

Widowhood within the Malawian Context: A pastoral care model

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DECLARATION

I **Gertrude Aopesyaga Sulumba-Kapuma** do hereby declare that this research submitted for the Doctoral degree (Practical Theology) at the University of Pretoria is entirely my own work with the exception of such quotations or references, which have been attributed to the authors or sources. I also confirm that this Thesis/Dissertation has not been submitted to any other University.

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DEDICATION

I am dedicating this research to my two grandchildren who were born the year I started my PhD programme. Anna-Stella in January and Unai-Jayden in April. They made me busy, as I had to attend to both school and grandchildren at the same time. They missed Nana's stories and treats'.

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“Wondisamala, Samagona Tulo eya, Sadzandisiya Ndekha” (He who watches over me will neither slumber nor sleep).

SUMMARY

The issue of widowhood is a serious pastoral issue in the church. Widows go through many difficulties in the name of culture when they are mourning their deceased husbands. It is believed that a woman is honoured through marriage. When the husband dies, she is mistreated, abused and left with no dignity. The purpose of this research is to come up with a pastoral care model that can be used by the church to pastorally care for widows in order to help them heal. A pastoral care model that can restore the dignity of women as created in the image of God. The project was done in Malawi in the area of the Church of Central Africa in the Presbyterian Synod of Blantyre.

The narrative theories were used in order to allow widows to express themselves so that their experiences could be understood better. African women Theology has found story telling as a powerful means of engaging women who have been through oppressive experiences and need to come out and talk about it. The process can be therapeutic and help women to move on. Through this method, the pain widows had from their experiences moved the author. A workshop was then organised for widows to help them begin to heal after a long time of keeping painful stories to themselves. The research found out the following

- That the church was not present for pastoral care during the grieving period of the widows.
- That some widows were exposed to dangerous cultural rituals of cleansing.
- That during funerals culture overtakes the teaching of the church.
- Those widows are dispossessed of their property and left with nothing with which to start a new life.

The fact that these issues affect women who are created in the image of God calls the church to pastorally care for them. To be able to journey with them during this

difficult time so that in-laws and cultural practices do not take control and in so doing diminish their personhood. The Bible is very clear that God is passionate and cares for widows; an example the church has to emulate.

KEY TERMS

Widowhood

Culture

Patriarchy

Rituals

Cleansing

Inheritance

Dispossession

Story telling

Narrative

Pain

Pastoral Care

Practical Theology

African Women Theology

Liberation

Healing

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

The issue of widowhood in Africa is a painful experience when a husband dies. “It’s pain is like the pain of a thorn that has been broken in the flesh and you are finding ways of how to remove it” (Interview with Chikhula 18th June 2016). Widows are exposed to many rituals and much is expected of them. Society forgets that women are human with feelings and need to be treated with respect. The story below explains some of the experiences widows go through.

Anagama (not real name), who the researcher has known for some years now, was involved in a car accident with her husband. The husband was badly injured and was taken to a hospital. During that night, she saw her husband struggling with life and he eventually died. It was a traumatic experience to see all that happening. The shock made her blood pressure to rise and she was admitted in the hospital for observation, whilst the family came in the morning to take the remains for burial. Cultural practices demanded that he be buried immediately. In this culture, it is believed that a person who died in an accident may not have his body lie in state in the house because it is believed that if the dead body goes in the house and lies in state as normally happens, misfortunes will affect the entire family, that is, people will die of accidents. The body is taken to the home, and remains outside in a tent or shade until all burial formalities are done and then it is taken to the cemetery. This cultural practice made Anagama not to attend the funeral of her husband. Few years later when she began to talk about it, she was so emotional. She talked of the shock she had on that fateful evening and that she has found it difficult to bring closure to it because she was not there when the husband was buried. To make it worse she was discharged from hospital later that very day, only to find people coming back

from the graveyard when she arrived at home. The family did not consult her and give her a chance to decide on how her husband should be buried. Because she was not at the grave to see the body of her husband being lowered into the ground; she could only imagine what happened. She wished she could have viewed the body and said goodbye to her husband. This experience made it difficult for her to heal and move on with life.

This is hard to believe when one sees the way widows are treated in most societies. Whenever one goes to a funeral, you see the pain of loss people are going through in the way they mourn and cry. In these situations it is mostly women who show their emotions when death occurs. Each type of loss brings its own kind of pain, challenges, reactions and responses. The pain that they will never see that person again. Some of this pain comes with guilt that they could have done something for the person not to die but did not. When the deceased is a husband, the situation is even worse. The level of mourning and yelling tells many stories. You can easily notice the difference in the way the wife is crying and looking so devastated without hope and on the other side, you see the in-laws also expressing their sorrow. The manner people express their sorrow tells you whether there is going to be peace after the funeral or not. In some cases, there are already divisions from the two sides, from the wife's side and the husband's side. This happens in the presence of church members but they cannot do anything about it.

Death of a husband is a painful experience and in the case of Anagama, when it is a tragic death the experience is worse. It leaves the wife devastated, confused and without hope. Collins confirms this in the following observations; "Loss of a wife or a husband is much more difficult. Burdens that previously were shared must now be borne alone, and that can be very stressful" (1988:348). Immediately the wife is called a widow, her plans on how she wanted her family to grow and their future are doomed. In Africa, it is believed that a woman is honoured through marriage. Marriage gives her a status of respect in the community. In the case of a widow, the dignity she had is stripped off because she is now an ordinary woman; there is no

man to cover (Wrong word doesn't make sense) her up. In the Ngonde tribe of Northern Malawi, they call her "Umfwile" meaning someone who is carrying death with her. It is a very negative term, which makes the woman not free until she dies. If people want to be with her, they are cautioned as to who she is. The woman is made vulnerable and feels marginalized with very few people to turn to for support.

News of the death of a husband is received with emotions of disbelief and shock to many women, mostly if it is through tragic accidents and or that of young couples. The way the news is broken to many women is very insensitive and leaves them in a state of shock without someone close to turn to for support or to care for them pastorally. Sometimes people are not sensitive enough as to how much this can affect the person's life. Our African communities are supposed to be supportive but are confronted with "cultural practices" which often leave the widow violated and victimized.

Due to urbanization and migration, many people no longer live in family units or clans that can support them at a time like this. Death may happen whilst one is away from home working in the urban area and one's immediate family members are far away. Edet remarks concerning African practices that; "The death of a husband heralds a period of imprisonment and hostility to the wife or wives. This treatment may or may not be out of malice, but in all cases, women suffer and are subjected to rituals that are health hazards and heart-rending" (1992:31).

The above statement makes her raise many questions such as why me God? Why are they treating me like this? Do they think I killed my husband? How should I continue with life from here? To whom should I turn to, someone who will be able to understand what I am going through? With these and many more unanswered questions, she must make major decisions about her life and that of her children. These questions guided the researcher as she embarked on this project.

The woman is seen now not able to make concrete decisions. Decisions are imposed on her. She cannot decide on how her husband's funeral should be conducted. Collins articulates the above in the following way, he says; "grief usually involves intense sorrow, pain, loneliness, anger, depression, physical symptoms and changes in interpersonal relationships" (1988:347). These are some of the pastoral issues that need to be addressed in this research.

Furthermore, some families even decide on who must inherit the property without her consent. She is made vulnerable and expected to go through all the customs/traditions and rituals without question. In some traditions, a widow must be "cleansed" in order for her to be accepted in the community after burial. The "cleansing" will vary from one culture to another. In one "cleansing" ritual practiced in two districts of Southern Malawi this would mean having sexual intercourse with a man that has been appointed by the community who are mainly members of the deceased husband's family.

There is no respect for this woman who once was the wife of their son. They cannot even give her the dignity she requires and deserves. The reader needs to note that the widow does not just lose a husband; she also loses her integrity, identity, dignity and her property, which could sustain her and the children. At a time when she needs support and comfort to help her begin to get to terms with what has happened, she is made to be alone – lonely with no one to talk to, which in many cases affects her physical health. To be silent and not seen talking is one of the virtues of a good grieving widow – so this is believed and taught.

1.2 Problem Statement

Widowhood experiences are diverse which makes women fail to understand death and the process of grieving stages that would help them deal with the circumstances they find themselves in. In their vulnerable situation, how can the church open its

doors and hear the negative experiences widows go through? Women, in this case widows, would like to tell their stories, - to have someone listen to them, to be understood without being judged. Oduyoye says;

“The stories we tell of our hurts and joys are sacred. Telling them makes us vulnerable, but without sharing, we cannot build community and solidarity. Our stories are precious paths on which we have walked with God and struggled for a passage to full humanity. They are events through which we have received the blessings of life from the hand of God” (2001:21).

Sharing such experiences would help in the healing process. What are the stories of widows? The stories of widows we worship with, who have accepted to take leadership positions in our church and yet they are going through the problems of widowhood, and the stories of those women who are our neighbors and belong to the same women’s group and are struggling in silence. Have they been able to share or tell their stories? The above-shared story and widowhood experiences raised many questions that guided this research. The research endeavored to understand the experiences and challenges widows go through in order to come up with a pastoral care model. The questions that guided the research are;

- What is it that causes the in-laws to place certain negative rituals on the widow?
- In what ways could culture be transformed to ensure that women go through the process of grieving with dignity?
- Why is the Church seen to be silent on these issues, and what kind of pastoral care can they offer?
- How do widows understand the liberation wrought by a God who was so particular about widows and their problems?

1.3 Methodology

To critically understand the position of widows and what their experiences and challenges are, the methodology was drawn from the African Women Theology. The African Women Theologians such as Oduyoye (1992, 2001), Kanyoro (1992, 1996), Njoroge and Dube (2001) and Phiri (2002) and many others aim at Transforming, Advocating and Engaging communities to affirm the humanity of women. The suffering and struggles of African Women are the focus in the African Women's Theology, who in doing theology through their specific challenges would like to empower and liberate African women from all the injustice and oppression done to them. In this case, the methodology will help to understand the challenges faced by widows in the church in Malawi, and see how the church can be engaged to understand these struggles in order to bring transformation to the widow's lives.

Oduyoye confirms this and says; "This theology boldly criticizes what is oppressive while advocating for the enhancement of what is liberative not only for women but for the whole community" (2001:17). The African Women's Theology deals with a number of issues, this research looks at the following: Traditional or Cultural Anthropology. How cultural practices negatively affect women and in this case widows. How these could be addressed to bring human dignity to women. The understanding of humanity will help to understand what widowhood experiences are and the need to bring liberation to their lives.

The second area is the Biblical Hermeneutics. How is the Bible interpreted? Are women affirmed in reading some of the negative passages? Kanyoro alludes to this and says; "The Biblical conviction that men and women are created in God's image in itself demands that women too must live in dignity" (2001:163). These theories will be used to come up with a pastoral care model for the church. A practical model that can be used to pastorally care for widows, so that they can begin their journey of healing.

1.3.1 Qualitative Method

With the above theory, the choice of methodology used in this research is The Qualitative method. The research deals with the experiences and challenges widows go through in their grieving period and this method will help to understand these experiences. Flick explains that; “Qualitative research is intended to approach the world ‘out there’ and understand, describe and sometimes explain social phenomenon ‘from the inside’ in a number of different ways....By analyzing experiences of individuals or groups” (2007: ix). In working with widows, that is, interacting with them, the research will discover more issues than what is taken for granted in the lives of widows. With this method, the researcher used the following tools to collect data:

1.3.2 Interviews: Best explains that; “The interview is one of the most popular methods of data collection. Simply expressed, this is because in everyday life one of the most common ways of getting people to give us information is to ask them for it” (2012:75). The researcher interviewed participants in groups that is widows, to share their Malawian experience of violation and abuse. Both the unstructured and semi-structured questions were used. The unstructured interviews, called free form, being designed to help the participants to be flexible and free to express oneself even on sensitive issues. If the researcher was not able to get the required information, semi-structured questions would be used to help participants give more information. “Semi-structured interviews combine planned and tightly defined questions with more free flowing ones, allowing a greater degree of spontaneity and some flexibility for the interviewee to raise issues themselves” (Burnett, 2009:162).

The researcher who has a similar life experience will not only be an observer, she will also participate wherever necessary. The advantage of this is that, the researcher’s personal experience will provide some concrete examples of what

widows go through and make participants feel comfortable. Giddens also comments that individual experience helps people to obtain richer awareness (1989:5).

1.3.3 Narrative: As a qualitative method, narrative theories will be applied for participants to express themselves freely. Creswell says that; “As a method, it begins with experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals” (2013:72). This theory was used in this research to allow women to narrate their stories, experiences, challenges and find healing or solutions to their problems.

This approach was effective with the widows because they were able to open up. Neuger further comments that, “A Narrative approach, which is based on helping the counselee find voice and self-authoring and, thus, different meanings and possibilities for life, is a powerful resource...We believe that stories that are spoken in the voice of the client are experienced as more enabling than stories that tell the client’s story for her” (2001:87). It will not be easy for women to unveil all that they have gone through, it will be a painful experience, but at the end, healing will have started. Phiri, Govinden & Nadar further says: “it is our hope that telling these stories will be therapeutic... so that healing and wholeness can come to African women who have continued to experience the effects of sexism and other forms of discrimination in the church” (2002:7).

The process of telling the stories of the past will be a process of liberation to some women after keeping their ugly stories to themselves for a long time. Story telling or narrative theory is the method African Women’s Theology uses to engage women and the communities. The stories told should also help to transform the negative experiences widows go through and help to engage the church. This narrative theory will also bring the epistemological understanding of widowhood, that, there are experiences and challenges. Through narration of what happened and how they were treated, will bring better understanding to the situations they go through. Balcomb states that; “If we want to explain an event we need to know how it

happened. To know how it happened we need to know what happened before it and what happened after it. In other words we need to know how things begin and how things end” (2000:50).

1.3.4 Case Study: In addition to the above methods, a case study of women who have been extremely violated by the culture of “cleansing” the widow through sexual intercourse with another man organized by the deceased family will be part of the research. As Haralambos and Holborn puts it: “A case study involves a detailed examination of a single example of something” (2000:996). The case study will help to understand and examine in detail the kind of pain and trauma some widows go through in practicing this ritual. The traditional background to this ritual must be understood and the researcher will further interview a Traditional leader as custodian of culture from the area where this is practiced for more information and understanding. “Case studies can have focus on a geographical location” (Best, 2012:95).

1.3.5 Sampling: Women who are widows will be organized in two groups. The first group will be from the urban area in Blantyre City. This group will draw women from different traditional backgrounds and congregations with a difference in age between late 20’s and early 70’s.

The second group will be drawn from Zomba, where the women will be drawn from the semi urban and rural areas of the district. The purpose of having these two different groups is to understand the different ways widows are treated within the traditional areas they live and to create a safe space for them and to let the women tell their stories of pain and express their experiences. The process aims at making them feel that they are not the only one; there are others with similar situations and experiences. How these women would like to be nurtured in difficult times and why this was not there for them will be part of the experience that can bring healing. “FGs can also be experienced as empowering with the sharing of views meaning

that people can realise they're not so isolated in their experience or perspective” (Braun & Clarke, 2013:111).

The above methods will help widows in the groups to discuss some of the areas that the church has failed them, and how this could be put right in order for the church to remain a meaningful institution. The researcher took the participants to a weekend retreat to help them begin to heal. This was intended to empower widows to stand up firm for themselves and support other widows having in mind that the process might bring emotions to some. For a comprehensive understanding of the plight of widows and how the Synod of Blantyre operates in helping widows, the researcher interviewed the leadership of the Synod and the Women's leadership. The reason was to check with the leadership as to how much they know of the problems faced by widows and what has been done, if anything, so far. The above methods should assist the researcher to come up with a pastoral care model that will help widows and women in general.

1.3.6 Ethical Consideration: In dealing with people and those who have a problem, the researcher will make sure that there is confidentiality. The case of widowhood is a sensitive one, care has to be taken in dealing with them. “Disregarding the rights of the respondents leads to researchers to become cynical and treat people as research objects rather than human individuals with feelings” (Best, 2012:34). With this in mind, an informed consent form will be obtained so that the participants can sign to participate and or withdraw if they want to. The identities of the participants will be protected. Pseudonyms will be used in the research to protect participants' anonymity and allow participants freedom to contribute. In reporting the findings, the researcher will try to be accurate and honest in interpreting the results. The researcher and the University of Pretoria will access the information collected during this research. The other works that will be used in this research will be acknowledged.

1.4 Preliminary Literature Review

Literature in this research was drawn from several sources to gain a better understanding of widowhood in Africa, and Malawi in particular. The resources were from library books, journals, articles and relevant Google materials. The first source was literature from widows themselves both from African and the West. How they understand what it means to be a widow and the experiences and challenges they went through.

The second source was from African women theologians and other African women, who were able to bring to open some of the cultural practices widows go through in Africa. They openly condemn what is inhuman and advocate for change to empower and give women a voice.

The third source came from some of the African patriarchs who are able to condemn the malpractices done to widows. They do this by bringing to light some of the experiences of exclusion widows go through during their time of grieving. They raise these issues as issues of pastoral concern.

The fourth source came from some of the African patriarchs who justify the negative rituals and practices of widowhood.

A comparison of how widows are treated in the west will help to understand the diversity of cultural practices and beliefs. The culture of the African set up helped to develop this research. Finally, Biblical hermeneutics was used to assist the understanding of the Biblical teachings on widowhood and what God says about widows.

