The Association between Widowhood and Identity Loss.
A Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Abstract

This study explored the association between widowhood and identity loss.

A systematic literature review (SLR), was used, and a final sample of 32 articles was selected.

The findings from this empirical study revealed that;(a) women play a significant, yet overlooked role in society, leading to their progressive loss of identity;(b) a substantial percentage of women have an identity pegged on their families of origin, transferred to their husbands on marriage and later on, gradually to their grown-up children;(c) on being widowed, women realize that they have had no identity of their own, and have to start an identity search.

Key Words: Widowhood, Gender, Feminism, Identity (loss)

Introduction

Widows and their families serve as an ideal barometer of the impact of society (Mutongi, 2007 p.4). As discriminated members of society (Peterman, 2012 pp.543-571, Sossou, 2002 p.207) in addition to being in a psycho-pathological state brought about by loss (Taves, 1981 p.x), widows are a portrayal of power and the impact of social ties that are often taken for granted when things are going well, yet often portending evil (Uko, 2011). Widowhood is an integral loss (Taves, 1981 p.x) and the loss of identity is just but one of the subsequent losses (Matlin, 1999 p. 476; Sossou, 2002 p.202); that notwithstanding, a progressive loss of identity (experiential and role-based) (Oyewumi, 2005 pp. 135-137), experienced through gender marginalization, and coming before the actual widowhood, influences the state that widowhood takes. This Systematic Literature Review, therefore, desires to address the association between the two variables: widowhood and identity loss.

Widowhood

"Widowhood has been a peripheral subject...treated in an endocentric and androcentric manner... [with] the conjugal bias in Western society resulting in a lack of interest in widows... (;) the real economic position of widows has also been ignored" (Potash, 1986 p.113). The author presents ten case studies that elaborate the complexities in widowhood: "access to land (and house property issues), post-widowhood conjugal situation, self-sufficiency, mourning, grief, and loneliness" (Potash, 1986 p.114), HIV/AIDS (Agot et al, 2010), in addition to post-traumatic stress disorder (Schaal, et al. 2011 and Matlin, 2004 pp.475/6). Case studies from Zulu Widows (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007 p.78), demonstrate dehumanizing activities subjected to widows: the *ukuzila* practice, a symbol that a widow is grieving properly and that she respects her deceased husband dictates that a woman wears black clothing, shaves her head, gives way, bows, bends her knees and avoids eye contact when she meets a man on the way, and should not show her back to people since it "emits *isinyama*, a bad omen or bad luck". Similar dehumanizing experiences befalling widows are elaborated on in Koran-Okrah (2012).

Additional studies on widowhood have concentrated on human rights and legal perspectives (Cooper, 2010a; ICRW, 2005;2007; Izumi, 2007; LaFraniere, 2005; Sossou, 2002; Walsh, 2005; and Young, 2006). In Kenya and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, there are studies on widow inheritance and on levirate (Kirwen, 1979 p.59) including sex practices for the cleansing of the widow (Malungo, 2001; Walsh, 2005). The United Nations brief on widowhood in Sub-Saharan Africa estimates the prevalence to be at 44% for those over 60 years and 16% for those aged between 45-59 (UN, 2001). This SLR addresses this group of the marginalized in an attempt to find possible interventions.

Identity

The study aimed at the association between widowhood and identity loss. Having expounded on widowhood, identity is herein discussed. It refers to an individual's self-rating of personal characteristics along with biological, psychological, or social dimensions (Whitbourne, 1998). Erikson, (1959; 1980 p.132) defines it as "persistent sameness with oneself", that includes the conceptions of the individual self in relation to others (Silberschmidt, 1999 p.22). Matlin (2004) considers four components of identity: body image (physical beauty and appearance), feminist identity (gender roles/one's roles as a woman; where women's ideas and experiences are valued), ethnic identity (social-cultural belongingness; belonging to a certain community and family, that has a particular set of attitudes and beliefs) and self-esteem (one feels appreciated, and has an evaluation of self; younger women see themselves as daughters and older women as mothers and older as grandmothers (Matlin, 2004 pp.474/5). This list leaves out professional and economic identity.

