**Title of the paper:**   **Discourse Analysis of Widow Psychosocial Experiences and their Self-Identity: A focus on socio-cultural experiences of African widows**

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## Abstract

Widowhood is an integral loss having devastating effects, leading to identity disruption. Widowhood hinders the individual's attempts to contribute towards social transformation, as the widow's voice remains subdued. This study set out to explore socio-cultural experiences of African widows, within the wider study whose focus was on widow psychosocial experiences and their self-identity. It looks at widow coping mechanisms and suggestions on how best to improve their lives. The study employs the Discourse Analysis framework, chosen due to its ability to address individual, social, and psychological contexts of the individual through the use of language. It uses the qualitative approach based on a socio-constructionist epistemology. The study site is Ngong Sub County. Through the snowball method, the study reached out to 42 participants from 18 out of the 42 Kenyan counties, in addition to five non-Kenyan participants. Conducted interviews generated widow discourse that was subjected to thematic analysis. From the demographics, relationship with caregivers and educators influenced the participants' education, professionalism, earning and subsequent role-based identities. Ten categories of widow psychosocial experiences emerged: socio-cultural, spiritual, economic, death and loss, health, education, human rights, illiteracy, psychological and sexed bodies. The socio-cultural experiences had the largest frequency of entries hence the focus of this paper. Relating to these experiences, widows challenge the societal stereotype beliefs and attitudes detrimental to their positive living. They struggle to re-construct their identities through positive inner attitudes and positive social relationships. They appeal for awareness on widow matters on the part of those who interact with them. To Government and to organisations they seek to be listened to and to be granted a conducive environment upon which to rebuild themselves, in order to positively contribute to Social Transformation. (281 words)

**Key words: Widowhood, identity, Discourse Analysis, socio-cultural experiences, Kenya, Social Transformation**

## Introduction

Consulted literature on African widows revealed a concentration on their socio-cultural challenges (Ambassa-Shisanya, 2007; Mutongi, 2007). From these explorations, unique negative experiences that widows go through, underpinning ways in which the society is unfair, featured (Koran-Okrah, 2015, Rosenblatt, & Nkosi, 2007). In these studies, ways in

which widows cope and eventually deal with these issues failed to standout. In this way, the widow was portrayed as a voiceless silent victim awaiting holocaust.

Studies on identity (Berzonsky and colleagues, 2007; Kopytoff, 2005; Sharma, & Sharma, 2010), failed to show a concentration on widows. Within this lack, no attempt was done to identify widow categories and how this relates to their identity and experiences. The present study, set out to relate widow psychosocial experiences with her self-identity, hence address this gap.

The focus of this paper is on the socio-cultural experiences that African widows go through. This study is part of a broader research that sought to explore widow psychosocial experiences and their self-identity. The choice of the socio-cultural experiences is based on the findings within which 175 out of 706 entries (24.78%) were in this category. This revealed the importance of socio-cultural issues to the widow as expressed in her discourse.

The study chose to concentrate on widowhood. This is because, widow prevalence among women aged 15-49 years is given at 5.03% (Peterman, 2012), revealing a significant number of women undergoing or set to undergo this phenomenon. This prevalence goes to nearly 50% for those above 65 years (Lichtenstein and colleagues, 1996; Michael and colleagues, 2003). In addition to this prevalence, over 15% of households are managed by widows (ANSD, 2013). This means that the children that are in these households depend on the widow, showing the significance of widowhood in society. With this therefore, since widowhood is rated as that integral loss (Matlin, 2004; Lichtenberg, 2016; Vijay, 2010), more devastating than divorce, how widows cope and the suggestions they give on ways to better their lives are of importance to social transformation. This link was sparse in literature hence the need for this study.

The concentration of this study brings to play the social as well as the cultural aspects affecting the African widow. "Widowhood practices are closely tied to cultural and traditional beliefs about death, ghosts, inheritance, feminine roles, family structure and family relationship" (Miruka, and colleagues, 2015, p. 240). Based on this realization, cultural issues as well as social ones are key to the understanding of the widow experiences. It is based on this that the present paper concentrates on socio-cultural issues.