1.5 Motivation of the study

The author lost her husband in 1998 because of a tragic car accident. The incident made her go through a lot of trauma to get all this into perspective. It was very difficult for her because this happened in South Africa when she was so far away from her family in Malawi. The husband was killed in an accident that occurred on a Friday and I only have to know about it on a Tuesday morning in the following week.

Whenever I needed comfort or support from my fellow Christian women, I was repeatedly told that I was not alone and that I have Jesus as my husband. This incident made me ask questions, as to how many widows go through this kind of pain. Having gone through such experiences, I now think of my fellow sisters who are going through similar experiences and are not able to speak out, and have no one to turn to for solidarity. This experience has made me search for a pastoral care model that could help those who are going through a similar situation.

Women are not given the opportunity to share their experiences of widowhood. How can such women be helped to understand death and the process of grieving, which can help them deal with the circumstances they find themselves in? The church is supposed to be a place where people can run to for support; how can the church open up its doors to hear the negative experiences of widows and begin to assist them. This process will not only help individual widows, but would also help many women with similar experiences to close their wounds of pain. Women would like to tell their stories, to have someone listen to them, to be understood without being judged. Oduyoye confirms that;

“The stories we tell of our hurts and joys are sacred. Telling them makes us vulnerable, but without sharing, we cannot build community and solidarity. Our stories are precious paths on which we have walked with God and struggled for a passage to full humanity. They are events through which we have received the blessings of life from the hand of God” (2001:21).

Sharing experiences with others helped in the healing process. What stories do widows have? The stories of their experiences pain and neglect. These are the women we worship with, who we have accepted to take leadership positions in church yet they have this as a problem; these are women who are our neighbours and belong to the same women's group. Have we allowed them to share their stories; what have they experienced and how can they be cared for pastorally, so that they can live with hope? These questions form part of the author's motivation to undertake this project.

1.6 Aim of the Research

The research aims to understand why widows go through negative experiences with no one to lean on for pastoral support. To hear from the widows themselves the pain and challenges they went through and the kind of pastoral care they received, and to further find out what mechanisms or systems of pastoral care are there in the Church in order to help and assist them in their experience of pain as well as the healing.

1.7 Objectives

The objectives of this research are as follows;

- To give the widows a chance to express their experiences to find a way for healing.
- To encourage or empower widows to speak of their ugly experience and begin the journey of healing
- To bring peace of mind and freedom to widows.
- To come up with a pastoral care model that can address the issues widows face within the Church in Malawi

To inform the Church on what widows go through and acknowledge that it is an issue needing pastoral counselling.

1.8 Hypothesis

This study seeks to explore the challenge facing the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian in Malawi and its failure to address the plight of widows. For some widow's experience, the church does not nurture the widow's psychological, emotional, physical, legal and spiritual dimensions at a critical time when they need such support. The community which has people from different backgrounds has helped widows to a certain extent, like visiting them helping them with some house chores and just being there for them listening to their fears, and this kind of support is declining among African communities. How can the church learn from the community for making herself available, from the support family units give? The research will attempt to inform the CCAP Blantyre Synod about what widows go through and that they are marginalized, stigmatized and discriminated against, and hence need the support of the church.

Oduyoye justifies the need to do a theology from such experiences of women and says; "Women experience the injustice of being blamed for whatever does not go right. The injustice of having to implement decisions they did not help to make, the injustice of having to struggle to have one's humanity recognized and treated as such" (2001:37). It is the church's responsibility to liberate women from the unjust experiences they go through in the community so that their dignity and prevail

This is how our Lord dealt with those who were oppressed. He brought liberation to those that were marginalized by the system and oppressed because of gender and or status in society. It will also attempt to present some practical pastoral care samples, which can help to achieve wholeness, healing and liberation for widows. Such caring models should also empower the women themselves to take up the

responsibility to move on with life. This attempt could possibly assist the church to become caring and an instrument of justice to widows and those who are marginalized. “The Church is asked to be in solidarity with women because in the body of Christ the women members (widows) are in pain” (Oduyoye, 1990:44).

1.9 Research Gap

Several scholars have addressed the issue of widowhood from the South African perspective. Oupa Stephen Matsaneng (2009) has researched on the traumatic experiences that cause women to wear black garments and to be excluded from the body of Christ. It is as if during the time of mourning women are unclean. His aim was to empower Ministers in order to offer care in the context of cultural barriers of the black cloth. Empowering pastors to be true to the scriptures and challenge the culture that oppresses and demonizes people. Mpiyakhe John Kubeka (2011) on the other hand was assessing the caring of the surviving clergy widow. He looked at the treatment and protection of the clergy widows and what care could be provided to the surviving wives. There are a number of articles that have been written to address the treatment of widows. Writers include Baloyi Elijah on; Theological Reflection on sex as a Cleansing Ritual for African Widows, Baloyi Gift on; when culture clashes with individual human rights: A practical theological reflection on the dignity of widows, and Nyangweso Mary on; Religion, Human Rights, and the African Widow. In Malawi, S. White et al, (2002) on Dispossessing the Widow did a research. They addressed the issue of Gender Based Violence through the experiences of widows. They looked at cultural practices and the law of Malawi. This research is from the Malawian perspective and specifically worked in the area of Blantyre Synod of the Church of the Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP). The researcher worked with the widows themselves to hear what their experiences had been. The research was able to look at some of the possible counselling models that the Church could use to help women with the problems they experienced after the death of a husband. That is, the pain of being stripped off all dignity, to conform to cultural practices that are against one’s faith and against human rights, taken to

be available for sex with men, or to sale their body for assistance to come even if the resources are their own.

They also experienced the challenge of not being trusted, and to be taken as a threat to people's marriages because they were now single. In addition they had to deal with, the challenges that widows experienced like, not being given a choice to remarry in the same way a widower would; and, that of raising children without income. The challenge of failing to control the children who at the end might become unproductive was also an issue. This raised the questions as to why should women go through all this ridicule? Is the church aware of this? There should be pastoral caring models that can be used to help women reclaim and keep their dignity; a caring model that can help them to heal and begin a new life. This is what this research aimed to achieve, since this remains a gap that has not been researched.

1.10 Significance of the Study

This study is very important to the Church in Malawi because it will serve to inform, educate and clarify the plight of widows and investigate reasons why they are neglected. Through this research, the church will take its role of Pastoral Counselling to women seriously in order to restore their dignity and to bring this issue to be part of the Ministerial Formation curriculum. To the widows themselves, they will be empowered and affirmed to know that the church is on the side of those who are suffering. This also falls within practical theology.

1.11 Limitations

Widowhood is a wide and very sensitive issue to deal with. The researcher will encounter some limitations in the research when it comes to bringing down the number of participants to be interviewed. They are many widows out there who would have liked to be interviewed, but only few were given the opportunity. Apart

from the other officials of the church, the people to be interviewed were widows themselves. The research will be limited to one denomination otherwise it can be an on-going project unable to do justice to the limited time frame and the distance between University of Pretoria and Malawi where the research was conducted. The practices and procedures differ from one denomination to the other so the pastoral care model the research intends to come up with can well be understood in this Presbyterian denomination.

1.12 Provisional Chapter Outline

Chapter One is the Introduction of this research. This includes problem statement, aims and objectives, research gap, research methodology, significance of study etc.

In Chapter Two the researcher looked at Literature Review based on widowhood. Analyzing some African and a few Western sources on this topic. It also includes the contribution from different perspectives of both men and women on this subject and dialogue with them

Chapter Three discussed Narrative Methodology and how it was inter woven with the stories of widows.

Chapter Four deals with Widowhood in Malawi. Looking at the Cultural Practices, Social Challenges, Economic Challenges, Psychological Challenges and Spiritual Challenges. How the widow is affected by the treatment that she gets from her in-laws and society.

Chapter Five discussed Interviews. These were the living documents of the research. Then the stories were analyzed in order to lead towards healing.

Chapter Six developed a healing process that will help pastors and the church to care for widows in Malawi.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter that discussed findings, recommendations and conclusion

Preliminary Conclusion

In this Chapter, the purpose of this was laid out as, outlining the methods that were going to be used in order come up with answers to the assumptions that are there.

The next chapter discusses literature and sources used to understand widowhood.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will look at the literature discussing the issue of widowhood. There is so much that has been written about widowhood, some of it is in general and some sources deal with specific areas. Having this in mind, the literature will be drawn from three sources, that is, from African women and African men who will be the main sources, and from Western sources. By interrogating these sources, a comparison of what happens in the west will help to see how widowhood is handled from different perspectives.

Studying literature from the perspective of African women and African men will also assist, in that we will see the reasons why some African men support the widowhood cultural practices, which are challenged by the African women sources. It is also important to note that some of these sources will be used to define and explain some of the terms and words that will be used, while some sources are from widows themselves to give a comprehensive understanding of their experiences.

The chapter will be discussed in the following sub themes;

Widowhood experiences, which will open up the discussion to understand what it means to become a widow. Rituals, that are immediately after burial and cleansing, Period of mourning. Isolation/Loneliness, financial implication, Impact on children, Pain and Repositioning, The role of Culture, Cultural Anthropology, The Biblical Hermeneutics and Role of the Church.

These topics will help to understand the circumstances that surround the widow in Malawi and other parts of the Sub-Sahara Africa. Some sources justify the treatment

given to widows saying that, it is the cultural norm that has to be followed when a husband dies. Both men and women who feel that some of the cultural practices reduce the widow to nothing and treated as if she is less human will challenge such sources.

2.2 Widowhood Experiences

When a husband dies, the widow in her state of shock has so many questions going through her mind with no answers. Questions like; why so soon? Why me God? Can I reverse the situation? Was I good to him? Did I say I loved him before he died? Who am I? In addition, what do I do now?

When her husband died, Moyo says that it was a difficult time when she was so hopeful that the husband would recover. “My heart was broken and I was emotionally drained. All the plans we made together suddenly became meaningless and unrealised” (2002:399). The experience of widowhood is extremely painful. The news of death comes in with shock and different people handle it differently. Widows will not forget this experience. “One day-- one horrible, awful, terrible, gut – wrenching, forever – life – altering day... With that ending came a new beginning; a scary and uncertain beginning called widowhood” (Fleet, 2012: xxiv).

This is how one widow described how she felt on that day. After years of sharing and living together with her husband suddenly, she is left alone in fear of what will happen next. Such experiences and expressions of pain come from the widows themselves and can be well articulated by themselves. “No matter how death comes, suddenly or gradually, the departure of a loved one is always devastating and traumatic. Nothing can prepare you for it and no one can adequately express how it feels” (Matheka, 2013:43).

This means that losing a husband should not be taken simply because of the problems that are experienced thereafter. The relatives and people surrounding the

widow should be able to understand her and be able to offer positive support. Many widows would have wanted their life to continue with their husband but they had no choice, their life had to change. “Becoming widowed, and that choice of words is deliberate, is possibly the most painfully difficult thing one can ever have to undertake in life. Firstly it is never a choice one makes...It is a situation that is forcefully imposed on one” (Rowland, 2016:4). This experience is not easy; one needs support during this difficult time of loss.

A widow is not seen as the same woman the society used to see. Stigma is attached to her. She is expected to do certain things differently. The eyes in the community she lives in are on her, to see what she is doing and how she is behaving herself. “On the fateful morning I accompanied my two brothers’ in-law...to the Lee Funeral Home... Is she the widow asked the mortuary administrator...Then it hit me. I am no longer a wife or a woman - I am a widow. Now I had a new role. My status has changed. People will no longer call me John’s wife, I am his widow” (Reggy-Mamo, 1999:11).

Immediately she is a different person who will be treated differently. Women accept this new status with pain, but they have no choice. They should go along with this new identity. Unfortunately, it is not a welcoming identity; it puts them off from the normal life style. “While going through immigration at the border, the form asked for my marital status. Standing with a pen in my hand, I realised that my status had changed from married to widow. My identity had changed without my having any choice or say in the matter. I realised that the stigma attached to widowhood will now be attached to me as well” (Kapuma 2012:62). Such stigma leaves the widow helpless and continues for a period if not forever. In whatever one is doing, she has to remember her status and do what the society requires.

Such experiences do not just happen after the funeral, as a widow you may be surrounded by people but this is for a short time. After the funeral, they all

disappear; the widow is left alone to understand the meaning of it. “The funeral is over with and everyone has gone home and returned to their lives, yet for you, the reality of widowhood and the building of a new life has just began. You are left without any sense of direction and in many cases, without even a sense of self. You are simply left – alone” (Fleet, 2012:1).

In as much as friends and family surround the widow, as soon as this happens in the African set up, she may get good support but it is temporal. They all have to go back to their homes. The situation may be handled differently from the Western culture. The widow may be seen to handle it alone, and sometimes may want time alone – to handle the shock alone. “No, you don’t need to rush over. I really don’t even know what it is I need or what it is I want. Maybe in the morning I will know. Please, give me a day, because this isn’t real to me yet. I really didn’t want people to rush to my side, because I didn’t know what was going on with me” (Filomena, 2016:9-10). This is a sign of shock and not knowing exactly what to do or what is happening within you, it is at this time that the widow needs support though Filomena felt she needed to be all by herself. She needed people around her to help her with the shock she was going through. She may have been in denial, with people around, she would have started making sense of what was happening and that her husband was no more. This is where death is different from the African cultural understanding. It is expected that the community will come and be with the bereaved family even without invitation.

Looking at the statements above we can see what really goes through the mind of the widow. It is not a simple situation and it needs to be handled with ‘Ubuntu’ (humanness, to know that the person going through this is a human being with feelings). The African and Western widow share similar experiences of shock and pain, trauma, though the handling of this pain and trauma may differ because of some of the expectations from the African culture, while the western culture will have facilities put in place to help the widow heal. Below we will look at some of the experiences of widowhood. The African widow may show her emotions and this is

expected of her, but she will not be allowed to make decisions. “The woman is perceived to be unable to make any concrete decisions. Decisions are imposed on her, mostly by her family in-law” (Kapuma, 2012:63). In the western culture, the widow makes decisions on how she wants her husband to be buried. She will inform the people of how the remains of her husband should be treated whether to bury or to cremate. The in-laws will wait to hear her decision; if older children are available, she will make her decisions with them. Though there are these differences, we should be mindful that in both situations, it is a difficult and painful time to go through which needs pastoral care. In the African set up, rituals will be waiting for the widow to observe. Below are some of the rituals they go through.

2.3 Rituals

The African widow in many traditions must observe several death rituals. These rituals vary from one cultural grouping to another. These rituals are practiced in the African traditional set up. Amoah explains rituals in this way; “The important element of rituals is that they are meant to symbolize some important beliefs, values, or practices that are cherished in particular societies in which they occur...In the same way, certain cherished human rights are visibly violated or incautiously set aside in performance of these rituals. Often it is women who suffer because they are entirely excluded or marginalized, or they suffer immensely in the performance of these rituals” (1996:250). A widow is expected to go through the required rituals to let the spirit of the departed husband depart properly or to save her family more especially that of the husband from death calamities. “It is assumed that a husband’s soul will not rest until the widow has completed elaborate mourning rites and has been purified” (Oduyoye 1992:15). The understanding here means that the rituals will determine the peaceful resting of the deceased soul. Where this is practiced, the widow would go through different stages of rituals before and after burial. She becomes the woman of the grave.

2.3.1 Immediate Ritual

When death occurs, the widow will be expected to take up her position as widow, that is, to follow the cultural practices of the clan and or tribe. This is not the case with widows from the West. They do not have cultural set practices to follow. In the African context, she should change her dress and dress up in cloths that can make everyone notice that she is a widow, these cloths would be old, faded and may be torn.

She must cover her head and have no shoes. This may not be for a short period though; she may be in this situation for a longer period just to prove to both the in-laws and community that she is mourning the loss of her husband. In other parts of Africa, she is not allowed to go to the garden and even fetch water during this mourning period. “She is forbidden to attend to her farms or to go to the stream to fetch water” (Tasie, 2013:159). Even though the reasons behind all this treatment are to protect her from the spirits of her dead husband, the understanding would be that, now she does not have the energy to do the usual chores. People who will be doing those chores for her also surround her. Otherwise, she will find herself with no water in the house, no firewood for cooking and she will then be without food waiting for some people to bring her some. According to Tasie, immediately the widow must be confined according to a tradition of the Ikwerre speaking people of Niger Delta of Nigeria.

“The widow is confined to a room under the protective watch of the ommiriya (daughters of the deceased’s patrilineage ... and her conventional dress code is replaced with mourning attire. This consists of a little piece of wrapper, which is tied round the waist of the widow and then passed in- between her thighs covering only her pudenda and leaving her buttocks bare. She wears a pad...the pad which the widow wears at this stage of mourning is part of an attempt to prevent the ghost spirit of the deceased sexual access” (Ibid: 159).

This is not only traumatic but it is also a disgraceful treatment to someone who is not only mourning but is also a matured woman. Who prescribes this mourning attire? Why should her buttocks be left bare? Why should such a respectable ‘wife’ be

treated like this? Women are seen to be weak, so much so, that they can be thought to be sexually active at such a time. Little is known of what is in her mind now, the questions she is struggling with. Apart from mourning her deceased husband, the woman is tortured and her right to privacy is violated. Tasie continues to argue that this widowhood rite is aimed at “serving the marital and conjugal ties between the deceased and his widow and preparing the widow for the arduous task of self-reliance” (Ibid: 159). Does the community consider her dignity and right to privacy and the pain she is undergoing? All her strengths at different stages of her life as a woman and married wife are ignored and she is now looked at as a weaker sex object.