Oyewumi discussing the Suku in Africa, talks of reciprocal existential identities, found in the sphere of kinship relations (father-son, mother's brother-sister's son, older brother-younger brother and so forth; ritual kinship 'blood brotherhood and adoption of acquired persons (slaves); and in the ritual sphere (Oyewumi, 2005 p.131). For this writer, ritual is key to enhancing identity in African society. She reiterates how identities give roles in the Suku (African)

community: the husband is the provider of meat, cloth, and utensils to the wife, while the wife is a grower and maker of food and provider of sex to the husband (Oyewumi, 2005 p.131).

In the Western world however, in addition to the mentioned discussions on identities, under feminism, lesbian and gay identities are discussed (Meyer et al. 2002 table.5.1). She discusses identity as a tenuous coalition rather than a single component.

The objective of this study, however, was on the identity of the widow; on the one part, there is the pre-widowhood period. This entails the girl and how she constructs or destroys her identity before marriage and how this trend continues or is dealt with during marriage, impacting the state of widowhood. There is also the era of being widowed, where the widow loses her identity as she buries her husband and the subsequent loss of identity thereafter. The primary review question is, what is the association between widowhood and identity loss, pre, during, and post-widowhood? In order to exhaustively address the primary review question, the following study questions were set: What is the definition of widowhood? What is the definition of identity (loss)? In what thematic contexts are the two variables (widowhood and identity (loss)) discussed? How are the two variables (widowhood and identity (loss)) associated? What methodologies are used to discuss and analyse the two variables (widowhood and identity (loss)), and their association? What were the results of the findings? What attributes are linked to widowhood? What attributes are linked to identity (loss)?

Method

This study employed the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method, which synthesizes research in a "systematic, transparent, and reproducible manner" (Paris & Peachey, 2012 p.377). SLR originates in the medical, health care, and policy fields used to assemble the best evidence used in making policy decisions (Cook et al. 1997; Tranfield et al. 2003). The method was chosen to bring transparency, clarity, accessibility, and impartial inclusivity coverage (Thorpe et al. 2006) in the area of widowhood and identity loss. The SLR used to evaluate the strength of available evidence in terms of numbers is quantitative, while that which helps to systematically schematize the emerging themes within the selected studies concerning the problem under study is qualitative (Selvam, 2014). This study allows a "review in which there is a comprehensive search for relevant studies on ... [widowhood and identity loss] ... and those identified are then appraised and synthesized according to a pre-determined explicit method" (Klassen et al. p.700).

The SLR, in this case, was not so much to address the prevalence of widowhood in society (this has been done by among others, the UN, (2001) and the US Census Bureau, (2001), and the causes of widowhood, well elaborated by Matlin (1999 pp.475/6), but rather to quantitatively search for intensities of identity loss among widows and how far back the losses can be traced in the widows' lives. Qualitatively, the SLR intended to look into the degree of association between the two variables (identity loss and widowhood). Due to this, studies that had as their main focus the development of feminist models of development were excluded. This approach entailed extensive searches for the relevant databases, in an attempt to ensure that all relevant literature was identified and included. This was done by taking care not to lose focus on the literature

relevant to the study. The concentration was on empirical studies related to widowhood and identity loss. The aim was to shed light on challenges facing widows and thus contribute towards the way social transformers address their tribulations in their endeavor to better society. The goal was to gather the best possible research evidence on the subject in order to develop evidence-based practice (Evans, 2001).

The stages of this review followed the steps laid down by Holopainen et al. (2008): definition of purpose, formulation of research questions, literature search, data evaluation and analysis, and finally presentation of the results.

Literature search. The task of the literature search is important in an SLR to allow the researcher to come up with quality work. The search was done on several occasions to ensure that sufficient credible material was gathered and adequate information solicited; the following databases were included in the review: Ebscohost (Academic Search Premier), Taylor and Francis, Ebsco Open Access, Google Scholar, Oxford University Journals, and JSTOR. All results were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles written in English. The searches for the published articles were conducted systematically following the order of the databases listed above. Due to the limited nature of a combination of the two variables "widowhood" and "identity" (loss), the researcher included time limits from 1997 to the present. This included the following search words in combination and singly: widowhood and identity loss to come up with the relevant peer-reviewed studies, and to narrow down, included the word Africa. To expand the research sources, references were visited and links, both electronic and manual were followed. This enabled the study to reach out to further sources of related literature and so enhance both the breadth and depth of the study.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria. The initial search sought articles that were (a) published in a peer-reviewed journal; (b) in the English language: and (c) using the words "widow" (widowhood), and/or, "identity" (loss) in "Africa". The search restricted itself to articles published from 1997 to the present. The number of articles containing the given criteria from each database was recorded.