In this paper the socio-cultural experiences are realised through analysis of widow discourse. Within the widow socio-cultural experiences, her coping strategies are given prominence, as well as the suggestions she gives on ways to improve the lives of widows. The role that others are meant to play to help her improve her life is also accentuated. The findings of the study challenge the misconstrued stereotypical understanding of the African widow. Hence the results help enrich gender studies in relation to the widow. This grants voice to the widow as she tells social transformers how best she can be assisted to contribute to societal development.

**Methods**

This study, which was part of a larger study whose concentration was on psychosocial experiences, sought to explore the socio-cultural experiences relating to the self-identity of the African widow. This qualitative study, worked within the socio-constructionist epistemology allowing the researcher and the participants to adequately and conveniently represent their world through theory (Keating & Porta, 2008). This epistemology also allowed the researcher's reflexivity as he acted and allowed the world of the participants to act on him (Taylor, 2011). Discourse Analysis framework, a close study of language in use (Taylor, 2001) guided the study. The Faucaldian dichotomy guided in the exploration of the socio-cultural widow experiences while the Critical Discourse Analysis dichotomy helped the exploration on the subjectivity and the individuality of the participant (Gee, 2011). Finally the Discursive Psychology addressed the emotions of the participants (Given, 2008) in relation to their socio-cultural experiences. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) informed by Discourse Analysis tools allowed for the analysis of the 42 interviews from widows that participated in the study.

*Participants*

The study employed the snowball technique (Gleshne & Peshkin, 1992) to arrive at the 42 participants. At the initial stage the study contacted nine widows, previously known to the researcher through local women groups. After the interviews, they linked the study to other 33 participants. Five research assistants were involved to enable reaching out to the participants. All participants had to be below 65 years of age. Participants were living in Ngong Sub County, the research site.

*Procedure*

Informed consent and demographic information were received from the 42 participants. Interviews were conducted following the set research objectives of the larger study. These sought the widow psychosocial experiences under which socio-cultural experiences featured. Also the widow self-identity issues were sought. Coping strategies as well as suggestions on how to improve the lives of widows were explored.

*Treatment of data*

Audio recordings of the interviews was transcribed and notes taken after the interviews included. Data was coded removing any information on names and locations that would lead to revealing the identity of the participants. This data was subjected to the six areas of Discourse Analysis, namely, conversations, discourses, figured worlds, intertextuality, situated meanings and social languages. These allowed the study to identify what emerged in the widow discourse. Also seven tasks of Discourse analysis namely significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems were employed.

Data analysis was informed by thematic analysis from Braun and Clarke (2006) and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). Computer assisted qualitative data analysis System-NVivo12 software (CAQDAS, 2014) was used in the coding and in the analysis. Dependability and confirmability, equivalent to reliability and neutrality in quantitative research (Creswell, 2007), was used in the entire process.

**Demographics**

Forty two widows participated in this study. Though all participants lived in Ngong Sub County at the time of the study, 37 were originally from Kenya's 18 out of the 47 Counties. This showed a well-distributed representation of Kenya. An additional three participants came from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea and Somali respectively. Only two participants were from Greece and Italy, though they had lived in Kenya for over 30 years. The socio-cultural experiences, emerge as a strong part of the African participants. Other factors that were in the demography are age at which each was widowed, and the present age of the participants. Their level of education, occupation, and the levels of income also appear. In addition, the type of housing that they live in as well as the location of the house is captured. This information is represented in Table 1.