In the village where there is no mortuary, the funeral may take place immediately. In the context of Malawi, people in the village cannot afford to take the body to the mortuary because of the infrastructure if he died at home. The dead are buried on the same day or on the following day. Immediately this happens, the widow is expected to be seated next to the corpse and wail on top of her voice every time people walk into the room. This is expected immediately, when she is in shock not understanding what has just happened. She may have been taking care of him and seeing him dying, her world stops, she is in disbelief and is not given a chance to internalize the situation; instead, she is tortured to sit next to the body.

Her situation is not considered and it is expected that rituals should begin. “The first thing I was told at night was that I had to sit with my legs folded touching the edge of the coffin... you have to shout when crying” (Moyo 2002:400). People coming should notice that she is there and that she is doing the right thing which is crying. Kabonde further says that; “Sometimes they order the widow to sit on a hard mat in a corner, as a sign of mourning. She must sit there and shed tears, for if there are no tears the relatives presume that she is happy and knows the cause of death, for without tears how can she be sorry? (1996:197).

This may mean that decisions being taken outside will exclude the widow because she is expected to be in the house full time. With this position, she has sleepless

days and nights and is often tired. She may not be served with proper food during this time; she is only given porridge to energise her.

The widow who is already going through cultural expectations coupled with her having questions without answers must follow all the rituals without question. Some go to the extent of giving them mixed herbs to drink as a process of chasing away the spirits. What the mixture is composed of is not known, the widow has to drink without questioning. Some of these mixed herbs might be dangerous to people yet she has to follow the dictates of the in-laws.

2.3.2 After Burial rituals

After the burial ceremony is over there are other rituals to be followed by the family. This will differ from one traditional practice to another. Most of these rituals will have to be followed by the widow and or by the mother of the deceased. Manala comments, "Immediately after the burial, the widow participates in a general washing of hands, and feet and the grave is sprinkled with water treated with Leilani... This is to ensure that the widow together with other family members do not constitute a ritual danger to the community" (2015:2).

In some parts of Malawi, early in the morning after the burial, they have the ritual of shaving the head. In this rite, the widow participates with other family members. She is the first to be shaved, sometimes with a blunt scissors or blade. A man does this from the deceased family clan; they will choose to do that. She must be noticed and look different (ugly) during this time of mourning. This rite can be defeated these days when it has become a fashion for women to shave their hair. However, this is done out of their own choice whilst with the widow it's a rite she must follow whether she likes it or not. After this, the widow is taken to bath with water mixed with herbs. If the cause of death was because of an accident, after the shaving ceremony they would all go to the river to bath. They use the river with a belief that the running water in the river will wipe away the bad omen of accidents in the family.

2.3.2.1 Mourning Attire

The mourning rituals will continue after the shaving of the head. The widow is given mourning clothes she should wear; these cloths could be black in colour and have to be worn during the entire period of mourning. “The black garment is understood to be the cloth or dress designed mainly for mourning. They were perceived to be special clothing that symbolizes the loss of a loved one through death within a particular family” (Matsaneng, 2009:43). She is not expected to change to other cloths but to wear these all the time. Some widows will only be given a pair of the cloths and will have to wash at night. The question in many people’s minds is why the colour black. In the African tradition, black is associated with bad luck or misfortune. Matsaneng further comments that: “In an African setting the colour black is to be associated with bad omen (isinyama) and the Christians understanding black symbolizes darkness or unclean” (Ibid: 45). This may affirm the traditional mind-set that the widow is unclean. The wearing of black makes the widow to become marginalised. She can easily be noticed, and instead of feeling sorry for her, she is looked at as someone bringing misfortunes in the community. In this period of mourning with her attire, she will go through many traumatic challenges. Dlukulu in his disagreement with the whole practice comments that:

“Another response from some communities can be seen in public transport where the widow is not allowed to queue with other people but must stand aside and wait for a sympathetic taxi or bus driver to allow her in. Even then, there may be other passengers who do not want to sit next to her, and she may be forced to sit at the back of the taxi, or find herself sitting on her own in the bus. Some taxi drivers do not want to touch her taxi fare because of sefefe (misfortune)” (2010:68).

In this case, the widow will have problems going out in public. Every time she does so, she is reminded of her status and may feel rejected at a time she needs understanding from the community and their comfort. This may not be easy for her

children as they may feel the same, which may not take away the trauma of losing a father.

The treatment received from the community may not differ from that in the church. In the church, she is supposed to be seen quiet. In some cases, she may not be able to attend the women's gathering in her church. In the black churches in South Africa, she may not be made welcome even to celebrate the Eucharist. Matsaneng emotionally describes the experience of a widow in church and writes: "The woman in black was sitting at the back waiting for all people to finish celebrating communion. After that, she made her way to communion table after everyone had been served" (2009:13). This confirms that the church also sees her as someone with a bad omen and she has to be treated at the end when all have been served, so that her situation does not bring bad luck to the rest of the congregation. Across Africa, treatment given to widows is unacceptable. The widow becomes the centre of oppression and discrimination. The family and community are not able to understand what she is going through. Instead, things that are more negative are done to her.

2.3.2.2 Widowhood Cleansing

This is another heart rendering ritual that takes away the dignity of a woman. The belief in some African societies about this practice is that the widow must be cleansed from her uncleanness because of the passing on of her husband. This practice involves sexual intercourse with the brothers, a relative or a stranger appointed by the in-laws. Perry et al explains, "She must engage in sexual intercourse without a condom with a "cleanser", often a non-relative of the deceased husband, to remove the impurity she is believed to have acquired from the death of her husband (2014:1). This does not only take away the dignity of the woman but it is also dangerous to health. Edet alludes to this and says, "The death of a husband heralds a period of imprisonment and hostility to the wife or wives. This treatment may or may not be out of malice, but in all cases, women suffer and are subjected to rituals that are health hazards and heart-rending" (1992:31). With such a practice,

widows can easily contract sexual transmitted diseases that may include HIV and AIDS.

In some parts of Malawi, there are those that still practice this cleansing ritual. They feel that the deceased is mourned completely when the wife performs the required ritual by the tradition of that grouping. The cleansing ritual is called 'Kupita Kufa' (meaning literally taking away dust after death). Lomba (2014:34) adds to say that, Widow cleansing, also known as sexual cleansing or Kupita Kufa, is defined by the international community as a practice in which a widow is forced to have unprotected sex with one of the deceased's male relatives with a view of exorcising the ghost of her late husband". Baloyi further says, "Another form of cleansing involves the brother or a close relative of the deceased" (2016:204). This means that the family may use the relatives of the deceased or a stranger to have sexual intercourse with the widow. The widow has no consent in all the plans of this ritual. Lomba further says, "Widow cleansing is predominantly considered, by the international community, to be an act of victimization by which the women are forced into patriarchal sexual diktats" (2014:35).

In Zambia, this used to be the ritual to be followed in some of the cultural groupings, but with HIV and AIDS, this practice is declining. Kabonde says "Previously, most of the tribes would only ensure a widow's freedom after she had slept with or had sexual relationship with a cousin or brother of the deceased.....cleansing is performed now by giving the woman white beads and smearing her with white mealie meal" (1996:199).

In some tribes of Kenya, the man to be asked to perform the ritual would be someone who the community regards as useless or mentally ill. "To avoid bringing disaster on her dead husband's clan, the widow was obliged to have sexual intercourse with a deranged man (Janeko)" (Reggy-Mamo,1999:45). Unfortunately, these traditional practices will go along with the Christian confession. When death

happens, the family will have to adhere more to the cultural practices than the Christian does. They find themselves in between two cultures and will follow the tradition to appease family members.

Regg-Mamo further explains that the Christian mothers who are supposed to protect and help young widows are the first to encourage the young widow to go for the ritual. “Don’t follow Christianity blindly... When it comes to the Luo traditions, make sure you become organized...You pull down your pants. Things are done the way. It is only for one night and your family will be taken care of. In the morning, you can repent, and go on with your Christianity” (Ibid: 49). This kind of counselling comes from an old lady who calls herself born again, a lady who is supposed to help the young widow. What will the poor widow do in this situation other than to do exactly what she is told? Kanyoro further says that; “Harmful traditional practices are passed on as ‘cultural values’ and therefore are not to be discussed, challenged or changed” (2002:15). There is no respect for the woman who once was the wife of their son and they respected her so well. Her dignity is gone, it is not just a loss of a husband, but her rights are violated and she is left as a nobody.

2.3.2.3 Period of Mourning

The mourning period will differ from one family to another. This happens when the widow has followed all the required rites, and then mourning ends. In many tribes of Malawi, the period is one year. The widow will go through the last rites before she can become free again and be able to do her normal things without interruption this time.

According to Tassie, the period of mourning is one year, which goes with regulations and taboos. The widow is required to continue following the rites given to her. “They include dressing in pure black material, moving about with bare feet, wearing pads as menstruating women do and wearing their hair tattered and uncombed” (2013:160). The pad is worn to protect the widow from her deceased husband’s spirit from sexually touching her. At the end of one year after observing all that is

required and being a good widow, she then must be purified, cleansed so that she can freely go back into the community without problems. In the Ikwerre speaking people of Nigeria. “The widows go to the stream in the wee hours of the morning for a ritual birth...at the end of this ritual their head hair is shaved and the cloths used in mourning burnt” (Ibid: 160). This practice is different from other cultural practices because they shave the hair at the end, whilst in others the hair is shaved immediately after burial; which means that even after the funeral rites are observed the widow has to look ugly.

Even though the mourning period is one year, in some parts of Africa this will depend on the ruling of the King. “In Bakenberg, the mourning period may be interrupted by the approaching of the rainy season during which the King gives the order to have all widows in the village take off their mourning cloths in order not to inhibit a good rainfall” (Manala, 2015:3). In this traditional practice, the widows whose husbands die close to the rain season are lucky because their period is shortened by the King’s rule.

In Malawi, the mourning period may be proceeded with the unveiling of the tombstone to those that can afford it and in the village; they will prepare the grave and put an official symbol of rest in the form of a peace cross. This is changing though; the cross with details of the deceased is put on the grave on the day of burial so that the family members can identify the grave in future.

In the Patriarchal tradition, it means that the wife may be allowed to stay in the family of her husband, or she may be asked to be inherited by one of the deceased husband’s relatives. In the Matrilineal tradition, where the husband comes to stay in the home of the wife; the wife may be set free, where people from the husband’s family and her family will meet to discuss the way forward and finalize funeral rites. If she has been a good wife to the deceased and his family, they will thank her and ask her to look after the children. Many times, in the village it is easy for the wife to

remarry unlike as it is in urban areas. Women in urban areas may be freed from all ritual but not allowed to remarry if they had property with the deceased husband. Whilst in other situations widows remarrying becomes a choice.

2.3.3 Isolation/Loneliness

During the mourning period, widows experience intense loneliness. It is like people or friends do not know what to say to them at this difficult time of their life. She finds herself walking into an empty house, an empty bedroom and in a cold bed. The nights become long needing someone to talk to, Reggy-Mamo tried to reach out to a friend when she felt lonely, but she was not successful. "Hello... I want to talk to you, but I am busy, she said, I will call you back in two to three weeks" (1999:75). Here is a friend who has no time for her friend the widow. She has to wait for two weeks. She does not even want to know the subject matter.

The period of mourning is a very challenging period. The widow may be isolated from all her friends and confined in a small room. The widow must reposition herself in the community. The things she used to do, she may not do them. She is not a free person. The eyes of the community are on her in whatever she does. "After the burial you don't see a single Church member coming to visit. You are left in a very, very lonely situation" (Owiti, 2011:82). Many widows have said that this isolation was the most torturous experience they had ever gone through. She is left in that room with nothing. She will have to wait for people to come in to assist her. "The widow is expected to be silent and should not be seen talking to anyone: this is perceived as one of the virtues of a good grieving widow" (Kapuma, 2012:66).

During this time of mourning, she is also not allowed to visit other homes, until she is cleansed. "A widow was restricted socially. She was not allowed to visit other homes, shake hands with people, or hold someone's baby" (Reggy-Mamo, 1999:44). This may mean that the widow is restricted to stay in her home. She is carrying the

dark cloud of death until she is cleansed then she will be able to visit other people and be able to do her normal things in life. This may be easier if she has help from family, but if she has no one to assist her then so many things in her life will be at a standstill.

If she depended on business then, her business would experience losses. According to Manala, “This is said to help protect the widow against suspicions of witchcraft” (2015:3). This means that she may be accused of killing her husband. Tasie states that the widow at this time is still expected to do other rites whilst in isolation. She is required to fetch firewood from the farm and fetch water at night so that she has no one to talk to. She also takes some of the farm produce to the market. Walking a distance without talking to anyone. She has people who will be following her at a distance to make sure that she abides to these rites. “The rites are, therefore, aimed at strengthening the widows in order to prepare them for the challenges ahead” (2013:160). Is it necessary for her to go through all this? This may mean that the strength of the woman was in her husband and without him; she cannot be strong and go on with her life.

Isolation or loneliness can be worse to the widow if her situation is HIV and AIDS related because of the stigma and marginalization attached to it. Kwamboka shares that she did not know that she could also be HIV positive when her husband was diagnosed positive. She lived in denial and in isolation because of stigma attached to it thinking that she was also going to die. She explains, “At home I lived a life of shame and embarrassment as I was thin and looked very bad. My family saw me as a failure and I was asked to stay away from the public eye especially when we had visitors” (2011 :(2011:72). Apart from losing a husband, she was discriminated against, in case she was HIV positive. Making it difficult for her to reach out to people. The family that was supposed to be supportive and caring were the first to shun her. What more, in this case, will the people outside the family in the community say about her and distant themselves from reaching out to her? In the village long time ago, we used to see people coming to visit the bereaved family, and

the widow would be part of this visit. The conversations would help her to begin to clear her mind, and this is where such rituals are not practised. Where such is practiced, it is torture, they begin by leaving your buttocks bare and making her sit ugly because no one should admire her as cited by Tasié. What would be in the mind of the widow? It can lead to depression and other mental illnesses. Kabonde agrees by saying; “With the loss of a husband, the widow is already in great pain. She may not know what to do with the breadwinner of the family gone...Relatives do not take the woman’s bereavement seriously. They do not think that she may be psychologically affected if she is not treated with care” (1996:196). Very few would think of her health, and may view it as not being that important compared to the rituals that she has to observe.

Widows in the west may not go through all these hazardous rituals. The advantage of the widows in the West is that they have facilities available for counselling where they can get help to cope up with grief, which leads to loneliness and isolation. The counselling helps them to also put things in order.

2.3.4 Financial Implication

Property of the deceased is one of the issues that families have problems with. Her in-laws may inherit a widow so that they can control the property and children. The understanding is that she is already married to the family and can only be looked after by them. Others believe that the dead husband would put an eye on her and that other men should not have a chance to see her. Where there is no inheritance, the in-laws make sure that all property is taken away from her, she is left with nothing, and she must continue raising the children on her own without support. Nwachuku comments that, “In the places where the church has played a role in stopping widowhood rituals, the African Christian widow still remains handicapped in terms of finances and property inheritance. If the widow is not in paid employment, she is thrown in penury, which goes against Christian principles” (1992:69).

The widow suffers after many years of working in the home and having acquired property together with her husband, all is taken away and she is left with children without money to survive on. Moyo narrates an experience of a widow she interviewed and says:

“My husband was a retail shop businessman....After his death his brother locked up the shop and he could not allow me to access money from it. After six months, I went to confront him. He told me that if I am interested in the benefits of the shop then I should cooperate with him. I said I was willing to work with him. He told me he would come to my house later on after closing the shop. He came and that is when I realized what he meant by cooperating with him. He allows me to have cash whenever I cooperate with him” (2009:155).

The woman is a victim after years of working together with her husband. She does not just lose a husband, she loses the property, she is sexually abused for her to access the money she worked for with her deceased husband, the money that belongs to her. When this happens, the woman will cease to be an active member of the church.

So many things come her way because of the inheritance custom. Kirwen narrates his conversation with a widow who was a strong member in church, on how the custom of inheritance had brainwashed some women who thought that it was better for them to be inherited than to lose the children and everything. “The only decent way for her to live and support her children, despite the opposition of the Church, was in a leviratic union with her brother-in-law” (1979:9). Women agree to be in this situation for the sake of the children. Nyangweso further says that; “The transfer of the deceased property to the levier associated with widow inheritance has led to the misuse of some of the widow’s property, especially during funeral rites, often widows are left in a state of economic hardship. At death, a widow may lose literally everything, from her husband’s clothes to property, including that which was acquired in marriage and children” (2017:371).

For some, everything will be taken away from them and they will be left with nothing, only children to look after. When they return to their parents' home there is no house, they squeeze themselves in whatever accommodation is given and expecting their parents to support them. However, even though they send her away, the family of the husband still expects the wife to erect a tombstone and provide money for the function for them to bring closure. "A widow is expected to erect a tombstone for her husband one year after the death. Sometimes this is done without any financial assistance from the dead husband's family. Cultural beliefs state that the soul of her husband will haunt her otherwise. Thus, many widows are forced into crippling debt by having to pay for the tombstone" (Kapuma, 2012:65).