After the first step, the terms "Pdf" and "full text" were included in the search. This was to allow for further inclusion. This second criterion allowed for (a) peer-reviewed articles (but excluded book reviews, letters, editorials, opinions, journalistic and antidotal articles); (b) articles written in the English language; (c) articles that are empirical studies; (d) articles that have addressed widowhood and identity loss (or any of the two variables separately), qualitatively and/or qualitatively. Finally, additional articles that met the above-mentioned inclusion criteria, were found by examining the bibliographies of the sources identified.

Sample. Libraries, from where books and journals considered beneficial to the study, were visited. In addition, the following sites: Ebscohost (Academic Search Premier), Taylor and Francis, Ebsco Open Access, Google Scholar, Oxford University Journals, and JSTOR, were used and over 21000 journals on widowhood and identity loss, were found. The review, however, concentrating on Africa (with few exceptions), free access, and peer-reviewed pdf

journals, came up with 32 articles. These met the inclusion criterion that was set at written in English, published material, academic researchers at the tertiary level, and empirical research. The exclusion criterion was gender studies focusing on widowers and men in general.

Each article was analyzed showing the title, database, discipline, geographical location, methodology, thematic focus, and relevance of the article to the two variables "widowhood" and "identity" (loss). The presentation of the findings is discussed after the Data Analysis and a tabulated presentation is given as an appendix.

Data analysis. The study used the Matrix Method (Gerrard, 1999) to present its data analysis. The Matrix Method organized the information received and abstracted it under the following subheadings: title database, discipline, geographical location, methodology, thematic focus, and relevance of the article to the two variables "widowhood" and "identity" (loss). This enabled the study to address the definitions, contexts, examination methods, and findings.

After the analysis, the findings were put into matrices showing the studies and the synthesis of the results including the quality of each study. The supporting evidence that each study used was given in addition to the thematic conclusions. Since there were both quantitative and qualitative studies, a closer look at the research questions, objectives, samples, and methods used helped me come up with the preferred design. The relevance of each article to the two variables was arrived at after gauging whether the article concentrated on widowhood, identity (loss), or both and whether the focus was on Africa. The gauging was, Very Relevant (VR)- those whose focus was on widowhood and identity (loss) in Africa; Moderately Relevant (MR)- those that had either widowhood in Africa or identity (loss) in Africa or had widowhood and identity (loss) in parts other than Africa; and Slightly Relevant (SR)- those that dealt with only one of the three aspects (widowhood, identity (loss) or Africa).

Findings

Databases, fields of study, and countries where related research has been conducted: Of the 32 selected peer-reviewed articles, 20 were from the Academic Search Premier database, two from both the Academic Search Premier and Taylor & Francis, four from Ebsco open access, four from Google Scholar, one from Oxford University Journals and one from the JSTOR database.

Overall the review showed that widowhood had been researched in 25 different disciplines namely (the number in brackets shows the number of articles that were cited in that discipline), African literature (1), developmental studies(2), education (1), gender & feminism(1), gerontology(2), health (HIV/AIDS)(1), health sociology(1), human communication(1), mental health(2), mental health/mortality(1), nursing & health sciences(2), oncology-medicine(1), palliative medicine (2), psychiatric epidemiology(1), psychiatry(1), psychology (14), psychology-aging & mental health(1), psychology medicine(1), psychology science and media(1), psycho-traumatology (1), research methods (1), sociology (8), socio-politics (1), and

social psychiatry (1). Widowhood and identity (together), had been researched in African literature studies (1) and gerontology (1). Some of the fields of study overlapped.

Of the 32 articles reviewed, eight based their studies in America (USA), nine in Europe (UK, Netherlands, Sweden, and Norway), seven in Asia (Iran, Israel, Vietnam, China & Hongkong, and Sri Lanka), and eight in Africa (South Africa, Gambia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria (and Cote D'Ivoire & Ghana), Rwanda, and Tanzania & Uganda (Combined)). The study is hence representative of four main continents.

About the methodology used in each article, 15 are gauged (by the reviewer) as having used the qualitative method, nine as the quantitative method, and seven have used both methods. On the sampling, the reviewed study that had the least sampled members had 15 widows (article 22 in the table appendixes) while that with the largest set of members had 658, 022 individuals (article eight in the table appendixes). The methodologies used for data collection are as follows: interviews (11), questionnaires (3), SLR (2), Survey and demography (2), and the rest (probability study, review, narration, literature review and questionnaires, interview fieldwork, theoretical methods, and logo-therapy, examination and diagnostic interview, register, cross-sectional and longitudinal research methods, observation and longitudinal interview, electronic signals, multidimensional models, narratives and letter analysis as well as the grounded theory methods) were used once each.

