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act 2000.

The participants enjoyed working with the researcher in a flexible way where they were also able to make decisions for their own empowerment. It became clear that Paulo Frere was correct in saying that oppressed people can know how to get out of a state of oppression if only they are made aware of how they are being oppressed. The widows did not know of the resources available for them.

There should be awareness programs to make widows aware of such resources. Guidelines are needed based on experiences of the widows and the findings of the study in order to assist the widows. The developed guidelines will assist the Department of Social Development and other stakeholders in service delivery for the empowerment of widows.

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APPENDICES

ANNEXURE A: Information sheet



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-9592011 Cell no: 0732458417

E-mail: Myshe.hugo@gmail.com

INFORMATION SHEET

*[Instructions: This template can be used to assist you in preparing your information sheet. Please ensure that your information sheet addresses any of the ethical issues that you feel participants of your study should be aware of. **Bolded, italicized text found throughout this document offers guidance and suggestions. Replace this text with the appropriate wording for your study.**]*

Project Title: An empowerment programme for African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State, South Africa.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by S. Hugo at the University of the Western Cape. I am inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a widow. You also meet the set

criteria for the participants. *[Describe why the person reading the consent form is a possible research subject for your project].* The purpose of this research project is to develop an empowerment programme for the widows. The knowledge is needed to develop a manual for an empowerment programme. The programme will empower the widows to improve their situation of vulnerability. *[Describe why the knowledge or information is being sought]*

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in a workshop and individual interviews with other widows to share information that could not be shared in the workshop with the group of other widows. The workshop will not take more than one and half hour. The interview will also not exceed one hour.

[Describe the procedure(s) chronologically using lay language and short sentences. State the location where the study will be conducted. Explain medical and other technical terminology using simple language. State the overall duration for the subject's participation and, if appropriate, how long each procedure will take. If the research involves surveys or interviews, include a summary of the questions that will be asked.]

The discussions will focus on your experiences and challenges as an African young widow in Mangaung.

The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. To ensure your anonymity, codes will be used instead of your name. This will ensure that information will not identify you personally. An identification key will be allocated for the researcher to link the data with your identity.

To ensure your confidentiality, codes will be used on the data and passwords will be used on the computers. Cabinets will be locked where data is kept.

[Include a description of the procedures to maintain the confidentiality of the data, e.g. having locked filing cabinets and storage areas, using identification codes only on data forms, and using password-protected computer files.]

If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected.

[If there is a possibility that you will collect information on child abuse or neglect, abuse or neglect of disabled or other vulnerable adults that may need to be disclosed to comply with legal requirements or professional standards, the possibility of such disclosure must be included in the consent form. See the following example, and modify it to include all applicable types of information.]

In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse, neglect or potential harm to you or others. In this event, we will inform you that we have to break confidentiality to fulfil our legal responsibility to report to the designated authorities.

[In the event that you are using focus groups] This study will use focus groups, therefore the extent to which your identity will remain confidential is dependent on participants in the focus group maintaining confidentiality.

What are the risks of this research?

There may be some risks from participating in this research study.

The risk of the study is that you might be affected emotionally when discussing your experiences and challenges as a widow. Professional counselling will be arranged where necessary.

OR if applicable, state the following:

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some degree of risk. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

The benefits of the study to you include learning how to deal with your challenges as a widow while contributing to the development of an empowerment programme, which will result in the manual on how to empower other widows.

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about challenges and experiences of African young widows. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of experiences and challenges of African young widows.

Describe the anticipated benefits to science or society expected from the research, if any.

The research study will contribute new knowledge on the experiences and challenges of widows and how they can be capacitated to deal with.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you

decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by *Ms Shirley Hugo supervised by Prof Catherine Schenk from the Department of Social Work* at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Prof Schenck at: 0219592011 at University of Western Cape; cschenck@uwc.ac.za

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Prof Catherina Schenck

Head of Department: Social Work

University of the Western Cape

Private Bag X17

Bellville 7535

cschenck@uwc.ac.za

Prof José Frantz

Dean of the Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

University of the Western Cape

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ANNEXURE B: Leqephe la dintlha



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

Tel: +27 21-959 2011 Fax: 27 21-959 2845

E-mail: Myshe.hugo@gmail.com

Ntlafaditswe: Lwetse 2014

LEQEPHE LA DINTLHA

Sehloho sa Projeke: [Programma ya ho matlafatsa bahlolohadi ba saleng batjha dilemong sebakeng sa Mangaung Metro, Foreisitata, Afrika Borwa]

Dithuto tsena dimabapi le eng?