<div align="center">**Table 1 Demographic data of the participants**</div>

| Variable | Frequency of occurrence | Valid percentage |
|---|---|---|
| **Age at which the participant was widowed** | | |
| 51-60 years | 5 | 11.90% |
| 41-50 years | 11 | 26.19% |
| 31-40 years | 12 | 28.57% |
| 21-30 years | 11 | 26.19% |
| Below 20 years | 3 | 7.14% |
| | | |
| **Present age group of the participant** | | |
| Between 31-40 years | 9 | 21.43% |
| Between 41-50 years | 17 | 40.47% |
| Between 51-60 years | 6 | 14.29% |
| Above 60 years | 3 | 7.14% |
| Unknown[1] | 1 | 2.38% |
| | | |
| **Participant's level of education** | | |
| Primary | 12 | 28.57% |
| Secondary | 9 | 21.43% |
| Post-secondary "certificate" | 8 | 19.04% |
| Diploma | 6 | 14.29% |
| Bachelors "degree" | 6 | 14.29% |
| Masters "degree" | 1 | 2.38% |
| | | |
| **Occupation of the participant** | | |
| Casual labour | 9 | 21.43% |
| Low cadre support staff | 5 | 11.90% |
| Middle cadre support staff | 6 | 14.29% |
| High cadre support staff | 2 | 4.76% |
| Low cadre professional | 3 | 7.14% |
| Middle cadre professional | 3 | 7.14% |
| High cadre professional | 2 | 4.76% |
| Business | 12 | 28.57% |
| | | |
| **Levels of income of the participant's household (per month)** | | |
| Above 100,000Kshs | 5 | 11.90% |
| 50,000Kshs - 99,000Kshs | 6 | 14.29% |
| 20,000 Kshs - 49,000Kshs | 6 | 14.29% |
| 10,000Kshs – 19,999 Kshs | 14 | 33.33% |
| Below 10,000Kshs | 11 | 26.19% |
| | | |
| **Type of housing of the participant** | | |
| Own house permanent | 14 | 33.33% |

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[1]

     [?]    These approximations in relation to age, including the entry under "unknown" emanate from participants whose interviews did not respond to the question on age. Age was inferred in eight of the cases, while no inference was possible in one case.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Own house semi-permanent | 13 | 30.95% |
| Rental house permanent | 3 | 7.14% |
| Rental house semi-permanent | 11 | 26.19% |
| No given/inferred response | 1 | 2.38% |
| | | |
| **Location of the participant's house** | | |
| Upper middle class locality | 5 | 11.90% |
| Middle class quarters | 19 | 45.24% |
| Low class quarters | 18 | 42.86% |
| **Total** | **42** | **100%** |

## Results

Results revealed ten categories of widow psychosocial experiences as shown in Figure 1.
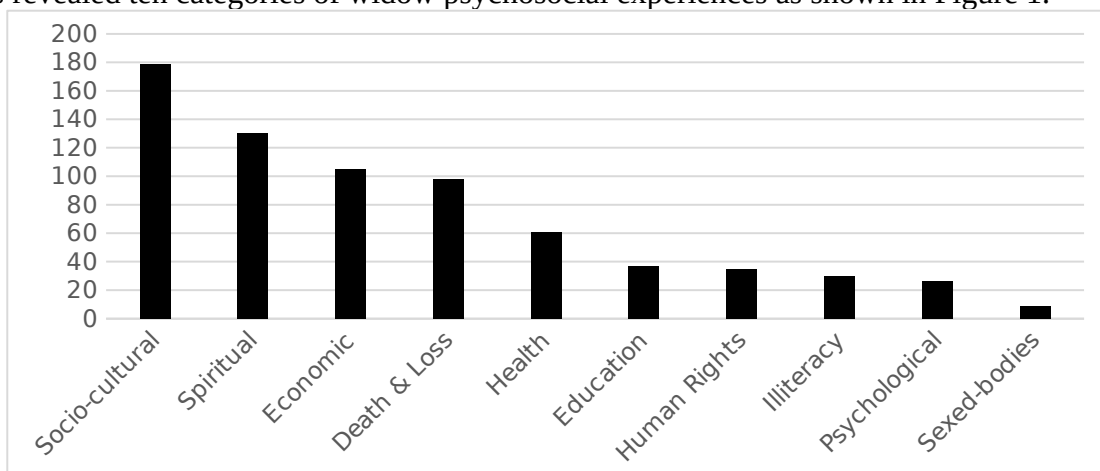


Figure 1 Widow psychosocial experiences

Of the 706 psychosocial entries that were derived from the data, 175 (24.78%) focussed on socio-cultural experiences, showing the prominent role it plays in widow discourse. With this therefore, this paper explores the African widow socio-cultural experiences relating them to her identity.