However, in the case of the widows from the west, they are fortunate because in many cases, a will is already in place and they have a lawyer to act on their behalf. "You are the one who disburses property to the appropriate parties as either set forth in a will or to whomever you feel should receive the property" (Fleet, 2012:130). This does not mean that there are no cases of property problems. Some widows fight with their in-laws for property. Fleet continues to say that, "It is sad fact when death occurs, sometimes families splinter....When it comes to matters of money or property it can get downright divisive" (Ibid: 129). The presence of legal services can help in this situation. Besides this, the whole understanding of making a will is very important and that it should be encouraged to avoid unwanted circumstances happening to the family when the husband is gone.

2.3.5 Impact on Children

The death of a husband does not only affect the wife, it also affects the children. Those that may be very young at the time of death may not understand what is happening but it will come at a later stage. Those that are grown up can know and understand the pain they are going through. Helping children to adjust and go on

with life without the father is the biggest challenge facing a widow. When she is going through her unanswered questions, one of the questions in her mind is what to do with the children. How to carry all the responsibility alone. When the treatment is hostile with the in-laws, this becomes worse. “She has to help them deal with the psychological pain, helping them to understand why he is no longer there to assist them to deal with the pain of separation” (Kapuma, 2012:67). Difficult questions are asked and she has to face them. It is not time to lie to the children; she has to tell them the truth. In reality, this becomes a problem. “My daughter keeps asking when daddy is coming home. I try to explain to her that he is not coming home why, she asks why he left us.” (Fleet, 2012:212). Sometimes mothers will tell their children that daddy went to heaven, which is well and true, but then the children will ask why can't we also follow daddy to heaven? A very difficult time for the mother to take all this within herself. It becomes so difficult the fact that she is dealing with her own pain and grief, and that of the children.

As hard as it may be to work through her grief, it is also important not to leave the children behind. Many widows assume that the children are handling it well when they do not show their emotions. “I found it hard to talk about their father's death. I mourned the loss my children had experienced” (Matheka, 2013:67). As a parent, you have a double task of grieving and helping your children grieve. This can help both of you and will begin to support one another. Matheka as a widow suggests that; “Honestly and clearly explain how their parent died....Allow the child to cry. This will help them release the intense feeling inside. Offer reassurance that you are all going to be okay... As a Christian, give them the hope of heaven. Maintain the usual routine and don't let them assume adult roles even if they are pushing to do so. Keep the memory of their parent alive. Deal with each child individually.” (Ibid: 69). This can go a long way in helping the children understand and begin to heal. Fleet further explains that; “Children of all ages not only need time and space to grieve, they need to have an environment created for them where they understand that they can be sad or angry or quiet or reactive... Help the children to enjoy remembering the good times with their daddy” (2012:211).

The family may begin to forget and bring closure to the death of their relative, but for the wife and children, this can take a while. If they have gone through bitter experience it is very difficult to forget, and the process even takes longer. The Children may ask the mother why they have been sent home, what happened to their house and many other questions. The effects of property grabbing might affect the children's education, health and other domestic requirements. This may result in children dropping out of school, or being affected by wrong peer pressures. With adolescent children, it is very difficult to handle their emotions like said above. They may go into excessive alcohol drinking, drug abuse, partying, or having irresponsible behaviour. Girls may be found pregnant because they took their grieving to someone who took advantage of. In addition, in the same way boys may find and impregnate someone. All this is on the shoulders of the mother to handle. The mother must be strong otherwise, she will lose them all. "They need to be strongly reminded that they are not the only ones who have suffered loss and that they are not the only ones in pain" (Fleet, 2012:217). This is why pastoral care is needed to help the family in this situation.

2.4 The role of Culture

Culture has often been used to defend the treatment given to other people who are considered inferior in society. Culture is used against those that are powerless to benefit those in authority. We have even gone to the extent of saying it is 'African Culture' when we know that we are losing nothing. The question that one could ask is that; does culture really oppress, discriminate and marginalise people. What is culture in any way? According to Kinoti, "Culture is the totality of any given society's way of life. It comprises a people's total social heritage, including languages, ideas, habits, beliefs, customs social organization and traditions, art and symbolism, crafts and artifacts (1996:63). In this definition of culture, women play a significant role in transmitting culture to their children generation after generation. Through their given traditional roles, they are able to teach their children the beliefs they hold and the traditional practices. Kanyoro expresses her concern that;

“Women in Africa are custodians of cultural practices. For generations, African women have guarded cultural prescriptions that are strictly governed by the fear of breaking taboos. Many aspects that diminish women continue to be practiced to various degrees, often making women objects of cultural preservation. Harmful traditional practices are passed on as “cultural values” and therefore are not to be discussed, challenged or changed. In the guise of culture, harmful practices and traditions are perpetuated...Yet, in fact, it is women who sustain these practices. Such a state of affair illustrates the reality of women’s powerlessness and vulnerability in the face of cultural prescriptions” (2001:159-160).

This kind of understanding that what culture is meant to be, affects the wellbeing of a widow. Culture is not static and people should stop treating widows as if they are less human under the pretext of culture. Culture is dynamic. So much has changed in our way of living, which includes our dressing, eating habits and life styles. All these changes are accepted but when it comes to change and the status of widows, culture is applied. “Culture is dynamic anyway, how can we pretend that we live in a society that has not been affected by other cultures and other realities?

Africans have a lot to teach people of other cultures just as much as we have something to gain from them (Jordaan and Mpumlwana, 1994:166). This is the duty of the Christian church to bring understanding and liberation to all God’s people. Christians should not respect a culture that is oppressive and marginalizes other groups of people and in this case widow. The role of the church is to educate and sensitize its members on the practices that respect humanity and give dignity to all.

It should not be used as a tool to oppress other people. Both men and women should be able to understand culture in the light of Christ so that they become liberated. Jordaan and Mpumlwana further says; “I do not mind a cultural practice if it does not contribute to the belittling of women. Once people exploit, discriminate

against, and deprive women of their God given status, in the name of culture, I begin to have a problem as a Christian (Ibid: 165). Baloyi affirms this and says; “Total freedom for women cannot be fully attained when inhumane cultural practise are still prevalent. Most cultural rituals release males from their control and leave women to suffer. Such cultural hegemonies should not be worshipped as if they have been prescribed by a higher authority and cannot be changed. Culture is dynamic, and as such is changeable” (2017:2).

2.4.1 Cultural practices in Malawi

Malawi practices two cultural systems of lineage. These two systems are the patrilineal and matrilineal. The systems have their own dynamics in the way people live. These dynamics affect women and in turn may affect the widow.

2.4.1.1 Patrilineal culture

This is practiced in the Northern region of Malawi and some districts in the Southern region. The men own Land in patrilineal systems. Women move after marriage to go and live in their husband’s home. Men in this system of culture are most often the leaders and decision makers. Men have the right to own land and children. In many cases having sons is seen as more of a blessing to the family than having daughters, because it is believed that sons will bring wealth to the family to continue to prosper, while the daughter will get married and move to the husband’s home. Tschirhart et al adds that; “Women can only access land through their husbands and sons. Upon divorce from the husband, the woman loses rights to cultivate her field and has to return to her own village. Upon the death of the husband, the woman, as long as she is unmarried, can use the land her husband owned. As she grows old and as the sons grow old, she shares the land with her sons and may be squeezed out of the land” (2016:137). This means that a widow after the death of her husband has no land. In a country where people highly depend on subsistence farming for a

living, this can make the widow lose everything and have nothing to live on for food and thus lives in poverty.

Marriage arrangements in patrilineal society are done through the husband paying 'lobola' to the wife's parents. This means that the wife now belongs to the husband's family, hence the reason for leaving her parents' home to go and stay with her husband. White et al comments to say;

“The entrenched lobola system which is patriarchal in nature leads to the degradation of women. There is a common belief that the wife has been bought. This same attitude influences in-laws to dispossess a widow of property. In their view, a “property”, i.e. the woman, cannot own property. Some cultures believe that if anything the widow, as property, should also be inherited. The system therefore forms the basis for women's discrimination, oppression and under development, leaving women submissive and out of the decision making process” (2002:53).

The wife lives happily as long as her husband is alive. The very same people she lives with may turn against her when the husband dies so that they take away all that she has.

2.4.1.2 Matrilineal system

According to this system, land is passed on to daughters. When a woman gets married, her husband is expected to come and live with her in her home village. He is given a space by the uncle or brother to build his house. The marriage will make her own land inherited from her mother or from her grandmother. Even though she has the right to own land, her uncle or brother as the custodian of the family clan (mwini mbumba) makes some decisions. Even though she has these advantages, the husband is the head of the family and controls whatever happens to the proceeds of the farmland. Phiri explains the way the Chewa matrilineal system used to work and says;

“Historically in matrilineal society, a woman was looked upon as root of lineage (tsinde) and dependant (mbumba). This shows that a woman was given a high status and a certain amount of freedom, but also at the same time heavily dependent on her male folk, usually her uncle and brother that was not there in patrilineal society. This was regardless of whether she was single or married. To illustrate her subordinate status, she was not spared from the evils of ritual intercourse during initiation, early marriage, and mental torture to barren and single women, polygamy, levirate marriages and abusive widowhood rites. Thus the Chewa matrilineal society was also patriarchal” (1997:32).

This shows that the matrilineal system has some shortfalls and the woman may not have complete power over her inheritance and this includes the widow. The uncle or brother has control and say over her wellbeing. The practice was that the husband was taking care of his sister’s children and the uncle or brother would take care of her children. As his responsibility, the ‘mwini mbumba’ has to make sure that he sends his sisters children to school. This made the husband to have less responsibility over his children because they belong to the wife. In the event of death, the sisters and nephews of the deceased husband would come in force to demand property that was earned by both of them. The widow, therefore, becomes a victim in her own home.

In both systems, that is the patrilineal and matrilineal, the people that are supposed to protect the woman are the same people who demand and dispossess the widow bringing hardship to her and the children. Having looked at these two systems of culture, the next paragraphs will look at patriarchy and its influences on the problems faced by widows.

2.4.2 Patriarchy

As we have seen in the sections above, patriarchy is practiced in both the matrilineal and patrilineal systems of marriage. Men have authority over the welfare of the household and women are expected to be subordinate to this power. In times of death, male members of the family have the power to decide on what to do. Ruether defines patriarchy as “Rule of the father, patriarchy refers to a system of legal, social, economic, and political relations that validate and enforce the sovereignty of male heads of families over dependent persons in the household” (1996:205). Because of this understanding, women have suffered, their voices have not been heard, and they have not been protected. Gruenbaum explains further that patriarchy it is not only more power residing in men but that there is more to it;

“Patriarchy is not simply a system of rule by males, but a more complex set of relationships that result in domination by older men over both younger men and females. But there is other domination and authority here as well: females over children, older women over younger women, older children over younger children, boys as they grow up increasingly asserting themselves over girls, even older sisters who used to have authority, and so on (2001:41, in Nyangweso, 2017:378).

In such a family structure where power resides in the male family members, women become vulnerable without protection. Lack of such protection has brought about problems of gender-based violence. The role of the male is negatively looked at; so much that women’s rights are violated. Ruether continues to explain that;

“The status of women in patriarchy societies has many nuances, depending on such factors as how women’s physical protection and the property deriving from their own families of origin are related to their status within their husband’s family...The general characteristics of the status of women under patriarchy is one of subjugation without legal status in their own right. Other aspects of this subjugated status include the following; (1) the lineage of children is passed down from the father; (2) male children are preferred to female children; (3) as wives, women’s bodies, sexuality, and reproductive

capacity belong to their husbands; (4) the sovereignty of the husband over his wife includes the right to beat her and to confine her physically, sometimes even to sell her into bondage...(6) their right to inherit property as daughters or widows is restricted, and what property they do inherit is usually administered by a male relative or guardian” (1996:205).

This kind of understanding and cultural practices have increased violence against women. The widow becomes a victim of violence with no one to protect her. Le Roux comments that; “Challenging these patriarchal structures would mean challenging culture, as patriarchy is culturally supported and condoned” (2015:238).

If cultural practices are not challenged, women, that is widows, will continue to suffer and go through dangerous rituals without questioning them. “The challenge is thus to find a way of challenging culture and the cultural practices which empower men at the expense of women and which enable and lead to violence against women, while at the same time not denying or degrading the importance of culture” (Ibid:239).

It is true to note that the structures that exist in our society are the very structures that violate the rights of women (widows). Making them voiceless and keeping their ugly stories to themselves in the fear that if they disclose, they are against the cultural practice or exposing the in-laws to the public, which is seen as a taboo. This kind of situation has made many women (widows) not to contribute positively to some family issues. Hlatywayo agrees to this and says; “The dominating nature of patriarchy in most African communities has resulted in a situation in which women have been subordinated, oppressed and prevented from making full and equal contributions to their communities, let alone recognized as significant” (2012:121). We shall now look at what culture and anthropology say from the African woman’s perspective.

2.5 Cultural Anthropology

The study has discussed the culture of Malawi and how it affects women and widows in particular. This section will continue to look at culture and how the values and beliefs affect humanity. According to the Dictionary of Feminist Theology, Lummis explains that; “Cultural anthropology is the study of cultures of various groups over time and how their values and beliefs interrelate and change” (1996:9). Some of the cultural beliefs have changed with time but there are still some that resist change. This is so because of the socialization process that people go through that makes them think that it is the accepted norm.

Parents, especially the mother, play an important role in the upbringing of children. There are basics and life skills that children learn from their mother. This basic knowledge is supposed to be given to children regardless of gender. However, in many cases the female child is expected to learn more of the life skills than the boy child does.

From childhood, the girl child experiences discrimination. The son, on the other hand, receives all the attention and resources. Society regards men as strong and women as weak, and this is seen in some families where a male child sees himself as important as the father rather than the mother and sister. He can also have authority in the home in the absence of the father. In as much as we see change taking place in the way we live, the beliefs and values for marriage and property inheritance, and the treatment of women remains an issue. The victims to such beliefs and values that we hold on to are women. Women are expected to keep all these values. “These values that are instilled in girls include being submissive and subservient to men in the family. This leaves them disempowered and without “skill” to escape violent situations or relationships” (Kapuma, 2015:257). Cattell further comments that;

“Although African lifeways, beliefs and values have undergone many dislocations and transformations, African ideologies and customs provide a continuing, though often contested, basis for ordering, interpreting and reinterpreting individual lives...The lives of Africans in general, and of widows in particular, have become much more difficult, with families struggling to meet their obligations to widows and dependent children-and sometimes falling short, sometimes failing together. For example, “grabbing” the marital property by the husband’s relatives has become common” (2008:52-52).

Many times this kind of suffering is justified in the pretext that it is our cultural values and beliefs that are followed. What is forgotten is that women are created in the image of a God who is a God of justice and compassion and that God cares for them. Oduyoye further describes what women’s anthropology is by looking at what culture prescribes for women. She says; “women’s anthropology points out that what is described as feminine and masculine are culture-coded and should not be allowed to circumscribe our humanness. It is, therefore, unacceptable that women’s humanness should be limited to biology and that the cultures that make women into beings whose only reason for existence is to assure the continuity of the race need to be transformed” (2001:70).

This mind-set has made widows not to be able to contribute to the socioeconomic wellbeing of their children and themselves. Because of what is tabulated on the cultural beliefs, they cannot access land to grow crops that can assist the family. In-laws will put their eye on the same land and if not the brother would want to access the land because it is productive and she should not own it. Cattell continues to say that;

“Each widow’s life is shaped within a particular sociocultural matrix(though even within one culture there is variation and room for manoeuvring) and refined by personal factors such as her personality, relationships with her in-laws, whether bride wealth was paid fully, in part or not at all, her mourning behaviour and her own economic resources. Thus widowhood is a sociocultural construction elaborated by the widow’s in-laws, who decides

whether her marriage was valid and what actions to take for or against the widow, and the woman's perceptions of herself as a widow and what she can do, what she must accept" (2008:54)

This shows that change has failed to take place with regard to the life of a widow. One can hear educated men who society respects because of the influence they have on other matters saying that 'my family will decide what to do when I die'. These are men who do not transcend, to make their education influence change on the negative cultural practices that do not only affect their wives but mothers, sisters, daughters and other female relatives. These men will refuse or fail to make a will to protect their wife if he happened to die. Women live happily in marriages but without security.

Cattell continues to say; "African widows' many problems and concerns include status loss, economic security, their children's welfare, male domination, remarriage, and gender violence, including beatings and rape, witchcraft, and AIDS and other STDs...Economic security is a major concern of most African widows. It is closely allied to their responsibilities as mothers and grandmothers. In a situation of wide spread poverty, many women (wives and widows) are poor and constantly struggling to make ends meet" (Ibid: 58).

Humanity is primary to the life of every one, which has to be restored. Women would also want to enjoy their humanness. To become a widow should not be seen as a yardstick to treat them as if they are nothing and or they don't belong. They have to continue with life and even to take care of the children they have. To have and experience the abundance of life that was promised by Jesus. "Women are seeking to pursue an anthropology that makes women and men co-responsible for the well-being of the whole community especially the family...And the man ought to recognize his co-responsibility genetically, and in the upbringing of the children he participates in making" (Oduyoye, 2001:72).

2.6 Biblical Hermeneutics

The Bible is the source of knowledge and wisdom. The Christian church has it as a manual on Christian faith. The Bible has many passages that illustrate God's love to his people. Many passages talk about God's care for widows. God as the creator of the universe acknowledges the plight of widows and is ready to deliver them from such misfortunes. The problem with the Christian community is that we take the Bible literally. It has been misinterpreted and misrepresented when discussing God's purpose for humanity. It is read in favour of those that are in power and benefit from the passages read. This understanding of the Bible calls for the Christian church to re-read the Bible through the eyes of those that are oppressed so that they can see the love of God in their struggles.