The relevance of each article, to the topic words "widowhood, identity, Africa" revealed that (2) articles were rated Very Relevant (VR)- they focused on widowhood and identity (loss) in Africa, (8) articles were rated Moderately Relevant (MR)- they had either widowhood in Africa or identity (loss) in Africa, or had widowhood and identity (loss) in parts other than Africa, and finally (21) rated Slightly Relevant (SR)- they dealt with only one of the three aspects (widowhood, identity (loss) or Africa). One of the articles had its focus on widowers; it was not gauged. The thematic focus of each of the reviewed articles is shown in column eight, in the appendixed table.

Prevalence, theories used, challenges (facing widows/association with identity loss), and related interventions on widowhood and identity (loss). *Prevalence of widows*: From the review, in Sri Lanka "there are 60, 000 widows living in refugee camps" (Tribe & De Silva, 1999 p.186); in Zimbabwe widows in the population of women aged 15-49 increased from 3.5 to 4.2% to 7.5%, in 1994, 1999 and 2005/6 respectively. Additional data from 15 Sub-Saharan countries (Benin (2006), Congo/Brazzaville (2005), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (2007), Guinea (2005), Mali (2006), Namibia (2006/7), Niger (2006), Nigeria (2008), Rwanda (2005), Senegal (2005), Sierra Leone (2008), Tanzania (2004), Uganda (2006), Zambia (2007) and Zimbabwe (2005/6)), showed 5.03% of women between 15-49 being widowed (Peterman, 2012 p.544). This indicates the general prevalence in Africa.

Theories dealing with widows: As discussed in Potash (1986), the functionalist and structuralist theories (structures of rights, duties, and responsibilities of levirs, sons, and family (male and female)) have been used to shed light on matters affecting widows. However, these

theories have been challenged by feminist theories. Therefore, the functionalists, structuralists, and feminist theories are the dominant theories emerging in this review.

Challenges facing widows: due to gender and patriarchal systems, widows have more challenges than widowers (Sossou, 2002 p.205, and Amaduine 1987). These challenges can be grouped as follows:

1. *Cultural* (wife inheritance, grieving, gender inequality, witchcraft (Sossou, 2002 p.203, and Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007 p.78 (the *Ukuzila* practice dehumanizing widows)). 2. *Social* (loss of home and family) (Owen, 1996, and Sossou, 2002 p.206). 3. *Health* issues: HIV/AIDS (Agot et al, 2010 p.3); prevalence of HIV in a sample of 1,987 widows was 61.7% (uninherited), and 64.1% (inherited). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among widows in Rwanda (Schaal et al, 2011 p.1). 4. *Economical*: economic (loss of income/land), poverty (Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007 p.76), many widows living in abject poverty; Asset dis-inheritance, leading to poverty (Peterman, 2012 p.543 and Evans and Day, 2011). 5. *Psychological*:
mood anxiety disorders in widowhood are discussed by (Onrust & Cuijpers, 2006) while Ungar and Florian (2004) research the psychosocial adaption of widows. Valdimarsdottir et al. (2005) shed light on the aspect of bereavement and grieving.

The association of widow challenges and identity loss/ understanding identity loss: (Dutton et al., 2010; Gecas, 1982; Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2011), define identities as meanings attached to the self. The association derived from the review shows factors influencing/ contributing/ leading to diffused identity loss before marriage. These are the educational level (lack or change of professional base); cf loss of valued aspects of professional identity (Chreim, Williams & Hinings, 2007: Doolin, 2002); gender inequality (Owen, 1994); childhood betrothal and female genital mutilations; these ways dis-empower the girl, interfering with her identity (Sossou, 2002 p. 203). Then there are factors influencing/ contributing/ leading to diffused identity loss during the marriage. The main factor in this area is polygamy and lack of divorce rights (Sossou, 2002 p. 203 and Imam 1988). Finally, there are those factors influencing/ contributing/ leading to diffused identity after the loss after the death of a husband. Here, gender inequality described in Sossou, (2002 pp.202/3), ritual (Sossou, 2002 p.204; Korieh, 1996 (women doing evil to women); cultural reason for ritual (Sossou, 2002 p.205; Bremmer and Van Den Bosch, 1995), and economic deprivation (Sossou, 2002 p. 204; Nwoga, 1989 and Nzewi, 1989), are seen as the key factors.