The questions posed were, "What experiences have you gone through pre, during and after marriage?"; "What experiences have you gone through as a widow?" The responses from the participants brought out the themes of ethnic community, family ties, friends and workmates, polygamy, re-marriage and witchcraft.

**Sociol-cultural themes emerging from widow experiences**

Table 2 Widow psychosocial experiences related to socio-cultural issues

| Themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes | Number of entries |
|---|---|
| Ethnic community | 7 |
| Family ties | 5 |
| Family of in laws | 22 |
| Brother in law | 4 |
| Father in law | 5 |
| Mother in law | 11 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Rejection | 14 |
| Sister in law | 3 |
| Nuclear family | 14 |
| Family of origin | 8 |
| Father | 12 |
| Mother | 19 |
| Siblings | 15 |
| Friends & workmates | 11 |
| Polygamy | 11 |
| Re-marriage | 12 |
| Witchcraft | 2 |
| **Total** | **175** |

*Family ties*

These ties incorporate the themes of family of in-laws, nuclear family and family of origin. Angy who lost her husband in her late twenties, leaving her at the mercy of the in-laws, had to be supported by her mother and the brothers, "My mother is my mentor...and also my brother...every time we were together." The same is expressed by Bensie who like Angy, relied on the training she had had from childhood, "My mum was very patient to just show me how to wash the dishes and practically she could show me but both of them [mother and father] played a big role and helped a lot in shaping who I am today."

These ties inculcated values in the growing child. "...dad who was empowering us... he wanted us to be strong and firm so that we can always take care of ourselves.... Dad always used to say most of us the bond between us siblings was very important and the sharing... (Finly, a middle level professional in a faith based organization)". They also became even more essential in times of intense challenges.

> I had a lot of family support even with the preparations for the burial and even after with even my brothers they were always there for me and had been always there for me and I must also say even if it is a study you are doing you have also been there for me….. (Bensie)

These family ties are at times interfered with by the family of the in-laws. "But my father-in-law hates me, he does not want to see me and he does not want to speak to me but I tell God, the bad thing is for me to insult that old man (Oila)". Oila a low cadre widow struggled after her husband died of long-term alcoholism. Nevertheless, this misunderstanding with the in-laws should not be taken as the norm, "...my father in law, when my husband passed on, he used to come to visit us, to see the grandchildren, even when he had something he would say take this ... so when he died, I saw that, another problem again (Bilian)". Unlike the earlier participants, Bilian had had an amicable relation with her father-in-law who in turn supported her in her initial years of widowhood. Zuk, though far from her in-laws shares of the importance of this relationship as she expresses her positive attitude on being married and accepted by the in-laws,"My family was his family and his was mine (Zuk)." These family ties start long before widowhood and play a significant role in widowhood. This is followed by the role played by family and friends.

### Friends and workmates

Friends and workmates feature significantly in socio-cultural widow experiences. Zuk expresses the role played by friends when the husband died through a tragic road accident.

> They [friends] were very supportive. They were very very supportive...I could not believe the crowd that came up from my work place. They were very many and I was very encouraged. They were very very many...cooks came and everybody. They were very very many. During the mourning period they would come and do the house chores every day. Even when we came back from the burial, they were there waiting for us in the bus station (Zuk)

However, friends can also be of another category. "...come to friends, whom I thought they were friends, (laughter and sigh) you know I realised, women who used to call no longer call. And I realised it is me calling (Casey)". From these text those who were friends abandoned her as soon as she lost the husband. Casey is a middle level professional having a steady income. She lost her husband from alcoholic related complications and is left alone with her daughters. The next theme that features is re-marriage.

### Re-marriage

Among the participants that the study interviewed, re-marriage carried with it several complications:

> Yea it's one married woman who told me that...Once your children are big you can remarry and I'm thinking like first that is not in the bible secondly you just don't go... so that day I was angry… I broke down I was hurt, why are these people not sensitive to us … (Bensie).