In Genesis we read that God created both male and female equal, that is to say both male and female have the capacity to live a good life and treat each other with human dignity. We see God assuring his people of his presence. This assurance is also given to widows. In Deuteronomy 14:1 it reads; *you are the children of the Lord your God. Do not cut yourselves or shave the front of your heads for the dead, for you are my people holy to the Lord your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth, the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession (NIV)*. Reading the passage, we can see the assurance God is giving to his people and this includes assurance to widows in that he has chosen them and treasures them because they are his creation.

God does not only care and love widows, he is the defender of the widows so that they should not experience shame. Psalms 68:1; *"A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (NIV)*. God assure widows of his presence and protection. This is also confirmed in Psalms 91:11, *"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you*

up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone (NIV). This passage in Psalms continues to show how God is able to defend those that are in trouble and under his care. This is also evidenced in the prophet's messages to the people of Israel. Isaiah 41:10; *"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand"* (NIV). The same Isaiah in 40:29 says; *"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak"* (NIV).

The love of God is seen in the experiences of some widows. The story of Naomi and her two daughter in-laws who both lost their husbands is an example of such love. God cared for them up until they went to their own people. The presence of God's love makes Ruth to challenge her mother in-law in that she will go with her. When she goes with Naomi, God prepares a man to marry her. She was too young to remain a widow. In 1Kings 17:9, 12; *"Go at once to Zerah in the region of Sidon and stay there. I have directed a widow there to supply you with food"...* *"As surely as the Lord your God lives she replied, I don't have any bread – only a handful of flour in a jar and a little olive oil in a jug, I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it- and die"* (NIV). This is another example of God's care for widows. This widow was not an Israelite, but God extends his love even to the foreigner. God's love has no boundaries.

God is also seen rescuing a widow whose sons were going to be taken as slaves. She says to Prophet Elijah; *"Your servant my husband is dead, and you that he revered the Lord. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves"* (NIV). The widow has trust in the man of God that God will rescue her from the situation she is in.

God does not condone those who wrong widows because of the authority they have. He is a God of justice and compassion. He is able to see the ill treatment done to his people and widows in this case. He defends this unjust treatment and warns the

people through the prophets. In Isaiah 10:1-3, Jeremiah 22:1-5 and Ezekiel 22:6-7 in these passages God is warning the people against such unjust behaviour. He is a kind God who is concerned with the welfare of the widows and that they have to be treated well.

These are just some of the few passages in the Old Testament that are able to speak to the widows and their experiences and that God sees them and is ready to rescue them from all the difficult experiences they encounter in life. In the New Testament, we are able to see what Jesus does to women who are found in different social situations. The gospel of Luke gives the mission statement of Jesus before his ministry Luke 4:18-19; *“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim freedom for prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour” (NIV)*. This is the agenda of his ministry so that people would be set free from bondage. During the time of Jesus, he never stopped to honour or recognize women. Jesus wanted to restore dignity to women and make them feel that they are part of God’s plan. Widows have the message of Jesus as their hope that sustains them. Oduyoye comments on how women feel about Jesus; *“Women know that although Jesus took hunger voluntarily, he never accepted deprivation as the destiny of humanity; rather he demonstrated that suffering is not the plan of God, hence the emphasis of the victorious Christ in African women’s spirituality” (2001:57)*. Jesus understood women in their struggle. Widows should know that they have a Jesus who loves and cares for them. Jesus would like to change the widow’s lives to become new, to give them power to understand themselves. *“The Christ whom women look for is one who is actively concerned with the lot of victims of social injustice and the dismantling of unjust social structures. Christ would, therefore, be expected to be on the side of women as they fight for the dismantling of sexism in society, a sexism that has oppressed them through the ages” (Hinga,1992:192)*. The following are some of examples of Jesus’ encounter with widows:

The story of Anna in the book of Luke is an example of a widow who devoted her life to serve the Lord. She was able to see the promised salvation when she saw the baby Jesus; the promised Messiah. It is an indication that God cared for her to reward her faith by allowing her to live until she saw Jesus. In Mark 12:40 “*They devour widow’s houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely*” (NIV). Jesus here is speaking about the bad treatment that widows got from the teachers of the law.

Walker suggests that; “The Lord Jesus warned the disciples against the conduct of the Scribes. Some of them made it their practice to target rich widows. Scribes probably functioned as consultants in estate planning for these rich widows. Such a situation gave them opportunity to persuade vulnerable widows that they should use their money for holy purposes” (2012:82). It is a common practice even in the present church. Croft and Walker further say that; “Sometimes widows were on the receiving end of injustice. It is no surprise, therefore, to hear how Christ exposed the Scribes and Pharisees because some of them were exploiting widows” (2015:23). Those widows that have property and have money are the ones the church visits most, so that they are able to enjoy the benefits of the property.

Immediately after this warning to the greedy Scribes, Jesus notices a widow who put in the treasury all she had. V43-44; “*Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything – all she had to live on*” (NIV). Jesus is able to talk openly of the spiritual wealth of the widow, that she gives all she has in faith.

Oduyoye further comments to say that; “The spirit of Christ is at work here, making Christ the ‘voice of the voiceless the power of the powerless’. Also in these churches the prophetic role of Jesus a ‘champion’ of the cause of the voiceless and the vindicator of the marginalized in society” (2001:59). Jesus is also seen as the liberator of widows. He would want to see the life of widow’s change so that they are

able to enjoy the abundance of the life he offers. “Christ is the liberator,...Jesus asks African women not to accept their hardship and pain fatalistically, but to work at eliminating the suffering and creating a better place for all...It is then Jesus who suffers in them and their works to give birth to new and better human relationships” (Ibid:62).

In Luke’s gospel, we are able to find some passages relating to Jesus’ encounter with widows. Luke 7:12-13; *“As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. In addition, a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, “Don’t cry” (NIV).* Jesus understood the pain of death. He was able to understand the pain of the widow, that in her widowhood experience her source of hope, the son, dies. She was so devastated and Jesus saw this. He shows his love and compassion to the widow who has lost hope. “The measure of compassion the Lord Jesus displays is never in accordance with the strength of your prayers and cries. It is true that he hears the weakest cries, but he even shows compassion when there are no cries for help. He sees an individual in distress and the very sight is enough to draw out pity from his heart” (Walker, 2012:73).

Later in the same book, Jesus talks about the injustice that those who are vulnerable, like widows, get from those people in authority. Luke 18:1-8 talks of a widow who went to a judge to help her and grant her justice against her adversary. However, the judge refused for no reason. The widow did not stop but persisted until she got what she wanted. Widows may experience such unjust reactions from those in authority, but here Jesus encourages widows never to give up but to keep on pestering. He teaches the importance of persistence in prayer. In whatever situation widows may find themselves Jesus assures them not to give up and continue to suffer. This assurance is from him. “The widows understand and express Jesus Christ as their friend, their keeper, provider, healer, life giver and close kin” (Maseno, 2015:6).

John 19:26-27; *“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple. “Here is your mother” (NIV). From that time on, this disciple took her into his home”.* This passage suggests to the readers that Mary the mother of Jesus was a widow. The father Joseph is absent and Jesus transfers his responsibility of caring for his mother to John. Walker in agreement to this says; *“At this point in her life Mary was almost certainly widowed. Jesus would not have commended Mary to John’s care if there had been a husband or family in a position to care and provide for her. But now, with strong filial love, and great tenderness, he obeyed his own commandment, in particular the fifth commandment, by committing his mother to the care of John and pressing on John a sacred obligation to provide for her” (2012:77).*

“Additionally, the words he spoke and the action he took regarding his own mother while he hung dying on the cross demonstrate to us how like his heavenly Father, Jesus really was. He was full of understanding and compassion and, as a faithful son, acted to ensure Mary’s needs were met...Here in the Lord Jesus Christ is the Priceless example of care for widows that, as we shall see, reflects everything the scriptures teach in both the Old and the New Testaments. Can the Church of Christ turn a blind eye to such an example” (Croft and Walker, 2015:23-25).

This is clear evidence that Jesus was passionate about the life of widows, which included his own mother. Being aware of the experiences of widows, he did not want his own mother to experiences the same.

During the ministry of the apostles, we are also able to see some teaching on how widows have to be cared for. The story in Acts 9:36-41, is a story of a miracle performed by the disciple Peter. Dorcas was a faithful widow who spent her time caring for those that were poor and widows also. Her death made the other widows cry for her because their hope was gone. They were upset and thinking of who would assist them in the absence of Dorcas. This touched the disciples who brought her back to life. A story that gives hope to widows. Peter does not just bring Dorcas

back to life, but he was also able to restore the lives of the other widows who had lost hope because of her death.

James on the other hand is seen to be outstanding in his teaching; he does not beat about the bush about the church's responsibility to care for widows and orphans. James 1:27; *Religion that God our father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world*" (NIV). He, with authority says that it is the duty of the Christian church to care for widows and orphans and look after their welfare. It is an encouragement to the widows that the Bible speaks for them. Paul in the letter to Timothy 5:3-4, 8, on the other hand brings another issue concerning who are real widows. It is on record to show that among the believers were widows. Paul saw that those widows over the age of sixty had the obligation to look after the younger widows because of their experience. He encouraged them to devote their life to the work of the Lord. As for the young widows, Paul encouraged the church to counsel them and help them to remarry because they were still young.

In agreement with this Walker comments that; "The Lord requires the church to exercise discernment in providing care and support for the widows among them. – Paul commanded that only godly widows were to be honoured; that is, they alone were to be supported and be shown great respect by the church" (2012:96). The responsibility here is that widows themselves have to be responsible; their families too have the obligation to care and love them, and the church, which is the body of Christ, has to emulate Christ in caring for the widows so that they can continue to live a godly life. Nwachuku comments that; "Paul's first letter to Timothy (5:1-4), which clearly states the New Testament church's attitude towards widows, should guide every African Christian community. Salvation of humanity was the whole essence of Christ's earthly ministry. He lived and preached deliverance to those in bondage and freedom to those captive in body, soul and spirit. Similarly, if the oppressed widow is delivered from her bondage, the Christian concept of salvation in

Jesus Christ will be transformed from faith as a religious abstraction to faith in action” (1992:72-73).

Throughout the gospel, Jesus liked to change the lives of people and these changes included the challenges widows go through. Even though Jesus recognized widows and their potential that they can even contribute in society that they are also human beings, yet the society continues to treat them as less human and exploit them without mercy. The patriarchal culture may have the power to treat widows this way, but widows have Christ on their side as their liberator and the one who notices them all the time.

Like what was said at the beginning, the Bible is the source of Christian faith. If it is well read and interpreted, it has many passages that apply to the life of widows. It all depends on how it is read and applied. The Bible is clear on God’s special care and commitment to widows. The Bible also addresses the role of the church regarding its responsibility in caring for the poor, needy and widows in this case. Jesus Christ gives the church the examples of how she ought to care and love those that are less fortunate in His Church. Paul summarizes on how the body of Christ, which is the church, has to live with one another. 1 Corinthians 12:26; *“If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoiced with it”* (NIV). Widows are part of the body and have to be celebrated.

2.7 The role of the Church

The church is the body of Christ called to care for God’s people and to bring human dignity to all. People join the church for different reasons. The common reason is that people want the church to care for them when they are in need. The church is seen as a safe place where people can go to without being harmed or discriminated against. “We, as a faith community, can be the safe place that people are intuitively

searching for” (Holmes and Williams, 2007:13). Unfortunately, the church has been too slow to offer such support. She has allowed culture to control the wellbeing of its members making them suffer. Widows suffer because the church is far from them. As a place of safety, the church is called to holistically look at some of the cultural practices that widows go through and see how these can be changed. The harmful practices that leave the widow a victim. Shisanya agrees that the church has not been able to address some of the critical issues that affect its members and in this case widows. She comments to say that; “The Church as a major liberating agent should show practical commitment to the oppressed and work for their fruitful future. In this regard, the Church needs to address itself to various issues that affect (Abaluhya) women in the event of death” (1996:192).

Widows live among Christians who see what is happening to them but have very little to offer or give support to a sister who is in need. Because of this, widows live without hope, surrounded with people who are not caring. Kabonde poses a critical question to the church with regard the cries of widows in our communities. She says;

“How do we, as a church or circle, restore hope and intervene in the sufferings of other women today? What cries do we hear? We hear cries of women who are oppressed, exploited and very helpless, unable to make ends meet because all their money, in the name of tradition or ritual, has been taken by the relatives of the deceased. We hear cries of mothers whose children have no hope for the future because the person who is responsible for supporting them is gone. Just as we would offer food and comfort to crying children, so, as Christians, we are bound to show and express our support and sympathy to all those in need” (1996:201).

This poses a challenge to the Christian church that so much has been left unattended to and women have continued to suffer. “It is the church’s responsibility to liberate women from the unjust experiences they go through in the community. The church is a critically important agent in achieving a society in which women’s equality and dignity is recognised. If the dignity and importance of women is not

recognised, the plight of widows cannot be addressed. The church has to identify and side with women, not only in order to improve the situation of widows, but because it is their Christian duty to be in solidarity with those who are in pain” (Kapuma, 2012:69). The call is that the church must be Christ like. To love and care for all people. Holme and Williams add; “What we are describing here is more than just a polite, smiley kind of love. Christ suggests that we are all capable of loving one another as an act of human will, hence his command to love (Lk. 10:27)” (2007:17).

The Bible, which is the main source of the Christian faith, has been quoted wrongly to support the wrong cultural practices concerning women. Some of the passages even quoted out of context. Nwachuku poses serious questions regarding this to the church saying; “What are the biblical bases for some of the rituals that go with widowhood, and on what bases have they been incorporated into the practices of some Christian churches in the light of the gospel and especially of the finality of death and resurrection of Jesus?” (1996:68). The church leadership at all level, have a role to play to educate and transform members to understand and use the Bible correctly.

The church has a responsibility to make herself available and listen to the stories that widows go through. It is through listening to these stories that the church can understand the plight of widows and be able to offer the needed help. To provide practical pastoral care that can help widows appreciate the presence of the church. Nwachuku suggests that;

“There are many issues in the present lives of African Christian widows that clearly call pastoral counselling as an essential service from the church. Properly organized counselling sessions are needed in which the widow is taught to appraise her new situation realistically and is equipped with new skills in order to avoid being disappointed by having undue expectations of the community members...The widow also needs help in acquiring strategies for handling grief without getting hopelessly broken. She needs strategies for

handling loneliness and desertion, and techniques for decision- making in her new role of leadership for herself and the family” (1996:70).

This means that the church should be in a position to provide mechanisms or special skilled people who can help the widow in her healing process and empower her to handle the unfortunate and negative experiences of widowhood.

Women are created in the image of God and their issues should be dealt with dignity because they are human beings. “The African Christian widow is a “person”, whole and worthy of dignity despite her grief-stricken situation...The church needs to take a firm stand to expunge obnoxious anti-Christian traditions and rituals. The stand must translate theories and rhetoric into practical action as daily challenges occur. Traditionalism needs to condemn dehumanization” (Ibid: 72). The Church can stand for widows and bring back the lost hope.

Preliminary Conclusion

This Chapter looked at the issue of widowhood by looking at the different sources that have addressed the issue. A clear picture has been laid to help us understand widowhood issues in the church. The pain and challenges faced by widows in Africa and in particular Malawi have been highlighted. It is obvious to note that the rights of women are violated because the church is not putting its ascribed role into practice. There is a need to pastorally care for widows in the church who are faced with such cultural practices that dehumanize them. The African women and some African men do not condone the arguments against the ill-treatment of widows and they call the African church to address these issues. Challenging the negative treatment of women in general will bring positive change to women’s and in doing so their lives will be transformed. The church is called to lead in bringing about this transformation to women (widows)...

The next chapter will explain in detail the methodology that will be used to accomplish the objectives of this research.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the literature that was used in this research and how the literature helped shape and develop a comprehensive understanding of widowhood and their challenges. In this chapter, the methodology to be used to obtain the aims and objectives of the research will be discussed. It is in this chapter that the direction of the research will be discussed and how the tools will be used to come up with the conclusion of the outcome in response to the research questions.

3.2 Methodology

Methodology is like a road map taking us to a destination. In this road map, the methods and tools used need to be discussed and explained to get to the conclusion. This guide will help us not to go astray by bringing in other methods that are not suitable for this research. It will work as a yardstick to caution the researcher and direct us to a successful research.

Braun and Clarke state that; “Methodology is broader, it refers to the framework within which our research is conducted...It consists of theories and practices for how we go about conducting research. It tells us which methods are appropriate for our research and which are not. Methodology can be understood as a theory of how research needs to proceed, to provide valid knowledge about the psychological and social world. It is what makes our research make sense, both in terms of design and in terms of process” (2013:31).

This means that the researcher should be able to understand the methods that will be used and how these are useful in the research at hand. Swinton and Mowat further explain that: “There is a common tendency to use the terms ‘method’ and ‘methodology’ as if they are synonymous and interchangeable. In fact, they are not, Methods are specific techniques that are used for data collection and analysis...Methodology is connected to method, but in a particular way. The term

‘methodology’ has a number of different meanings. Formally, it relates to the study of methods. More broadly, the term methodology has to do with an overall approach to a particular field” (2006:74). Such an understanding of what methodology means will be helpful in the use and application of the two terminologies. That is, to understand the challenges and experiences of widows and how to choose a suitable framework. Methodology provides a framework for making a series of decisions about your research, including:

How can participants be selected?