Under the association of widowhood and identity (loss), various factors are seen as positively intervening. Among them are *church interventions:* Family Rehabilitation Centre's work on widows' needs and future rather than their living through the (identity) of their children (Tribe & De Silva, 1999 p188); help from the church, (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007 p.82) ((Sossou, 205; Amaduine, 1987), *constitution*; the constitution of Ghana (and of other African countries among them Kenya), has made specific provisions concerning the rights of all, including women
(Sossou, 2002 p. 207; cf Kenyan constitution; Bill of Rights), *empowerment of women through women groups* (cf. Women in Law and Development Africa (WiLDAF) in Zimbabwe, UN

Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Sossou, 2002 pp. 207/8 and Simon, (1990) quoted in Sossou, 2002). These findings shed light on the understanding of widows and identity (loss), the key concern of this study. In addition to the above the questions set at the start, were looked at with the review findings.

Findings in response to the study questions

1. What is the definition of widowhood? What is the definition of identity (loss)?
Widowhood defined. A widow is defined as any woman who has survived or outlived her spouse. It is a woman that has lost her husband or partner through death. It is a state that is determined by cohabitation, customary marriage, and marriage of ordinance (western type of monogamous marriage in a magistrate court or a church (Sossou, 2002 p.202).

Identity defined. Identity is expressed as a persistent sameness with oneself and as the conception of the individual self in relation to others (social identity) (Erikson, 1959/80). In a further discussion on identity, Kopytoff (1990 p.80) brings in the concept of existential identity (identities based on who the person is, e.g., feminine or masculine), and (role-based identity (those that are based on what a person does). Role-based identities are more negotiable than those that are existential; some of these last categories are culturally defined and the individual is left with little choice-they are intrinsic and immanent (Silverschmidt, 1999 p.23). Friedan, (1963) in discussing the Western woman's existential identity, calls it the *feminine mystique.* Widowhood is associated with both identities: existential and role-based, pre, during, and post-marriage era, and after the husband's demise.

In discussing identity's cryptic nature, Erikson, (1959/80 p.32) and Jacobson-Widding, (1983 p.14), bring on board the identity crisis, explaining the mystic nature of traversing different human stages of development. This is linked to what widows go through depending on their ages and the identity of their human developmental stage. This brings forth social identity (Goodenough, 1965 and Oyewumi, 2005 p.129), feminist identity (Matlin, 1999 p.123), and alternative gender identities (Oyewumi, 2005 p.140 and Chambers-Schiller, 1984). This last category includes nuns (and priests), bachelors (spinsters), and widows (widowers). Some view these alternative identities as incomplete; representing an unachieved journey toward the mature identity of a married person (Oyewumi, 2005 p.140). Identity is therefore an integral component of the human person, determining and being determined by the state the person is in, in this case, widowhood.

2. In what thematic contexts are the two variables discussed? Widowhood and identity (loss) are discussed under varied fields among them social welfare and justice that incorporate feminine and gender studies (Peterman, 2012; Walsh, 2005; and Malungo, 2005). In this discussion widow inheritance and/or levirate marriage is portrayed as a social marginalization endeavour that reduces the woman, and in this case the widow, to the level of an object at a man's disposal. This position is however challenged by Kirwen (1979 pp.116/7), who while discussing Sukuma Customs for the care of widows, shows the power of the widow to choose whether to be inherited or not and even when she is to be inherited, whether to engage in sex or

not. This field also engages a human rights discussion. The Widows without Rights Conference Declaration (2001), supported by the different African nations' constitutions (Ghanaian 1994 and Kenya's 2010), as well as the various women groups such as Women in Law and Development Africa (Sossou, 2002 p.207; Ashworth, 1995 and Rao, 1995), show the woman suffering human rights violations in the name of culture: violence in the home, harsh and punitive widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, forced childhood marriages and disinheritance of wives, daughters and harmful traditional practices (EWD, 2001).

Widowhood and identity loss are also discussed in health studies concerning HIV/AIDS prevalence (Walsh, (2005) and Majola, 2014), PTSD (Schaal, 2011), Cancer (Valdimarsdottir et al. 2004 and 2005), reproductive health challenges (Coleman et al, 2006) and mental health and depression (Johnson et al. (2009) and Bennet (1977). The focus has however mainly been on widowhood; there is hardly any mention of identity, though it is hypothesized that with terminal ailments, changes in role identity occur.