Bensie, loses her husband in her early thirties, leaving her with two children, the eldest being 14 years. She seeks solace in the church where she meets an elderly woman who suggests re-marriage. She is hurt by the insensitivity in the words of this married woman. It appears she expected married elderly women to be more empathic and understanding to widows. Rather than a caring statement of concern on the condition of the Bensie, the woman gives suggestions. This does not augur well with the participant. There is an implication from the participant that she seeks to be listened to, rather than being given advice. With listening, the society would better understand the position of the widow:

> Because we have heard of many cases you find that a person has rushed to go and get married. For example I would have rushed to go and get married, I would have arrived in that place, [and] I have been left children who are in fact eight. There is no one to take care of them. And there is no one that I would have said I am going to his place when I have eight children. Then the second thing you may be married by this man and he may decide to start [sexually] using these children. Now he may make even the lives of these children to be ruined. And even you as the mother will have no future. Because there in that house there will be chaos. Now perhaps a corpse may be found, divorce may result. There may be many problems. I usually pray a lot that a person can at least stand and even if she will get married but she should take time to first think. Not just to rush since you can meet you are running then you fall into temptation (Patsy).

Patsy was married as a second wife and the number of children mentioned are hers and those of the previous wife to her husband. She is left in custody of some rental houses, hence some income. She loathes the idea of re-marriage citing fear of misuse of the inheritance by another man.

*Polygamy*

This theme also featured. "... the time he married me by the way he was a person who had a wife and children (Patsy). Patsy, a young secondary school leaver is married into a home as a second wife. She justifies her getting in to that marriage as a second wife.

> ...the wife was going (away), even she wanted to leave, and now my husband used to ask her when you leave whom do you leave the children with? Now the wife used to point at me...I liked children and I never liked to see a child suffering or lacking peace and I am there.

In this case, the first wife does not challenge the coming of the second wife but rather moves on into other relationships. The family of Patsy's new husband also appear to condone and in fact welcome the new wife. In this new relationship, caring for children appears the main purpose for the marriage.

Later on in widowhood, Patsy stands her ground and fights for her family's wealth. She is able to relate well with the in-laws and takes care of both her children and those of the first wife. The intricacies of polygamy among the African families call for further studies.

*Ethnicity, witchcraft and rejection*

These themes are discussed together as they portray a co-relation as they feature in the widow discourse and so are discussed together. "...I got married to someone who was not from my tribe so that also was an issue so it was an issue to others but my mum kept on telling that even if he is from another tribe and you are getting a, b, c, d just try it (Finly)". From this text, marrying from a different ethnic community is not welcome by some members of the family. With ethnic rifts, the woman is easily blamed for witchcraft and rejection ensues. When the woman attempts to get closer to the family through the children, she is suspected of intending to harm the children through sorcery. With these, she is set aside, "... I felt so low and as if I didn't belong to that family so I even told my father that I feel like I didn't belong to my husband's family. I feel rejection, I feel like I don't belong there (Casey)".

This section on widow psychosocial experiences related to socio-cultural issues has looked at family ties, friends and workmates as they relate to the widow. It has also looked at re-marriage, polygamy and ethnicity as affecting the widow. In the end, it has addressed how ethnicity leads to accusations of sorcery, leading to the rejection of the widow. The next section delves into the link between identity and socio-cultural experiences.

**Socio-cultural experiences related to widow self-identity**

Two categories of identity emerge from literature. These are the existential and the role-based identities (Kopytoff, 2005). In relation to the widow, the first category addresses the participant's girlhood, adolescence and young adulthood. Also the state of widowhood is addressed under "alternative gender identities (Oyewumi, 2005, p.140). These identities are rated as being incomplete. This identity is also referred to as lingering identity (Burke, 2006; Umberson & Chen, 1994). Finally, under existential identity, feminine identity is discussed by McCann and Kim (2013) as they present Judith Butler's "feminine mystique" This term is associated with the different roles played by the woman's body, hence a link with the role-based identities.

The second category features the roles widows acquire and how these roles define who the participants are. Within the role-based identities, social identity (Oyewumi, 2005) as well as marital identities (Watson & McLanahan, 2009) feature. The Chicago panel gives six social positions: spouse, parent, employee, relative, friend, and group member. This is complemented by the New Haven panel that adds the roles of student, organizational and church member, and neighbour (Lutters & Ackerman, 1996; Thoits, 1991).