What methods of data collection and analysis are appropriate?

Who can or should conduct research?

What is the role of the researcher? (Braun and Clarke, 2013:32).

The research gives a detailed explanation of how the selected methods and tools were used. The choice of method in this research is qualitative, in the fact that it dealt with people’s lives. Nevertheless, before discussing this, the theories that were used have to be discussed first so that we are able to understand why the choice of qualitative method.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

African women’s theology concentrates on issues affecting women in Africa. They look at the oppressive elements in the society that affect women in their daily lives and, would like to bring change. For this change to come about African women’s theology would like to hear the different stories about what African women go through, by allowing them to tell their stories of the different experiences and their oppression. In doing so, the society, together with women, is helped to understand these issues. Mercy Amba Oduyoye explains that;

“African women accept story as a source of theology and so tell their own stories as well as study the experiences of other women including those outside their own continent, but especially those in Africa whose stories remain unwritten...This framework is necessary, given the fact that narrative theology prevails in both oral and written materials. The normative role of stories in Africa’s oral corpus, and the role of story in biblical theology, give women the paradigm for their theological reflection (2001:10-11).

The researcher borrowed this narrative approach to understand, in depth, the stories of widows. What is it that widows in Malawi go through? Who is there to listen to their experiences? With such questions in mind, the researcher was able to engage the community and church to understand what widows go through. It was found that the church was not fully aware of the experiences of widows; this approach helped the church to be aware of some of the experiences that are not known and that these need the church’s intervention.

To understand the choice of this theology one needs to understand what African women’s theology is all about. The choice is because it looks at the issues concerning women in Africa. Oduyoye outlines the reasons for this theology and says; “The particular theologies of African women express aspects of global and African Christian theologies from the vantage point of women’s experiences and location. They are the theologies that reflect women’s heritage of participation in Africa’s colonial and missionary history” (2001:9).

The term is welcome in many circles as compared to the term “feminist theology”. Feminism is negatively perceived as a western concept with the aim to liberate women and call for equality. Musa Dube explains that; “Feminism is sometimes associated with Western women. This has led some men in the two-Third world’s contexts to associate it with discourse concerning women’s call for liberation and their quest for empowerment. These men have dismissed this discourse on the pretext that it is another Western imposition. Some women use the term women’s theology, and prefer to undertake “gender analysis” as opposed to “feminist analysis”

(2001:10). This means that the African women's theology is to make women part of God's creation by articulating the issues that affect them. "It is an approach that pays attention to all that denies the fulfilment of women's lives and the assertion that African women are part of the circle of life" (Ibid: 11).

Issues concerning women should not be left unattended to, attention needs to be given and treated with priority. Women are human beings and have feelings just like any human being. Women can pastorally be counselled if the issues that affect them are known and understood and that they are of great concern.

The African women's theology does not stop at only hearing the stories, they would want to see change-taking place in women's lives, the kind of change that can make women free to participate and make decisions. Oduyoye further says that; "It, therefore, does not stop at theory but moves to commitment, advocacy and a transforming praxis" (2001:16).

The research aimed at taking this commitment, which will transform not only the widows' lives but will begin to advocate for change to take place in the church and community. "Changing the ways we think about women, and most of all transforming our society, to one that values the humanity of all people- both women and men" (Phiri et al, 2002:9). A commitment to engage the leadership of the church to understand and appreciate women who are going through different forms of violence in the church and have no one to lean on for support. Oduyoye further explains that; "African women's theology bears the mark of the creation of a people whose human rights are trampled over. They are women who are doubly and triply burdened, women whose humanity needs to be proclaimed. This is an area where women in Africa have numerous stories to share. Stories of poverty, exploitation, violence are constants in the contexts of theologizing. Analyzing these stories reveals how religio-cultural ideas, that foment ethnocentrism, brew the evil and sin with which theology struggles" (2001:24). Widowhood is the area, which has stories of

exploitation, and violence, the dignity of women who are part of God's creation is not taken into account.

The African women theology approaches were used in this study so that the lives of widows can be transformed pastorally. Sharing their stories of pain, widows were able to open up and freely narrate their experiences. This helped them to realize that they were not the only one's going through widowhood struggles. Through such sharing and the workshop that was organized to bring them together, helped to an extent, that healing started in most of them. They felt that the burden they carried for a long time was beginning to get lighter. This process was able to liberate their thinking and see their situations differently from before, which brought healing that, would transform their lives. Through hearing the ugly stories of oppression and the pain widows have gone through after the death of their husband, women's lives should change positively, they should be able to take decisions and move on in their life with dignity. Transformation will come by helping them pastorally to understand that they must live on and continue with their different responsibilities with dignity. The approach will also help to make them custodians of a culture, which could consist of some women in the community or chiefs to understand how some of the practices negatively affects widows.

The patriarchs in the community who use women to abuse fellow women and make them less human in order to benefit themselves need to be transformed to understand the humanity of women as created in the image of God. This transformation will also have to be addressed in church. The biblical teachings should help to liberate women and help the church to take a stand to advocate for women's equal treatment as members of the body of Christ. To advocate against abuse, adultery and property grabbing by members of the church. Widows are part of the community of believers and their issues and needs should be addressed by the church.

Kanyoro further states that; “We are hoping that women pastors will be willing to talk about reality of women’s experiences in their sermons, and, therefore, be able to make a connection between Churches, home and society. That in itself is a possibility for women to be included in the telling of the story of faith to the community of faith” (2001:161). The Church should be a safe place where they can run to for refuge, where they can hear God speaking to them. This framework helped at the end to come up with a pastoral care model that can be used by church leaders, both lay and ordained, to help widows and women to live in fullness. A pastoral model that is able to address the plight of widows and make them welcomed members in the community of the believers.

3.4 Qualitative Method

Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014:4). This method was chosen because it helped to explore the problems encountered by widows in Malawi. “The term qualitative research is used to refer to both the techniques (of data collection or data analysis) and to a wider framework for conducting research, or paradigm. Paradigm here refers to the beliefs, assumptions, values and practices shared by a research community” (Braun and Clarke, 2013:4). Best further explains that; “qualitative research has been defined as any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (McLeod, 1994:77). Widows in this case, having gone through different types of experiences were the centre of this research.

Qualitative research involves the utilization of a variety of methods and approaches, which enabled the researcher to explore the social world in an attempt to access and understand the unique ways that individuals and communities inhabit it (Swinton and Mowat, 2006:29). This research attempted to use a few methods so that more understanding would be reached at the end.

Swinton and Mowat further state that, “Qualitative research assumes that the world is not simply ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered. Rather, it recognizes ‘the world’ as the locus complex interpretive process within which human beings struggle to make sense of their experiences including their experiences of God. Identifying and developing understanding of these meanings is the primary task of qualitative research” (Ibid: 30). The world of widows was understood better after going into their world. To understand what issues surround them and how these affect them?

The nature of the issue you are dealing with, decides the proper method to use, Holosko gives us the following reasons for conducting qualitative research.

One wishes to explore a topic or phenomenon of which little is actually known;

One wishes to pursue a topic or study something that is sensitive and has emotional depth;

One may wish to capture the so-called lived experience from the perspective of those who live it and create meaning from it;

One may wish to delve inside the so-called black box (Scriven, 1999) of programs and interventions;

One is a quantitative social work researcher who has reached impasse in data collection, interpretation of data and/or findings; and

One wishes to give “voice” to a group and merge social activism with research. (2010:345-6).

In the above summary, Holosko gives a picture of what the research will be doing, to be able to capture the living experiences of women and to give them a voice to be heard. Such an experience did not only empower the women, but it also began to transform their way of life in order for them to move on with life. Creswell explains that a researcher should not just choose a method for the sake of it, but should be

able to understand the method well and to know why that particular method is good for the intended research. He gives us the characteristics of qualitative research as follows:

Natural setting: Qualitative researchers tend to collect data in the field at the site where participants experience the issue or problem under study.

Researcher as key instrument: Qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behaviour, or interviewing participants.

Multiple sources of data: Qualitative researchers typically gather multiple forms of data, such as interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual information rather than rely on a single data source.

Inductive and deductive data analysis: Qualitative researchers build their patterns, categories, and themes from the bottom up by organizing the data into increasingly more abstract units of information.

Participants' meanings: In the entire collective research process, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or what writers express in the literature.

Emergent design: The research process for qualitative researchers is emergent. This means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data.

Reflexivity: In qualitative research, the inquirer reflects about how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences hold potential for shaping their interpretations, such as the themes they advance and the meaning they ascribe to the data.

Holistic account: Qualitative researchers try to develop a complex picture of the problem or issue under study (2014:185-6).

With the above explanation, it means that one has to understand well the method before engaging in it. “The qualitative interview seeks qualitative knowledge as expressed in normal language; it does not aim at quantification. The interview aims at nuanced accounts of different aspects of the interviewee’s life world: It works with words and not with numbers. In qualitative interviews, precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation correspond to exactness in quantitative measurements” (Kvale, 2007:12). The reason for utilising a qualitative method in this regard was that it gave the researcher a chance to interview people and understand their world. To be able to understand the experiences the widows went through.

3.4.1 Interviews

“Interview is a form of conversation, usually involving two people, initiated by the researcher for the purpose of collecting data that can be used to support the aims of a research project” (Best, 2012:76). The research used interviews to have a conversation with widows. The conversation helped to hear from the widows themselves the different experiences they went through in their journey of grief. This gave them a chance to open and be able to speak out what they kept inside for a long time. “The assumption appears to be that in a face to face encounter people are more willing to provide more detailed information about themselves when asked. Conversation is an essential aspect of human behaviour” (ibid: 75).

This is what helped the research to gather more information about the experiences of widowhood. Swinton and Mowat further explain that; “Interviews are concentrated human encounters that take place between the researcher who is seeking knowledge and research participant who is willing to share their experience and knowledge” (2006:63). Such an encounter helped the researcher gain knowledge on the subject under study and the unique meaning of the situation. It was possible that through interview, the interviewer did not only acquire knowledge, the respondent had also a chance of gaining knowledge on the subject under study. The widows in

this case had an opportunity to gain knowledge from the experiences of other widows. This experience helped to understand that they are not the only ones going through a particular problem, but that others have experienced the same though in a different way. “The interview process is a meaningful human encounter with which both parties gain implicit and explicit knowledge about other. It is a unique space for the creation and sharing of meaning” (Ibid: 64). To utilize such an opportunity, the researcher needed to prepare well on how this was going to be conducted. “Your questions may be either in the form of a formally structured interview-schedule, or just a list of informal and open-ended opinion question, depending on the nature and purpose of your interview. Further, you may interview one person at a time or whole group (panels) of persons, depending again on the nature and purpose of your research” (Peter, 2011:65). The researcher intends to meet with participants in groups more than once, to allow all the participants equal opportunity to narrate their stories. Holstein and Gubrium add that;

“Interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In this respect, interviews are special forms of conversation. While these conversations may vary from highly structured, standardized quantitatively oriented survey interviews, to semi-formal guided conversations, to free-flowing informational exchanges, all interviews are interactional. The narratives are produced may be as truncated as forced – choice survey answers or as elaborate as oral life histories, but they are all a product of the talk between interview participants” (2006:141).

The interviews enriched the researcher with information that was not known and helped to dig in-depth for more information.

It is important to follow steps before the actual interview takes place, it prepares the researcher well. Creswell suggests the following steps to be followed in the mind of the researcher;

Identify interviewee who can best answer these questions based on one of the purposeful sampling procedures.

Determine what type of interview is practical and will net the most useful information to answer research questions.

Use adequate recording procedures when conducting one-on-one or focus group interviews.

Design and use an interview protocol, or interview guide.

Refine the interview questions and the procedure further through pilot testing.

Determine the place for conducting the interview.

After arriving at the interview site, obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study.

During the interview, use good interview procedures. (2013:164-166).

Following these steps helped the researcher to come up with good data collection. Gerson and Horowitz further confirm; “A successful interview study also depends on the prior construction of a theoretically informed and user-friendly schedule (or questionnaire). First, the researcher needs to know what kind of information to gather. As important, those who have offered to give their time and share the intimate details of their lives also have the right to expect a clear, understandable, and supportive guide though a process that can be confusing and unsettling” (2002:205).

The above information should help the researcher to understand clearly, what qualitative research interviews are about. Interviews can come in different structures. The researcher had the responsibility to choose the structure/s that will help in getting the needed information (data).

3.4.2 Unstructured Interviews

In this research, unstructured interviews were preferred to allow widows to talk freely about their situations. Kombo and Tromp explain that, “In unstructured interviewing, neither the specific questions to be asked nor the range or type of possible answers are pre-defined. They are informal and conversational. The aim is to get the informants to open up, and the researcher should stimulate an informant to produce more information...It is useful in studying sensitive topics” (2006:92). This suggests that the researcher is a key person in making sure that participants are open and free to talk. Burnett further comments that, “Freeform interviews are unstructured, and issues raised are entirely those chosen by the interviewee, as is the length of time which it might take to fully expound them. Freeform interviews are usually used for life history collections, and can be conducted in a series over time” (2009:162). The research wanted to understand better what widow’s experience during their grieving period. The unstructured questions made them open up and say more as the conversation continued. The researcher was able to ask some questions that were not scheduled because of the flow of the conversation, which helped more data to be collected. Unstructured interviews have their advantages and disadvantages whereby the researcher has to keep this in mind.

Advantages

They are flexible. This is because there are no pre-defined questions. This allows the respondents to freely respond to an issue. The researcher can, therefore, gather a lot of information.

The respondent feels part of the team since no rigidity is displayed. He/she can, therefore, freely participate in the research. Since it is a free response in a relaxed atmosphere situation, the answers given are more reliable. It allows the interviewer to be responsive to individual differences and situational characteristics. The instrument is useful for studying sensitive topics. (Kombo and Tromp, 2006:92.93).

Creswell further comments on the advantages in that, “Participants can provide historical information. Allows researcher control over the line of questioning” (2014:191).

Disadvantages

The responses given may not be accurate and may not reflect real behaviour. Respondents may lie, may forget, or may lack the information required.

Interviews may also be influenced by the presence of the researcher. The answers given may be influenced by the way the interviews define the situation. (Haralambos and Holbon, 2004:907).

They are time consuming since a respondent can dwell on one issue. If the researcher is not careful, it can get out of control, with the respondent getting too emotional or personal. (Kombo and Tromp, 2006:93).

Interviews may not just flow; the researcher has a big responsibility to control and making sure that the desired responses are collected. This is why it is important to plan well and prepare oneself in good time.

3.4.3 Semi-structured

When conducting interviews. The researcher wanted to collect all the important information. Semi-structured interviews helped to serve this purpose. If the participants responding was not satisfactory, the researcher used semi-structured questions. Kombo and Tromp explain that, “There are several types of semi-structured interviews.

- a) *Focused interviews* – This intensively investigates a particular topic. They aim at gaining a complete and detailed understanding of the topic.
- b) *Case study* – The purpose of case studies is to collect comprehensive, systematic and in-depth information about particular cases of interest (2006:93).

Semi-structured interviews have their short falls also.

Advantages

They are flexible. This is because they consist of both open and close-ended questions.

In-depth information is gathered by close-ended questions.

By using the open and closed-ended approach, the researcher gets a complete and detailed understanding of the issue under research.

By using both the open and close-ended approach, the researcher gets a complete and detailed understanding of the issue under research (Ibid: 93).

Disadvantages

They can be time consuming due to the open-ended questions.

Analysis of data may be problematic.

The respondent may be cautious of the answers given in close-ended questions.

3.4.4 Group/Focus group interviews

The researcher conducted group interviews in order to get information and hear the widows explaining what they went through. A focus group can be defined as a group-based in-depth interview, the main aim of which is to explain and understand the meaning, feeling, beliefs and attitudes that influence the behaviours of individuals who are assumed to have a common cultural problem or issue (Best, 2012:89).

Some widows in Malawi share the same widowhood experiences through what they went through. Bringing these women together made them share such experiences. Furthermore, Focus group, which are sometimes referred to as group interviews, provide an opportunity to collect data that may not arise in an individual interview Best further explain that, "Participants in a focus group are selected by the use of

purposive sampling. In other words, the individuals may not be representative of the population we are interested in but they are from the specific population we are interested in” (Ibid: 89).

In addition, the social interaction within the group often exposes differences in perspective between group members. Potentially the method can generate data that is deeper and richer than that collected from one-to-one interviews. However, the difficulties involved in maintaining confidentiality and anonymity means that a high level of trust is required from group members in order to maintain the ethics of the data collection process (Ibid: 89).

Braun and Clarke explain that: “Focus groups are a method where data is collected from multiple participants at the same time. They involve relatively unstructured, but guided, discussion focussed around the topic of interest” (2013:109). The widows were allowed to explain themselves freely and relate the experiences they went through. Such a flow of information helped the researcher collect the needed data and ask for more explanation where it was necessary. This may help other widows to open up and narrate their stories freely.

When the widows are together in the group, already it will make them feel at ease. Listening to their friends tell their stories and experiences will help them to open up and to be able to relate to their own experiences. “They all have knowledge of the area we are investigating and as such we can reasonably expect that the group “focused” on the topic for discussion” (Best, 2012:89). Such openness helped the researcher to collect richer information and data. “In focus group interviews, broad discussion topics are developed beforehand, either by the researcher or by the group. These provide a broad frame of discussions which follow...Members of a focus group express their opinions while discussing these issues” (Kumar, 2005:124).