Widowhood and identity loss are also discussed in developmental studies (in demographics and economics) (Peterman 2012), and also in the field of history (Mutongi, 2007). In conclusion, widowhood is discussed in various fields ranging from health, psychology, and social and developmental matters. The fields of health and psychology have the largest number of articles addressing the issue; it is therefore a gap that sociology is called to address more.

3. How are the two variables associated? In the fields above, where the two variables (widowhood and identity (loss) are discussed, there is no deliberate association (between the two), hindering conclusive findings on the co-relation, and hence necessitating further research. However, 'Bridewealth, identity and social value' discussed in Hakansson (1988:20 in Silberschmidt, 1999 pp.86-90), and 'Cross-sex bonds, identity, and social value' in Hakansson (1994:516); and Silberschmidt, (1999 p.90), show a relationship between social value and identity. These two discussions bring in marriage as a base that determines a woman's role-based identity, and the African woman's existential identity. Bridewealth and sex, in addition to childbearing and motherly roles, show a strong link to the identity of the woman. Since these factors are linked to marriage and identity, it is hypothesized that they are linked to widowhood.

4. What methodologies are used to discuss and analyze the two variables and their association? In the articles discussed, both the quantitative and qualitative (and at times a combination of the two), are used. However, a bias towards the qualitative is seen. Nevertheless, it was challenging to identify the research design in some articles, except through the research questions and objectives as well as the samples and methods used. Depending on the research design and research topic, samples were sought ranging from 2 to 658,022; all being widows and widowers. The research data collection tools include interviews (they are the most preferred having been used in 14 of the 33 articles reviewed), questionnaires, Systematic Literature Review, biographical narrations, medical examinations, as well as observation methods.

5. What were the results of the findings? From the SLR (a) the prevalence of widows is at about 3 and 5% (b) widows face challenges and identity loss (c) there is an association between

the two variables though not discussed overtly in the articles reviewed (d) there are intervening factors to mitigate the challenges (e) that there need to be further researches on the area of widowhood in Sub-Saharan Africa.

6. What are the attributes linked to widowhood? In Africa, widowhood practices are closely tied to cultural and traditional beliefs about death, ghosts, inheritance, feminine roles, family structure, and family relationships (Sossou, 2002 p.207). Widowhood brings intense grief, is seen as a course of death, and brings poverty and family disintegration through fights over inheritance (Rosenblatt and Nkosi, 2007). Widowhood is continuously increasing (Peterman, 2012, p. 544).

7. What are the attributes linked to identity (loss)? In the African context, women find identity in marriage (Mutongi, 2007 pp.141/169; Herskovits, (1938 pp. i, 319-22; and Strobel, 1982 pp.120-121). This discourse dictates the view of African society and influences the woman before and after the death of the husband, thus influencing the state of widowhood.

Limitations

The SLR was conducted in a disciplined manner. Nevertheless, limitations emerged. The study limited the search process to journals available through the Tangaza University library system (EBSCOhost/Academic Search Premier, Taylor, and Francis, Google Scholar, Oxford University Journals, and JSTOR journals). Other databases are available, but no articles under the specified conditions were found. The inclusion of journals from other universities would have added more information to the study.

Given the diversity of cultures influencing identity (loss) and the universality of widowhood, an inclusion of sources and perspectives from cultures outside Africa in the search had to be included to enrich the study. The methodology used and the findings of the review were subjected to the discretion of the reviewer who decided whether the article used the quantitative, qualitative, or both methods. This decision was informed by among other things research questions and tools used. The use of set tool kits would have guided the study differently and perhaps brought out variegated findings. A focus on either the qualitative or the quantitative empirical studies would have allowed a deeper understanding. As a guide to scholars interested in the two areas in the future, a multi-culturally based study focusing on widows either done in each of the cultures singly or as a comparison, even when these cultures are African, shall add more value to the study. More work is needed, looking at best practices in empowering widows in Africa. An integral empowerment process for the girl child is needed to enhance gender parity, to enhance development. In addition to SLR, more tools need to be developed in social sciences.