Ena ke projeke ya dipatlisiso e etswang ke Mme Shirley Hugo yunivesithing yaBochabela Borwa. Ke ho memela honka karolo projekeng ena ya dipatlitliso hobane o ile wa tsebahala jwalo ka mohlolohadi ya motjha wa MoAfrika. O boetse o dumellana le ditekanyetso tse behilweng bakeng sa bao ba ka nkang karolo.

Sepheho sa projeke yena ya dipatlisiso ke ho theha lenaneo la matlafatso bakeng sa bahlolohadi. Tsebo ena ya hlokahala ho ntshetsapele buka ya lenaneo la matlafatso. Lenaneo le tla matlafatsa bahlolohadi ho ntlafatsa maemo a bona a tlokotsi.

Ke tla kopuwa hore ke etse eng ha eba ke dumela ho nka karolo?

O tla kopuwa hore o nke karolo kokoanong ya dipuisano tsa sehlopha, hape le ho di puisano tsa bomong le bahlolohadi ba bang ho arolelana lesedi le neng le ke ke la aroleana kopanong le sehlopha sa bahlolohadi ba bang. Kokoano ya dipuisano e ke ke ya nka nako e fetang hora e le ngwe le halofo. Puisano ya bomong ha e na ho feta hora e le ngwe.

Dipuisano di tla shebana le boiphihlelo le diphephetso tsa hao jwalo ka mohlolohadi e mocha wa Moafrika Mangaung. Nakong ya thuto ya sehlopha o tla nka karolo moqoqong o etelletsoeng pele ke dipotso tse tswang ho mofuputsi. Puisano e tla etswa ka puo ya hao, lapeng la hao, ka nako e o loketseng. Sehlopha sa tsepamiso se tla tshwarelwa holong ya sechaba ka nako eo ho dumellanweng ka yona le bankakarolo bohle. Dipotso tse lokelang ho tshohluwa ka kakaretso di kenyelletsa hore na ho bolelwa eng ho ba mohlolohadi, ditlhoko tsa hao le se ka etswang.

Na ho nka karolo ha ka thutong ena ho tla bolokoa e le lekunutu?

Bafuputsi ba itlama ho sireletsa boitsebahatso ba hao le mofuta wa tlatsetso ya hao. The researchers undertake to protect your identity and the nature of your contribution. Ho netefatsa hore ha o tsejwe, ho tla sebediswa dikhoutu sebakeng sa lebitso la hao. Sena se tla netefatsa hore tlhaiso-leseding e ke ke ya ho khetholla. Senotlolo sa boitsebiso se tla fuoa mofuputsi ho hokahanya data le boitsebiso ba hao. Ho etsa bonnete ba lekunutu la hao, dikhoutu di tla sebeliswa ho data le di-passworddi tla sebediswa ho di-computer. Dikhabinete di tla notleloa moo ho bolokilweng data.

Haeba re ngola tlaleho kapa sengolwa ka morero ona wa dipatlisiso, boitsebahatso ba hao bo tla sireletswa.

Ho latela ditlhokahalo tsa molao / kapa le ditekanyetso tsa profeshenale, re tla senolela batho ba nepahetseng / kapa le ba boholong tlhaiso-leseling e re hlokomelang mabapi le tlhekefetso ya bana kapa ho se tsotelle kapa dikotsi tse ka bang teng ho wena kapa ho ba bang. Ketsahalong yena, re tla o tsebisa hore re tlameha ho roba lekunutu ho phetha boikarabello ba rona ba molao ba ho tlaleha ho balaodi ba khethiloeng.

Phuputso ena e tla sebedisa dihlopha tse tsepamisisang maikutlo hore na boholo ba boitsebahatso ba hao bo tla dula e le lekunutu bo ipapisitse le bankakarolo ba Sehlopha sa Focus ba bolokang lekunutu.