Haralambos and Holbon state that, “group interviews are valuable because they allow diverse categorizations and sentiments to emerge showing how participants flesh out, alter, or reconstruct viewpoints in response to challenges. They believe that having voice present (which they call multivocality) broadens interviews and can make the interviews more reflexive” (2004:905). Participants were drawn from different traditional settings which helped to enrich the understanding of the experiences in the journey of grieving.

3.5 Narrative

Narrative was the method that was used not only to allow the participants tell their stories of widowhood, but also to understand how they are able to narrate the experiences that have negatively affected them. Merriam states that;

“The oldest and most natural form of sense making are stories or narratives. Stories are how we make sense of our experiences; how we communicate with others, and through, which we understand the world around us...stories, also called “narratives” have become popular source of data in qualitative research. The key to this type of research is the use of stories as data, and more specifically, first-person accounts of experience told in story form having a beginning, a middle and end” (2009:5).

Widows themselves can best tell the stories of widows, they know how they were affected and the narrative approach will help achieve this. Creswell explains that, “As a method, it begins with experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals...Narratives might be a phenomenon being studied, such a narrative of illness, it might be the method used” (2013:70).

Widows go through different experiences in their grieving period and many times their experiences are kept to themselves. Not because they want to keep them, but

that they have no one to share the stories with or that people are not ready to listen to the stories. Allowing them to tell their stories will begin to help them empty what has been stuck in their life for a long time, something they are afraid to talk about or ashamed of, to let it come out which might bring relief for some.

Story telling opens the conversation, and Neuger states that in counselling every participant starts with storytelling in order for the conversation to start; “The counselee begins by talking about the distress or problem in the context of her life and its history” (2001:52). For this to happen, participants will feel free to begin to express themselves if the researcher has created a safe place for them, a place where they will feel comfortable even with those around them. Marshall and Rossman state that; “In narrative inquiry, people’s individual life stories are the focus. This method assumes that people live “stories live” and seek to collect data to describe those lives” (1995:86). The stories are real stories that have happened in the lives of widows, and some are very sensitive. In dealing with such living stories and participants who are willing to reveal their stories, the researcher will need to respect them and understand them as they are, and not to judge them.

Kumar confirms that; “Narratives are a very powerful method of data collection for the situations which are sensitive in nature...You as researcher ask the people to narrate their experiences and how they have been affected. Narratives may have a therapeutic impact; that is, sometimes simply telling his/her story may help a person to feel more at ease with the event” (2005:125). Through sharing stories of other widows and how they were able to handle the particular situation, helped others to realise that they are not the only ones, others have also gone through difficult experiences. Clandinin and Connelly state that in the Education field, studies are based on experiences, they say; “For us, narratives are the best way of representing and understanding experience. Experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it. In effect narrative thinking is part of the phenomenon of narrative” (2000:18). In this way, the experiences and challenges faced by widows

can only be understood better through their different narratives. Phiri et al adds to say; “The act of storytelling – of delving into the past – encourages introspection and reflection on our experiences. We begin to see our past in a new light and this consequently makes us read the present differently. Story telling shapes and reshapes our identity” (2002:6).

Hearing stories being narrated helped widows to understand the epistemology of the whole situation. That is, what happened, how it happened, what followed and so forth? In this way, narrative becomes an important epistemological category in dealing with human experiences. In this regard, Balcomb explains that; “The fact that narrative is a fundamental category of human experience and thinking can be explained very simply. Stories create meaning. In addition, human beings cannot survive without meaning. Things that happen need to be explained...To know how it happened we need to know what happened before it and what happened after it. In other words we need to know how things begin and how things end” (2000:49-50).

The stories of widows helped to know exactly what happened, the treatment that was given and where they are in their journey, the knowledge is not just powerful but also important in people’s lives. Through sharing such knowledge is when ways of helping the women pastorally began.

The African women theology has found story-telling (narrative) as a powerful means of engaging women who have gone through oppressive experiences and other kinds of experiences to come out and talk about it. Esther Mombo and Heleen Joziase in their book “If you have no voice, just sing” talks about the narratives of female students at St Paul’s university in Kenya who through story telling were able to come out of their closet and talk about their journey of faith. These female students included widows. They say; “Narratives include the women’s experiences and challenges in relation to their churches. By doing this we bring to light what may not be known or seen by watching the women at work, but even more we intend to encourage women to come and start using their God given talents in the service of god and humanity” (2011:10). This method, therefore, helped to reveal the hidden

stories of widows, so that what is not known to people of these experiences will be known and women will be helped so that their lives are transformed. Neuger compares such narratives with the story of the exodus that people moved from bondage to freedom she explains that; "The primary narrative in Exodus is the movement from a community of bondage to a new community based on freedom and a sense of solidarity under the leadership of a God who has brought forth this liberation...Once they had experienced this community of empowerment, they were called by God to a new kind of accountability-an accountability based on their ability to see the fullness of their lives and the choices that faced them" (2001:60).

What Neuger is suggesting here is that, it is not only the stories of their past but also what lies ahead of them that are important. This suggests that when participants begin telling their stories and challenges they have gone through the process can be pastoral to the researcher who is a pastoral counsellor. Balcomb alludes to this; "we must listen to very carefully, and take very seriously, the stories that people tell, especially of their faith, because these stories are true, no matter how unlikely this appears to be...the universality of the truth of these stories is proven in the lives of the people who live and tell them. In other words, do not look for universal truth that cannot be demonstrated in the acts, lives and beings of people" (2000:55). With such truth in the stories being told, how can such women be pastorally helped so that their life can continue? This is where Oduyoye said earlier that there has to be commitment to transform the lives of these women.

Narrative experiences were articulated through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, where Finca observed that listening to the stories that were being told or uncovered by different people was not easy, it was a painful experience to both the listener and the victim. Through the process of telling, the story helped many to begin to heal or to reconcile with the past. He says: "Telling your story of obedience to a higher goal is a liberating act. It affirms who you are. You bless your memories of pain and struggle as you fit together in one picture the

act of liberation” (2000:15). Such an experience in mind assisted in the process of helping other widows to express themselves freely and begin the process of healing.

3.6 Case Study

The research was a sensitive and emotional issue to some women. There was need to handle those to be interviewed with care and understanding. For this reason, individual widows were interviewed in order to get in depth the processes they had gone through in their period of grieving. Best concurs with this and says; “The in-depth interview is regarded as a useful research method to use when the subject matter is very personal, sensitive or complicated” (2012:83).

Some widows go through a number of rituals, some that are hazardous to life and violate a person’s rights. In Malawi, some traditions still practice the cleansing ritual of the widow. The researcher wanted to go more in-depth in the study of this practice. To understand what it is all about and what happens. What does that mean to the community that practices it? This cannot be done in a group it has to be in a one to one interview so that the participant is free to express herself. Best continues to explain that; “The case study approach is an in-depth investigation into a case and a case is simply the focus of our research. The purpose of the case study is to gather a great deal of detailed information about that one single case...case studies can have focus on a geographical location” (Ibid:95). This explanation helped the researcher understand the background of widowhood cleansing and the area where this is practiced. Is it a traditional practice that is imposed on the widow or the widow accepts to go through such? Yin elaborates more on this; “There’s no formula, but your choice depends in large part on your research question(s). The more that your questions seek to explain some present circumstances (e.g.” how” or “why” some social phenomenon works), the more that the case study method is relevant. The method is also relevant the more that your

questions require an extensive and “in-depth” description of some social phenomenon” (2009:4). The case that was investigated in this research is very sensitive and personal to the participant thus, why a case study was relevant. It would also made the participant comfortable because she was interviewed on her own. This built trust in that all what was narrated was between the participant and the researcher. When doing the analysis of the research findings the researcher made sure that, no names appeared and that this was treated confidentially.

“In the literature on case study, different authors refer to case study as a method, a strategy, an approach and not always consistent. I prefer the term “approach” to indicate that case study has overarching research intent and methodological (and political) purpose, which affects what methods are chosen to gather data...The primary purpose for understanding a case study is to explore the particularity, the uniqueness, of the single case” (Simons, 2009:3). The ritual of cleansing is not commonly practiced in other traditions, thus this is why it is unique. Through the in-depth interview, the researcher wanted to know the negative impact it has on the widow. When this negative impact was known, then the need to advocate for change on behalf of the victims and women in this cultural setting was paramount.

“As a research method, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group organizational, social, political and related phenomenon...In brief, the case study method allows investigation to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real -life events -such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes, neighbourhood change, school performance, internal relations, and the maturation of industries” (Yin, 2009:4).

The case study being conducted in a pastoral manner, the researcher was mindful all the time during the interviews to be attentive and listen with love. Active listening is very important in this kind of interview. There was need to create good space that

made both researcher and participant comfortable. In using the listening skill, the researcher was able to discern at what point to ask questions and the kind of questions that probed the participant to go into details with the explanation. Eye contact and body language was observed to allow a smooth discussion. It is about real people and the information gathered is what exactly happened. The need to apply the counselling skills is very critical. Wills confirms that; “Case studies are about real people and situations, and much of the data collected occurs in real environment” (2007:239). Many times, people take things for granted including the fact that no one talks about it. In the case of widowhood, cleansing the assumption is that all is well right up until one engages with the victim and is able to understand the real issues. Simons continues to shed light on this and says; “The potential for uncovering and presenting unobserved feeling and events that cannot be observed. In interview people often reveal more than can be detected or reliably assumed from observing a situation” (2009:43). The purpose of conducting a case study interview is to allow the participant to reveal more and shed more light on the case at hand.

3.7 Sampling

The term ‘sampling’ often is associated with selecting the ‘right’ cases from a known reservoir of cases and this can be done at one time (Flick, 2007:30). Each study has the responsibility of selecting representatives that could be interviewed to give information on the topic at hand. Widows are many and all over in the country with different experiences. It was not possible to interview each widow, hence the need for sampling. This means that a representative of widows was selected to be interviewed to collect data. It is very important to explain how those that were interviewed were selected. What criteria were used to select them? Flick further explains that; “We may define at the beginning of our empirical work how many female and male participants we need to interview, set up a range of years for their age, define other criteria life specific professions and the like” (Ibid:26).

In the case of this research, a careful consideration was given to the age gap of the participants. The age gap between 29-70 was not enough, years of widowhood as well were also considered so that comprehensive data could be collected. In some cases, widows were only married for few months and in others for a number of years. Such difference in years helped to understand the challenges and pain that one underwent. “Sampling involves identifying the relevant population. A population in this case includes all the relevant sampling units. The sampling units are the individual persons or social groups in the population” (Haralambos and Holborn, 2004:894). The researcher identified a few individuals as samples before the actual research commenced.

3.7.1 Purposeful sampling

“Cases for study are selected because they are “Information rich” and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population (Patton, 2015:46). A deliberate effort was made in selecting those to be interviewed. Some were selected because of the experiences they went through and others because of the positions they hold. In this case, widows were selected from three categories; those coming from the semi-rural areas whose issues and experiences are different because of the setup of traditional practices in the area. Then those from the urban area, some working or doing business and others retired. The experiences of this group was different from others. Apart from the work they do, they also come from different parts of the country with diverse traditional practices. The last group was drawn from an area that practices a ritual of cleansing. These three groups were selected so that rich results could be achieved. “The research must intentionally select a few cases and proceed to select additional cases so that they can test the findings of the cases that they have analysed” (Flanklin, Cody & Ballan, 2010:365). Intentionally the widows were selected in this way so that there could be a variety of experiences for comprehensive results in the

data collected. The sampling was also done in this way so that the participants did not feel intimidated by the presence of those that economically were different from those coming from urban areas.

Silverman highlights that; “Purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some features or process in which we are interested” (2010:141). This enabled the researcher to interview widows that were involved in some rituals. It also created space to interview the custodian of culture in the area where such was practiced, namely, the chiefs. This allowed the researcher to be able to establish from their side why such rituals are important and are still being practiced. In this situation, the Chief is important because he was able to shed light on some issues that the women failed to explain.

3.8 Analysing Research Data

After collecting all the data, there is a need for the researcher to process the material in such a way that it makes sense and clearly shows the findings. Rubin and Rubin explain that; “Data analysis is the process of moving from raw interviews to evidence- based interpretations that are a foundation for published reports...Analysis entails classifying, comparing, weighing and combining materials from the interviews to extract the meaning and implications, to reveal patterns or to stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative” (2005:201). This means that when the researcher finishes with the fieldwork and has interviewed the required people, there is still work that must be done to make sense of the interviews.

Rubin and Rubin suggest that there are two phases that have to be followed which are; “In the first, you prepare transcripts; find, refine, and elaborate concepts, themes and events; and code the interviews to be able to retrieve what the interviewees said about the identified concepts themes and events. Second phase, you can compare

concepts and themes across the interviews or combine separate events to formulate a description of the setting. In doing so you will seek to answer your research questions in ways that allow you to draw broader theoretical conclusion” (Ibid: 201).

This process of analysing the research interview helped to validate the questions and issues faced by widows. This is the process that led to finding ways of bringing healing to widows that have been affected by different hostile experiences in their journey of grieving.

3.9 Healing Therapy

The theoretical framework used in this research drawn from the African Women Theologians was to use story telling as a means of hearing the stories that surround women. The theory does not only end at listening to stories, there is commitment to help to bring transformation to women and men and to advocate for change. As a Pastoral care giver, the researcher was stuck with the amount of emotions that were expressed by different widows through what they went through. It was clear at this point that interviewing participants to get the information required was not enough. Through the process of interviews, wounds begin to open; widows began to recall their experiences of pain. Such traumatic experiences could not be left without taking action. With this in mind, the researcher organised a workshop for all the widows that were interviewed to help them begin to understand and allow healing to begin so that life could move on. Helping them to heal and to transform their lives to begin a new way forward. A workshop was organized to serve this purpose. It included the presence of the church.

The stories of widows are very sensitive, and women narrate them with emotions. Such emotions needed to be handled with care so that no new issues open. With the help of the Supervisor, the workshop took place in Blantyre Malawi. All

participants were invited to come together to a weekend retreat. Below is a tentative programme on how the workshop was.

Venue: The workshop is expected to take place at Grace Bandawe Conference Centre in Blantyre Malawi

Aim: The aim of the workshop was help widows who were interviewed in the research project come to closure with their loss and past experiences.

Dates: Arrival 28th February, Departure 4th March 2018

Participants: About 36 widows attend the workshop. 6 leaders to help in the groups. These included both male and female clergy. Included more female clergy. Each group to have a scribe and these were students from Zomba Theological College. The Women's desk Director and her Chair and secretary were part of the proceedings.

Included were Church clergy who are male and a lecturer. These were 4 in number and became the voice.

1. Wednesday. Arrival of Prof in the afternoon. Participants from Zomba arrived in the afternoon also. In the evening: Meeting with the Church leadership, leaders of groups and scribes took place in order to prepare them for leading groups. There were be evening devotions for those putting up at Grace Bandawe.
2. Thursday, The workshop to begin with devotions. Official opening by the Moderator and Prof M Masango preached. On this official opening the researcher through the Synod invited Presbytery representatives to come and attend the opening. Male clergy should came with their wives. . After the official opening, the researcher introduced the process that is going to take place. Some do's and don'ts.
3. Prof M Masango led workshop. Introduction, icebreakers was part of the way forward.
4. Friday. Workshop continues. Group leaders and some observers gave feedback in the evening.

5. Saturday. Workshop continued and in the evening closing workshop with Communion by the Synod Moderator. After Communion Prof met with Synod Leadership and ZTC Rep. The aim was to discuss how this could be included in the curriculum or at The Synod assembly proceedings
6. Participants departed after attending a morning service in congregations in the city

At the end of this retreat workshop, widows went back home as free women with the assurance of the church. The presence of the church leadership helped to see a way forward, which will be affirmed by the church, and to be put in practice.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

The research dealt with the personal experiences of widows. It may be that some of the experiences had never been shared because of the nature of the experiences and or because of lack of trust. Having this in mind extra consideration had to be taken to making sure that the stories of these women were treated with confidentiality. Best points out to say; “You have a professional responsibility to avoid the exploitation of research participants” (2012:22). This means that the participants are there to assist in finding the problem at hand and need to treat them as co-researchers and treat them with dignity.

The researcher had the responsibility to make sure that all participants were aware of what was happening. Meaning that the whole process of the interview was explained so that participants knew what they were getting themselves into. When this was done participants felt free to contribute what was needed. Best suggests that extra care must be taken “particularly if the research topic is sensitive and the dissemination of the information could have adverse consequences for the respondent” (Ibid: 28).

Participants were interested to know that their privacy was protected and there is confidentiality in all the discussions. This why it was important that before the interviews, all the procedures are explained, and a consent form is signed by the participant and the researcher. Flick highlights that; “Informed consent should be an obligation in every study.- Confidentiality- how does the researcher take care that anonymity of the interviewee is maintained throughout research process and in publication” (2007:83). This process should run through to the end of research and when the study is completed. It will be unethical for a participant to learn of her name and connected story from someone along the way in breach of confidence.

“The research will follow the absolutist position: This is based upon the assumption that as social researchers we should be moral examples and only conduct research in a manner that is ethical...Disregarding the rights of the respondents leads to researchers to become cynical and treat people as research objects rather than human individuals with feelings” (Best, 2012:34). At all stages the rights of the participants were respected and time spent helped in building confidentiality. When people are convinced that they are protected, their participation will be vibrant, and they will even talk of the things you never expected could come out. In addition, since participants were selected from different churches in the Synod, the General Secretary of the Synod of Blantyre provided a letter approving the research and interviews.