*Socio-cultural widow experiences related to existential identity*

From the data, existential identity does not feature except where Casey says, "My dad also is the one who showed me how to put on earrings". This is a case of differentiation (psychic maturity) (Vancea, 2013) that is related to the participant seeing and verbalising her feminine self-view. This differentiation is seen later as she stands her ground as a widow to fight for her inheritance that the brothers-in-law attempt to distribute among themselves soon after the husband's burial.

Passivity is associated with disempowerment in relation to marital and later to lingering identity, as seen in the words of Kutlie who despite her secondary school education, did fails to pursue a career and relies solely on the husband's provisions.

> It is painful because I was used to everything being done for me. Everything even these clothes of mine since he married me I did not know how to go to the market or do anything. He was a person who would buy for me even panties. Everything even bra was brought to me and it was put for me there.

This provision though appearing comfortable leads towards a dependency that at widowhood, is detrimental.

In relation to widowhood, looked at as part of alternative gender identity, Casey shares, "So there are times I ask myself, if only you are sincerely considered a widow when you turn 60, then who am I?" This question is pertinent to the widow participants. Later on she repeats the concern, "Where are they [widows]? Yah, I think because they, I I feel as a social being, the the society that I belong to which is part of the government, should help me understand where I belong". This is a continued concern for this paper.

*Socio-cultural widow experiences related to role-based identities*

**Table 3 Distribution of role-based identities**

| Category | Role played | Number of entries |
|---|---|---|
| Socio-Cultural | Daughter | 32 |
| | Friend | 10 |
| | Wife | 15 |
| | Mother | 7 |
| | Social being/person | 14 |
| Occupational | Student | 11 |
| | Worker: Employee/business lady | 10 |
| Spiritual | Church member | 5 |
| | Spiritual being/person | 10 |
| **Total** | | **114** |

*Socio-cultural role identities* occupy the largest number of entries in Table 3. The entries total 78 out of 114. This shows the significance that these roles play in widow discourse. On being a daughter, Finly enjoys the relationship she had with the father. "I can say my childhood was good, the way I was brought up and I can say I had a dad who was empowering us". This shows the value of a parent to a daughter, and positively contributes to the roles she plays at widowhood. This point is juxtaposed with the feelings of a lost parent as shared by Kutlie,

> ...my teenage was not easy… because just when I just finished my fourth form my dad died! And when he died to me that was like the end of my furthering my studies because with relatives we had that is my uncles all they had was for me to get a job to support...

The death or even just the absence of a parent leads to a lack of basic needs. In the case of Kutlie, her education stops despite the presence of the relatives, a lack that intensifies in her widowhood.

*Marriage life and the role of being a wife and a mother* also fall under socio-cultural role identities. Being a wife is seen as synonymous to being a mother. So these two are hence presented in the same text. "I got my first born, and marriage life let me say it was neither easy nor bad. It was moderate (Pyulet)". The same synonymy is seen in Hatly, "When I was married I was married in the year 1988. I was blessed with my first child called first born son." The participants share on marriage and immediately transit to the issues of children. These two participants have below secondary school education and hence no professionalism. For them, more than those participants from higher cadres, children play a significant role in assisting them have an identity in marriage, and later in widowhood.

However, there are some participants whose professionalism is interfered with by the transition into marriage. Lyna says, "...I got married to my late husband. So my contract ended and I had just got married so I left now employment and now started my life with my husband and now this time round now without a job..." She explains the challenges of having to financially depend on someone else; she was not used to it since she had earlier been earning. From this sharing, socio-cultural role identities take preference over occupational ones.

At widowhood, socio-cultural roles are interfered with. Casey shares how they had *family friends* when the husband was alive. Nevertheless, after she loses the husband, "I realised people moved away...and it is like I end up being so so much alone." Loneliness hits her since the friends move away. Earlier on under widow psychosocial experiences of death and loss, the immense loneliness that the participants go through was presented. Also under widow psychosocial experiences related to socio-cultural issues, relationship with family and friends was looked at. These support the "moving away" that Casey talks about. With this movement, the participant's identities in relation to socio-cultural roles changes. She loses some friends who were part of their life when the husband was alive. Since she is a *social being,* she moves on to get new friends that accept her in her present condition.