Dikotsi tsa phuputso ena ke dife?

Ho ka ba le dikotsi tsa ho nka karolo thutong ena ya dipatlisiso. Kotsi ya thuto ke hore o ka angwa maikutlo ha o buwa ka boiphihlelo le mathata a hao o le mohlolohadi. Tlhabollo ya ditsebi e tla hlophiswa moo ho hlokahalang.

KAPA ha ho hlokeha, bolela tse latelang:

Dikamano tsohle tsa batho le ho buwa ka wena kapa ba bang di na le dikotsi tse itseng. Leha ho le jwalo re tla fokotsa dikotsi tse jwalo mme re nke bohato kapele ho o thusa haeba o ka ba le ho se utlwise bohloko leha e le hofe, kelellong kapa ka tsela e ngwe nakong ya ho nka karolo ha hao

thutong ena. Moo ho hlokahalang, phetisetso e nepahetseng e tla etswa ho setsebi se loketseng bakeng sa thuso e eketsehileng kapa ho kenella.

Melemo ya patlisiso e ke efe?

Melemo ho wena e kenyeletsa *ho ithuta ho sebetsana le mathata a hao jwaloka mohlolohadi ha o ntse o kenya letsoho ho nshetsopele ya lenaneo la matlafatso, le tla fellang kaho thewa ha bukana ya ho matlafatsa bahlolohadi ba bang.*

kapa

Patlisiso ena ha eya etsetswa ho o thusa ka seqo, empa dipheho di ka thusa mofuputsi ho ithuta haholoanyane ka diphephetso le boiphihlelo ba bahlolohali ba bacha ba Maafrika. Re tshepa hore, nakong e tlang, batho ba bang ba ka una molemo thutong ena ka kutloisiso e ntlafaditsweng ya boiphihlelo le diphephetso tsa bahlolohadi ba bacha ba Maafrika.

Na ke tlameha ho ba phuputsong ena mme nka emisa ho nka karolo neng kapa neng?

Ho nka karolo ha hao phuputsong ena ke ho ithaopa ka botlalo. O ka khetha ho se nke karolo ho hang. Haeba o nka qeto ya ho nka karolo phuputsong ena, o ka emisa ho nka karolo neng kapa neng. Haeba o nka qeto ya ho se nke karolo thutong ena kapa o khaotsa ho nka karolo neng kapa neng, o ke ke wa fuwa kotlo kapa wa lahlehelo ke melemo eo o tshwanelehang ka yona.

Ho thweng haeba kena le dipotso?

Phuputso ena e ntse e etswa ke Mme Shirley Hugo a okametsweng ke Prof Catherine Schenk wa lefapha la Mosebetsi wa Setjhaba Univesithing ya Kapa Bophirima. Haeba o na le dipotso mabapi le boithuto ka bo bona, ka kopo ikopanye le Prof Schenck ho: 0219592011 Univesithing ea Western Cape; cschenck@uwc.ac.za

Ha o ka ba le lipotso mabapi le boithuto bona le litokelo tsa hau joaloka monkakarolo oa lipatlisiso kapa haeba u lakatsa ho tlaleha mathata afe kapa afe ao u kileng oa ba le ona a amanang le thuto, ka kopo ikopanye le:

Moprofesa Catherina Schenck

Hlooho ya Lefapha: Boiketlo ba Sechaba

Univesithi ya Kapa Bophirimela

Mokotla wa poraefete X17

Bellville 7535

cschenck@uwc.ac.za

Moprofesa José Frantz

Modini wa Legoro la Disaense tsa Baagi le Boitekanelo

Univesithi ya Kapa Bophirimela

Mokotla wa poraefete X17

Bellville 7535

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Patlisiso ena e amohetswe ke Komiti ya Patlisiso ya Senate ya Univesithi ya Western Cape le Komiti ya Boitšoaro.

ANNEXURE C: Consent form



UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

Private Bag X 17, Bellville 7535, South Africa

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E-mail: Myshe.hugo@gmail.com

CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Project: *An empowerment programme for African young widows in Mangaung Metro, Free State, South Africa.*

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

Participant's name.....