Conclusion

SLR shows that identity loss and widowhood are discussed across cultures within Africa, but not as exhaustively as needed, compared to the European world. It also shows that different disciplines are concerned with the variables and within them different contextual and thematic

settings. Identity has been discussed and continues to draw further discussions. On its part, widowhood is as old as humankind. The discussion on widows in the African context takes root in 1900 (based on the available literature). This is not to say that earlier than this there were no issues of widowhood. However, there appears to have been culturally accepted ways of dealing with the challenge, in the traditional African context: levirate and wife-inheritance. The articles show that the association between widowhood and identity loss has not been exhaustively studied; each has been explored differently. When dealing with widowhood, the bias has been to show the tribulations facing the widow and the cultural malpractices, human rights decadence, and widow deprivation of property. On identity (loss), the focus has been to demonstrate existential and role-based identities. This has been supported by the different identities in human development, and the recent feminist view of gender-based minority communities. Therefore, a study of the association between widowhood and identity loss is needed.

The first question on the definitions of the two variables widowhood and identity (loss), sought to clarify the understanding of the uses and the implications of the terms, detailing the discourses that emanate from the overt and covert uses. On the part of widowhood, Taves (1981) presented the definitions as well as the attributes that are associated with the term. This informed the study on the qualitative significance of widows and enlightened them on the magnitude of the problem as well as on the preceding as well as succeeding eventualities associated with the state.

On the part of identity (loss), findings based on the definitions and attributes helped align our thinking on the impact of the phenomenon, detailing how we are part of it through being its constructs, and how it influences individuals and communities and is in turn influenced by the same.

An analysis of the association between the two brings to play a link that calls for further research to understand the causal-effectual relationship.

The second question addressed the contexts within which the two are discussed. This discussion is within the field of Social Transformation, within which, the human being is the main beneficiary and goal, while he/she is the main actor/protagonist in the process. With this understanding, therefore, and with the realization that woman is integral in the development, forming half of the human resource, it is important that a deliberate inclusion rather than one that takes things for granted, is executed. The widow, the representation per excellence of the tribulations facing the woman and hence a representation of the bug ailing the society, is deemed an ideal and realistic entry point into the endeavour. The findings from this SLR hence prepare the ground for further research in the area.

The SLR investigated the fields within which the two variables are discussed. The varied fields and disciplines show the intensity of the issue and the hypothesized impact that it has in sociology and hence in social transformation. It also showed the continued need to discuss the matter further in an attempt to gauge its impact on social development. The methodologies used were borrowed from medical science. Further adoption and adaptation of this into social sciences, though having its limitations should guide the development of social science models

that shall befit the discipline more allowing it to further its scientific investigations. These tools shall help analyse the quantitative and qualitative empirical studies better and hence add to knowledge allowing for societal improvement.

Several directions for future research emerged from the SLR. First among them is the need to conduct field research on the association between widowhood and identity loss that would in turn show the impact of identity loss on the woman leading to the type of widowhood that the woman goes through. This shall inform scholars in the field of human development, both from a sociological and psychological discipline on the precautionary measures to be undertaken in order to mitigate the devastating effects. This shall shed light on scholars of developmental studies and social transformation in the areas to include while endeavouring to integrally empower societies.

While interacting with the widow, shortly after the loss and in the long run, the psycho-pathological incidences that appear, need redress. As the psychologist, social transformer, and psychologist travel with the individuals and the groups that widows and other marginalized women, they are to be informed of the causes of the present type of widowhood, they are dealing with. In their endeavour, they become better informed when accompanying the victims and the communities around them on the short and long-term solutions to their challenges. In empowering the individuals, the communities both immediate and distant, the entire society becomes supported.

The SLR has explored and revealed definitions and attributes related to widowhood and identity loss. It has assisted in shedding light on further studies needed on the association between widowhood and identity loss. In so doing it has contributed to showing that a systematic understanding of this association is possible and vital. The SLR, though having its origins in the medical field, has shown its contribution to the fields of social science.

This, therefore, encourages future researchers to make better use of the method.

As an integral human concern, the marginalization of the woman, here represented by the widow, continues to elicit global cries calling for continued studies on how to involve and better engage the woman in development. A continuous downplaying of the role of women in development continues to have devastating effects in the developing world and our case in Africa, hindering the process of social transformation. A deliberate endeavour to understand her contribution and enhance it shall not only go a long way in empowering our communities but shall re-direct human resources into cooperation (identified with the woman), rather than the continuous competition commonly identified with the male species (Kitetu, 2014), thus leading to a more formidable society.

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