In this new relationships with friends, the participant has to be careful. Casey shared how the friends attempted to take advantage of her. "..my husband's friends...they come in so strongly, they think it is now them inheriting (laughter)..." The male friends come in attempting to have sexual relationships with the participant. Also, Milny shared how one can be bitter based on her unmet expectations in these new relationships. "You begin to get bitter when you think that people should help you and there is nothing good in the help that they will help you and they need to understand that…" This appears to affect more the non-professional participants such as Milny. The participants have to adapt to new changing socio-cultural roles.

There are those participants however, who choose to interact more with their children. These children are encouraged to start taking up more responsibilities in the absence of the husband. The participants seek deeper relationship with the children,

> And I told her [daughter] you know you are the next of kin, in these shares, if I am not there you like it or not you will go for these meetings. And I asked do you feel, her do you think you can go for this meeting on Friday? And she told me now you are there, Go! (Laughter)

Similar interactions are presented by Metrin who at widowhood, is left with no assets and has to go out in search of casual jobs to cater for her financial needs. She shares of her new relationship with her daughter as both go out in search of sustenance. This time they assist each other financially.

Now at this time, this girl of mine had been employed this work of sweeping the road and that work has stood. Now the hope is *githeri* (a mixture of boiled maize and beans) there. And that other one has no work but she is married. Now she is just like me the way when I was with my husband I was being given. At some other time if she sees a little she throws at me. If she is not given a lot, she does her own things.

Both the mother and the daughter are however not so financially stable. None was able to pursue education properly and hence move to professionalism. Therefore they depend on casual jobs. Their socio-cultural relationship has shifted from mother-daughter only and added on friendship. Both existential and role-based identities are therefore linked to widowhood as seen from the discourse. The role-based identities however appear to take precedence over the existential identities.

**Discussion**

This section is divided into five parts. The first concentrates on the demographics, while the second focusses on the stereotypical beliefs related to the widow. The third part discusses the possible effects of the stereotypical positions. Following this is the fourth part that concentrates on the realizations emerging from the study. The fifth part discusses suggestions on ways to improve the lives of widows.

*Demographics*

From the demographics, the level of education and the subsequent occupation feature. The parent plays a significant role in the education of the child. A parent that is educated has higher chances of facilitating and encouraging their children to pursue education (Oguta, 2013). Similarly, educators are also significant (Somani, 2017). In this way, parental and the educator's role influence the girl's education. As the girl moves into young adulthood and into subsequent marriage, the occupation she undertakes, determines her earnings which in turn influences the marriage partner she desires. On this note, education and income become a determining factor on the choice of partner (King & Allen, 2009). Hence, relationship with parents, education, income and choice of marriage partner are related. According to the study, these factors also influence the participant's category of identity as well as her future widowhood.

*Socio-cultural stereotypes*

In relation to socio-cultural stereotypes related to widows, several labels feature. Widows are taken to be social victims. They lack an identity other than that acquired through marriage (Parker, 2016). In this view, they lack a culture save for that of the husband and of the families they are married to. Based on this they are not meant to have a voice after the death of the husband (Radzilani, 2010). In addition, widows are considered perpetual beggars who need charity emanating from their "poverty stricken" state (Moring, 2010, p. 215). With this they are taken to be in a constant search for men, as soon as the husband is dead. This is seen as the only way towards their financial sustenance. Even the in-laws move in fast to salvage whatever resources their brother or son left since the widow has no capacity to manage the resources. Also, widows are taken to be promiscuous. Now that the husband who was providing sexual satisfaction is no more, they need a man to speedily fulfil their sexual desires (Mahy and colleagues, 2016). Based on these wants on the part of the widow, levirate relationships, wife inheritance and re-marriage (Ojore, 2013; Okonda, 2017; Varun, 2013), present themselves as the called for remedies. In addition to the above stereotypes, widows are also taken to be murderers to their husbands or at least accomplices in the cause that lead to husbands dying, "widows are still accused of being responsible for their husband's death" (Jamadar and colleagues, 2015, p.57). These beliefs lead to subjecting the widows to dehumanizing cultural rituals (David, 2010; Koran-Okrah & Haight, 2015; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007).