Participant's signature.....

Date.....

Consent Form Hugo S

Version Date: 15 September 2014

ANNEXURE D: Foromo yahofana katetla/Consent form



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FOROMO YAHOFANA KATETLA/CONSENT FORM

Sehloho sa Projeke ya dipatlitliso: Programa yaho matlafatsa bahlolohadi basaleng batjha dilemong bama Afrika seabakeng sa Mangaung Metro, Foreisitata, Afrika Borwa.

Dithuto tsena kedihlaloseditswe kapuo e ke iutlwisisang. Dipotso tseo kene kena letsona mabapi le dithuto tsena di arabowe/arabehile kaofela. Ke ya utlwisisa hore honka karolo haka hotlabolela eng, etswe ke dumela honka karolo ka holokolloha le bo ithaopi baka/ ho ithaopa haka. Keya

utlwiisisa hore boitsebiso baka / mabitso aka bokekebe ba ntshuwa pontsheng homing kapa mang. Ke a utlwisisa hore ke dumelehile ho ikhulela morao ke seke kanka karolo dithutong tsena ntle le hofana ka lebaka kappa ntle le hotshaba ditla morao tse jesang disathehoeleng kapa tahlehelo ya menyetla.

Lebitso la monka karolo:.....

Ho tekena ha monka karolo:.....

Mohla/Letsatsi:.....

Foromo ya hofana ka tetla: Shirley Hugo 8915979

Version Date: 25 June 2014

ANNEXURE E: Interview guide

Leqhepe la D – Tataiso ya puisano

Interview Date:.....

Letsatsi la puisano:.....

Biographical detail

Manollo/ Holokodisa....

| | | | |
|--|--------------|--------------------------|--|
| Gender Boong | Male/ motona | Female/ motshehadi | Who is in your household? Ditho tsa lelapa? |
| Highest standard passed O fihleletse sehlopheng se fe sekolong? | | | Mother in-law Matsale |
| Age Dilemo | | Father in-law Ratsale | |

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Urban Resident Moahi wa toropong | Rural Resident Moahi wa metseng | | Number/Nomoro |
| | | Son/Mora | |
| | | Daughter/ Moradi | |
| | | Grandchildren/Ditlhoholo | |
| | | Siblings/Baena | |
| | | Other/s/Babang | |

Objective of the study

Sepheo ka thuto ena

To explore the needs and experiences of African young widows in order to co-develop an empowerment programme to capacitate the widows and reduce their vulnerability.

Ho lekola ditlhoko le kgahlamelo eo bahlolohadi ba maAfrika ba nang le tsona. Se na se etswa molemong wa ho theha mmoho le bahlolohadi lenaneo le re retsweng ho ba rupella le ho ba thusa ho fokotsa mathata ao ba tobanang le ona.

The following participatory tools will also be used to facilitate the discussions with the participants

Mekgwa e latelang e tla sebediswa ho tataisa puisano ho ba nka karolo

Tool 1: Community mapping:

1. Mmapa wa motse:

Purpose of the activity: To reveal the participant's perspective and experiences of the community.

Sepheo ke sena: ho fumana tsebo le kutlwisiso eo ba nka karolo ba nang le yona ka baahi.

Step 1: Draw a picture of your Home and community:

Including the resources available and challenges experienced in the home/community. Also explore attitude of the community towards widows

1.1 Karolo ya pele:

Taka setshwantsho sa ntlo ya hao le motse oo o dulang ho ona. Setshwantshong sena, akaretsa mehlodi kapa disebediswa le diphephetso tseo le lapa la hao le baahi ba kopanang le tsona.

Step 2: Identify and label three things that you would like to change in the house/

Community (this can be physical, attitudes, social issues etc)

1.2 Karolo ya bobedi:

Hlwaya dintho tse tharo tseo o ka ratang ho di fetola le lapeng la hao le motseng oo o phelang ho ona (dintho tsena e ka ba tse tshwarehang, mekgwa ya batho, etc.)

Step 3: Explain the reasons why you want to change these aspects

1.3 Karolo ya boraro:

Hlalosa mabaka ao susumetsang hore o ba tle ho fetola maemo ana.