Contrary to the above positions that see widows as culprits, death of the husband for the widows is traumatic (Jannoff-Bulman, 2006). The presented stereotyped positions add to the grief leading to a moral inquiry that is "a constellation of symptoms including shame, anger, demoralization, self-handicapping or poor self-care, and guilt (Harris, 2015 p. 1). Others who discuss similar sentiments include Gray and colleagues (2012) and Maguen and colleagues (2011). In this state, they have in intense reliance in spirituality (Peteet and colleagues, 2013)

and pour out to whoever cares to listen. Those with the knowledge of counselling services and who can afford, may opt for the service. These last two coping strategies are social-based in that they bring to play an outsider. In all these efforts, the widows should be treated with care and concern.

*Widow reaction to stereotypes*

Despite this devastating state, this paper reveals the dynamism that is within the widows to re-construct themselves through positive self-talk and spending time alone. This aspects provide for them the space to re-find themselves. During this time, they also re-organise their activities to fill the vacuum left by the death of the husband. As they decide to move on, they change their activities and ways of doing things, which at times is taken negatively by those watching them.

It is in avoidance of being mistaken that the widows choose to have a positive relationship with their children. They confide in them getting them parentified, "a situation where a pattern of family interactions when either a child or an adolescent [is given] and accepts roles and obligations fulfilled by adults (Borchet and colleagues, 2016, p.1). They spend their times and energies within this new-found haven of mother-children relationships. Based on this, Oila advises, "Cultivate a positive relationship with your children". As an extension, the widows will cautiously share with other widows as they avoid loneliness. It is based on this that a continuous call to "have a group of widows who can come together and share about women (Angy)", is emphasised. These suggestions point to the importance of socio-cultural relationships.

Finally on suggestions to organizations on how to help the widows improve their lives, there is an appeal to Civil Societies to guide in the facilitation of widow support and lobby groups. The Government on its part is asked to include widows in the preferential assistance to the marginalised. Individuals are invited to be aware and more sensitive to issues affecting widows. There is a call to read more on widows, have a non-judgmental attitude towards widows and a willingness to positively journey with them.

**Limitations**

In this research, a core limitation that was encountered was a man conducting a research on pertinent and sensitive issues of women. While this was a moment of learning, only those participants known to the researcher through earlier women groups accepted to be interviewed. To overcome the limitation, female research assistants were trained and set out to interview the participants. In line with this, it was noted that exploratory skills found among counsellor research assistants were significant. This is in addition to their being able to deal with emotion-laden issues of death and loss.

**Future Directions of Research**

A deep concern on the participants was on their children. Widows stay strong and find purpose in life, in their children. They feel indebted to be there for their children. This commitment led them to constantly appeal for studies to be conducted in relation to children of widows.

**Conclusion**

While there are those that are widowed, almost all are affected by widowhood. Couples are privileged to be alive and with time could have one of the pairs widowed. Parents whose children are entering into marriage could find their daughters widowed at some point. This also applies to brothers and sisters who have married sisters. In any social set-up, be it at work or in institutions, widows are around us. This serves as a wake-up call to all to be informed on matters relating to widows.

Widow prevalence is at between 7-14%. This means that this population cannot be ignored, more so due to its task of bringing up children in widow-headed households. Since this is a special group, specialised approaches on the part of society and on caregivers journeying with widows, is required. Stereotypes only contribute towards increasing the stigma and other related challenges, as well as destructing the widow's identity. Even in this devastating situation, the widows continuously struggle to re-construct themselves. They appeal for justice in the legal set-up and in the social support systems. They cry for a conducive environment within which they shall be allowed to be so that they can re-build themselves, take care of their households, and continue contributing towards social transformation through the enhancement of their human capabilities and their human capital (Andrés & Chavez, 2015). .

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