Tool 2: Drama:

2. Papiso:

Purpose of the activity: To explore the experience of the widows.

Ho lekola ka moo bahlolohadi ba amehang ka teng.

Scenario:

A widow is evicted from her own house by a brother in-law

1. What happens to the children during the eviction?
2. What happens to the widow eventually? Who helps the widow?

Papiso ya pele:

Mohlolohadi o ontshwa ka hara ntlo ya hae ke ba bohadi.

- Ho etsahala eng ka bana nakong ee?
- Qetellong teng ho tlo etsahala eng ka mohlolohadi eo. O thuswa ke mang?

Tool 3: Poetry

3. Thothokiso

Purpose of the activity: To view the vulnerability of the participants through their eyes

Mona sepheyo ke ho bona ka moo ba nka karolo ba tla bontshang ho ameha ka teng ke thothokiso ena.

Step 1: Request the participants to write a poem about their first experience of widowhood in their communities. Participants to articulate people, situations and, places where they are most vulnerable.

Karolo ya pele:

Kopa ba nka karolo ho ngola thothokiso ka moo ba amehileng ka teng ke ho ba bahlolohadi motseng oo ba phelona ho ona. Kopa ba nka karolo ho hlalosa ka moo ba amehileng ka teng ka ho fitisisa (mohlala: ha ba le ka hara batho, tlasa maemo a itseng le dibakeng dife motseng oo ba phelang ho ona.

Tool 4: Venn diagram

4. Setshwantsho sa Venn

Key Questions:

Dipotso tse hlwahilweng:

1. Which organisations/institutions/groups are working in/for or with the community that you are aware of?

- Ke mekgatlo kapa ditsha di fe tseo o ditsebang motseng oo o phelang ho ona?

2. Which institutions/groups do the participants regard as most important, and why?

- Ke ditsha kapa dihlopha di fe tse ikopantseng ka hara motse tseo ba nka karolo ba di hlwayang e le tsa bohloka ka ho fitisisa mme ba fane ka mabaka ho tshehetsa karabo ya bona.

3. Which institutions/groups are needed in the community?

- Ke ditsha kapa dihlopha di fe tsa bohlokwa tse hlokehang ka ha ra motse?

Tool 5: Problem tree

5. Diphephetso

A process will be facilitated where the individual will be drawing a tree discussing the following questions regarding vulnerability of widows:

Ba nka karolo ba tla tataiswa ho taka setshwantso “mohlala: sefate” ho thusa ho bebofatsa dipotso le dikarabo mabapi le ka moo bahlolohadi ba amehang ka teng:

Key Questions:

Dipotso tse hlwahilweng:

1. What are the causes of widows' vulnerability?
 - Ke dintho di fe tse amang bahlolohadi?
2. What are the effects of widowhood?
 - Ke ditla mora di fe tse amahangwang le bohloohadi?
3. What do you think are the solutions to solve these problems?
 - Ke eng seo o nahanang hore e ka ba tharollo dintho tse amang bahlolohadi?

Tool 6: Fieldwork guidelines for observations

6. Dintlha tse tshwanetseng ho elwa hloko nakong ya ho etela baahi

During each fieldwork visit, researcher to note observations during their engagement in the communities

Nakong ya ketelo enngwe le engwe motseng ela hloko ka moo puisano le baahi e tsamayang ka teng

Explain your experiences when interviewing the participant

- Hlalosetsa ba nka karolo seo o ithutileng sona nakong ya puisano
1. Describe your observations of the widows in their homes or community hall where the interviews took place.
- Hlalosa seo o ithutileng sona ka bahlolohadi malapeng a bona kapa dibakeng tseo dipuisano di etsahetseng ho tsona



ANNEXURE F **OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH**

**UNIVERSITY of the
WESTERN CAPE**

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

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15 May 2017

Ms S Hugo

Social Work

Faculty of Community and Health Science

Ethics Reference Number: HS17/5/1

Project Title: An empowerment programme for African young widows in
Mangaung Metro, Free State, South Africa.

Approval Period: 12 May 2017 – 12 May 2018

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Hugo', is placed over a white rectangular box.

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee
of the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the

abovementioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of the study.