Preliminary Conclusion

The chapter discussed how the research was going to be conducted to get to answer the research questions and to come up with a pastoral care model. The theoretical framework was discussed to help the reader understand what it is and how it would be applied in the research. African women’s theology will help the research to take form by looking at the experiences and challenges of widows. Widows’ issues must be discussed and taken as a priority in the church. The need to transform women in

general is very important here because women were empowered to understand the issues and be aware of the negative experiences, so that when they are in a similar situation they will be able to make informed decisions. It was also discussed that transformation is a process that has to go to all for a common goal to be reached, that is, women, church and community.

The study chose to use the qualitative method for the very reason that it deals with people's experiences. By choosing this method, the different tools to be used were also discussed so that the required data is collected. Narrative method was discussed to help understand that the research would use this method to enter the lives of widows and be able to understand their feelings. The narrative helped with the in-depth interview so that there is more understanding on the issue. The other tools were used as guidelines to help have a professional research and get to the required conclusion.

These methods helped to get to the heart of the problem. To understand that widows have issues that have to be addressed by the church and community, then find how a pastoral care model can be formulated to be used by the church in Malawi.

The following chapter will now look at the issues of widowhood from the Malawian context. That is what happens and how widows are treated.

CHAPTER FOUR

WIDOWHOOD IN THE MALAWIAN CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the methodology outline that this research followed. In this chapter, the issue of widowhood from the Malawian context will be discussed in detail. Blantyre Synod of the CCAP covers the completely southern region of Malawi, which has different ethnic groupings such as the Yao, Ngoni, Lomwe Nyanja and Sena. There has been migration of people from all parts of the country to the South because of job opportunities. These migrants might come from other ethnic groupings such as Chewa, Tumbuka, Ngonde and Tonga and live in a diverse cultural set up. The Southern region has part of the lake where people have come for the fishing industry and work opportunities in the holiday resorts. It has the industrial city Blantyre, Tea estates, and sugar plantation, which attract people for work opportunities. With these places, we have people from all occupations and with different traditional practices.

With the above in mind, the author will now analyse the life of widows. One experience that married women fear is the experience of becoming a widow. "Losing one's partner is traumatic, but this trauma is compounded by the societal and cultural expectations of widows" (Kapuma, 2012:61). Widowhood experiences vary from one area to another. There are also many similarities with regard to the pain and challenges experienced by them. In the olden days, widowhood was associated with older people, but recently widowhood is across the board. There are young widows as well as older widows. With the spread of HIV and AIDS, widowhood has become even more common, many women are becoming widowed at a young age. Nkhoma and Kirwan further comments that; "Widowhood is not a situation experienced only by older women. There are many early marriages in Malawi and it is common to find

widows in their early 40s with more than seven children and some grandchildren” (1997:14). These young women will need someone to journey with them in their grief. To help them understand, get to terms with the loss and move on with life. Kapuma further comments that; “Despite the trauma suffered by widows and despite the fact that this status is becoming more common, widowhood remains an issue people are hesitant to speak about. Death and the dead are topics to be avoided and people are hesitant to address and confront traditional cultural practices. “This hesitation is also present with higher institutions of theological learning. Ministers are not trained on how to support women who have lost their partners, nor are they shown how to confront cultural practices that discriminate against widows. On the contrary, ministers often do not even see what is wrong with such cultural practices” (2012:61). This, then shows that widows are not supported in their time of need and the church which is supposed to accompany them, plays no role in helping them to heal.

Malawi has two cultural marriage practices as indicated in chapter two, with a third one, which is by choice. The first one is the matrilineal culture where at marriage the man goes to stay at the wife’s home. In this practice, the wife inherits land from her parents, which turns out to be their household land. Control of the proceedings are in the hands of the uncle even though the husband will have daily control. The uncle as a male member has the right to decide what has to be done with the children. In the past, education of the children was left in the hands of the uncle, and the husband would be looking after his sisters’ children. This practice is dying, and husbands are taking responsibility for their own children. In the event of death or divorce, children belong to the wife and the house is left with the wife.

The second cultural practice is the patrilineal practice. In this practice, lobola (bride price) is paid at marriage and the woman goes to stay at the husband’s home. She becomes part of his family. In the event of divorce, she is sent back to her family and if it is death, she is either inherited by the brothers of the deceased husband, or asked to stay in the village, or sent back to her family. The children belong to the

husband's family, and if she leaves, she may leave them behind. The third practice which is by choice, that is, marriage may be matrilineal and the wife chooses to go and stay at her husband's home. Therefore, this could be a matrilineal marriage, but living patrilineal. Depending to her relationship with her in-laws, she may be asked to stay or go back to her home with her children after the death of a husband. In all these cultural practices, power resides in men. They control everything and sometimes without sharing with the wife. This is manifested in the practice of lighting fire outside the funeral house. Only men are expected to sit by the fire. This is the place where they make decisions on what to do while the women are inside. Sishanya further comments that; "The fact that men perform the task of lighting fire, a task normally associated with and performed daily by women in their kitchen reveals two important beliefs. First, decision-making on societal matters, which normally takes place around such courtyard fires, is entirely a male responsibility. Women do not sit by those fires...Furthermore, Abaluhya men believe that women have very little to contribute in funeral arrangements. In this case women are denied the opportunity to decide when, how and where their close family members should be buried" (1996:188). Kenya people do not only practise this experience, it is also the practice in Malawi. The fact that women are absent at the fires where decisions are made means many decisions are made without the consent of the widow. They will only come to her when money is needed.

The research will deal with widowhood experiences coming from all these traditional practices and the challenges that they are faced with.

4.2 Death of a Husband

When a husband dies, the elders will say that a 'dark cloud' has befallen our family. This may mean that the person who they depended on most is no more or it's the dark days because of losing someone in the family. When this happens normal activities in the village have to stop to begin the preparations for the funeral since the

practice in Malawi is that the dead are buried immediately because of the infrastructure that some parts of the country do not have mortuaries, and or that the roads are not good enough and transport to the nearest mortuary could be a challenge. Because of this, it may not take more than two days to bury the dead.

Immediately this happens, the widow is expected to take her rightful position, which is sitting in the funeral house and mourn her husband. In the village, as the body may not be taken to the mortuary if he died at home, the woman has to sit next to the body weeping all day and night till the following day of the funeral. She has to be at a position where it is noticed that she is the widow. “Early in the morning on Saturday 24th April, one woman took me outside and said the following to me. “You have to shout when crying and you should cry ‘*muyeni wane, muyeni wane* (Ngoni phrase for “my beloved, my beloved”) so that the people know you are the widow” (Moyo, 2002:400). This is not only in Mzimba, the Ngoni’s of Ntcheu also have a similar practice where a widow is expected to cry at intervals to show that she is the widow, and the person who has died was her ‘lord’. The mourning house should not be quite she has to cry. Every time people walk in the room, she has to cry loudly and others will respond and help her cry too.

This kind of death practice imposed on the widow is very traumatic to many women who struggle in their weeping to understand why the husband has died. “Each type of loss brings its own kind of pain, reactions and responses. The death of a husband is a painful experience, especially unexpected death. Women are shocked and traumatised when hearing the news, especially if it is communicated in an insensitive manner” (Kapuma, 2012:62). At this time, she may not understand what is happening. She is trying to get into the whole situation and at the same time cultural practices demand that she sits in the room where mourners will be coming to join her to mourn the loss. Walker further comments that; “The death of a husband leaves a widow with an overwhelming sense of destitution, of isolation and emptiness” (2010:28). Being heart broken, she may not remember to put her personal belongings in order or lock them in a safe place. So many things will be happening

and at the same time she is confused, she does not know what to do and where to start. Whilst she is in the funeral house crying and devastated, decisions are made without her and property is taken away.

She is seen not to be in a position to make decisions on the arrangements of the whole funeral. Very few women will be asked for their decisions, but many decisions are made by the relatives of the deceased husband, together with male relatives of the widow. She cannot decide on the way her husband should be buried. Not even giving her a chance to go and choose the coffin as a last respect to her husband. Women have been shocked to see the kind of coffin the relatives have bought compared to the money that was demanded for it. If the children are older, the case may be different, because they will be in a position to decide what should be done to accord their father a decent burial. They can go and confide with their mother as to what has to be done. In this, she can give her voice through the children. This also is a critical time because the decision where to bury the husband remains in the hands of the brothers. The older children are able to voice out their father's decision on where he wished to be buried. This happens in both the matrilineal and patrilineal traditions. The family may decide to settle in urban cities and have their property there, and agree that they would all be buried in the city. This does not work many times in their interest. The deceased family members may demand to take the remains to the home village and the wife may not have a say in this. Such disagreements add pressure on the mourning widow. Not many people will understand the difficulties she may have in all that takes place. She is expected to be quiet, watch and listen to the dictates of the in-laws. She may not be given a chance to discuss some of the decisions taken by the deceased if there were no written instructions.

So many changes within a short period. Her title changes, she becomes the widow. Nkhoma and Kirwan adds that; "The death of a husband brings about major changes in a woman's position in the extended family and in the wider society. Her husband's death does not automatically remove the widow from the family, but her position

becomes the subject of discussion and decision making by her late husband's relatives" (1997:15).

4.3 Cultural Practices

Each family grouping/clan has their own traditional practices that they follow during and after the burial of their family member. In these practices, rituals/rites may be practiced. In the case of the death of a husband, the person who has to go through the rituals is the widow. Rituals to be performed have meaning to the family, and it is expected that this have to be followed in order to respect the spirit of the departed. Rituals vary from one grouping to another. It can be a simple practice, but at times, it can involve harmful ritual practices. All these are done at the expense of the widow. White et al comments on this and explains that; "The mourning rituals can sometimes be very abusive and degrading. In some patrilineal societies in Dedza, a widow has to crawl all the way to the graveyard, no matter how far...This is a manifestation of 'obedience', to which the widow committed herself at the time she was getting married... Men do not practice this ritual. This raises the presumption that due to male status, unlike women, men are regarded as clean by nature. On the other hand, they possibly recognise the ritual as a form of punishment. Being the perpetrators of the ill practice, men, therefore, cannot punish themselves" (2002:62).

4.3.1 Shaving and Bathing Rituals

When death occurs, and in this case death of a husband, the wife who becomes a widow has to take her rightful position. She is expected to dress not in an appealing way, but clothes befitting a mourning widow. She has to cover her head with a wrapper so that hair is not seen. In other practices, she is expected to cover her

whole head with a cloth (Chitenje) so that she does not look at the people or the people can see her face. She is meant to walk without shoes, as a sign of someone who is devastated by the death. She should not walk on her own; someone should accompany her. However, this can be looked at positively that she does not have energy and requires someone to assist her, but the expectation of the people is that she should not be seen walking around alone. She will walk without shoes to the graveyard and back, and she may not have bathed from the time the husband died to prove that she is in sorrow.

This practice is now changing more especially in urban areas than in the rural areas, where the widow has good friends, these friends will arrange that she takes a bath and bring her food. Nevertheless, if the funeral is at the husband's home in the village, and people have just gone there for the burial, it may be difficult because everyone is a stranger and they may not know their way around.

After the burial, the family goes into a ritual of shaving the hair. The hair of the widow will be shaved first and then the mother if she is still present, sisters and others who may want to shave. The difference would be that, the other members would only have the tip of their hair removed. However, the widow will have to be shaved all the hair in the head whilst in other practices they only cut the hair short. A male member of the deceased husband does this with a blunt pair of scissors. She is mourning, and everyone has to notice her. She is not supposed to look her best, as hair may make someone look good. The question is that, why are only the widow and the female members of the family subjected to this practice? Are they the only ones mourning for the loss? Like I said earlier that the shaving of the hair might not mean a lot today with the new coming of hair styles where people are shaving, and not all people who shave are in a state of mourning. In some traditions, this is the only ritual she will go through and after that made free. In other groupings, the family will pound herbs and give it to all those that shaved to touch. After that, the widow will then go to bath with those herbs in her bathing water. The herbs are used as a

sign of chasing away death calamities in the family and protecting the deceased husband's family.

In the case of death caused by accident, the family will be required to go to the river to bath together with the widow. They use the water in the river because it is running water and by so doing it will wash away any death calamity that may happen because of the accident. In such a funeral, the widow may be required to do other rituals in order to protect the children from a similar incident happening to them.

After this ritual of shaving and bathing, the widow may be given a cloth to wrap her head for forty days. In some practices, she may be given a dress from cheap, cheap material and a chitenje (local cloth) to wear in those forty days. She is expected to wear these every day until the forty days are over. On the fortieth day, a special ceremony is organised to finalize the death rituals. This is when she is asked to choose from the brothers the one who can inherit her.

It must be put to record that the practice of making widows wear mourning attire is fading out with very few people still practicing it. Around the 90's, when many people died of HIV and AIDS, which included young people, there were many widows both young and old. The younger widows would still be working and expected to wear the mourning cloth, which was black at, work. This was an uncomfortable situation for the widow and her colleagues at work. The Synod of Blantyre, through its women's department, organised a series of workshops to sensitise women about the issue of the black cloth. People talked negatively about it and even said widows wore the attire in order to advertise themselves and show that they were widows. It was agreed then that Christian widows in the CCAP Synod of Blantyre should not wear black in order to avoid the insult that was coming from the community. This action has helped women so much that it is very rare to see a widow wearing black as a mourning cloth after the death of a husband. This was copied by other denominations also. They may wear black clothes during the funeral and on the

actual burial day, but after that, they are not forced to. This is why in some practices; the family of the deceased husband would want to put strict rules on the widow's appearance by giving her the cheap dress to wear for the mourning period of forty days, just to make sure that she is noticed as mourning and having a dark cloud around her. It may also be a means of protecting her from other men who may want her to know that she is mourning.

4.3.2 Other Rituals

Depending on the traditional grouping and practices one comes from, there are other rituals that a widow may be expected to undergo. The practice of these rituals, are in the pretext of preventing the widow from harmful misfortunes in the future. Little is known that these ritual practices violate the rights of the widow and or exposes the widow to harmful situations. Because she is in the mourning state after the loss, people do anything to her without thinking of how that affects her. Some of the practices include:

4.3.2.1 The use of herbs and old plates

Herbs are used in many rituals. These herbs are said to defuse the agents of bad luck that can affect the families. However, in other practices it is not only to the family, the herbs are used to sprinkle the grave and some are put in water at the gate of the grave yard so that everyone coming from the grave should wash their hands. Those coming from such beliefs will adhere to this washing of hands, but others would pass.

With other practices, it will be done on the day of cutting the hair. What is not clear about the herbs is that only female members of the family use them in many occasions. Women would be asked to rub themselves with the herbs that have been

prepared and or to use them to bath with. In the case of a widow, depending on which ritual practice they use, the herbs will be used more on the widow and her children. Others do not just rub and wash with the herbs, they are also asked to drink them. It can be in a form of water mixed with herbs or mixed in a porridge. Moyo relates her experience; “I was given a big cup of porridge made from liquid herbs by a woman instructor. Before I drunk, I asked her what the symbolism of the porridge was. I was told that with the death of my husband, I was now ‘cold’ (sexually inactive) and yet I could be shaking hands and mixing with those who are still ‘hot’ so the concoction was meant to protect me from *mdulo*: “A disease which affects the sexually inactive person.” (2002:400-401). this is what they see in a widow and that they would want to protect her.

Still the issue here is connected to sex. Why would they want to sexually prevent her, these are some of the questions many widows fail to understand the whole motive behind. As soon as death is announced, the widow is expected to accept all the rituals that the older people will give to her. The in-laws may, not give some of the herbs that she is required to drink or rub with; her own family may prepare these for her even before the in-laws so that she is protected. The issue here is also about protection, when both of them were alive; there was no need for protection until when the husband died.

The herbs are not the only rituals a widow will have to follow; she is also shocked by the utensils they use to serve her food. They will look for very old cups and plates to serve her with food. She is supposed to eat alone so that she does not mix with other people who may be ‘hot’ because she is cold. At a time when she needs someone to assist her to eat, she is left to eat on her own. In some villages, they would take her to a half-fallen house for her to eat inside that house. At the end of the funeral rites, the plates are disposed of. The falling house is a building where no one can sleep. Therefore, taking her there is so that her dark cloud should not affect other people and their homes.

Moyo with the experience she went through, further shares that; “Apart from this ‘protective’ drink, my food was served in almost abandoned plates and cups and I had to eat alone in a half-fallen building. The understanding was that all those plates were later to be disposed of” (Ibid: 401). This is an educated woman, and the family did not care about her position, but they brought her down in order to conform to cultural practices even though she was not in agreement with them. The widow is treated like the way they used to treat people with leprosy. They were isolated from people in fear of infecting them. In the case of a widow, it is that she is perceived to be covered with the dark cloud of death. Such an experience will confuse the widow more and make her wonder why people are treating her like this.

4.3.2.2 The sleeping Place

Mourning the dead is not an easy experience in Malawi for women. They are expected to sleep on the hard floor during and after burial. On the night before the funeral, neighbours, friends, people from Church will come for the night vigil. Women stay in the room where the body is laid in state. They sing and conduct services. The Elders of the church will come for a short period to conduct the service and leave the choir and women to sing. The widow will be sleeping next to the coffin on the floor. She is not allowed in the village or to bring a sleeping cushion, to help her get some comfort when lying down. If she does that, they will start talking about her that she is not emotionally affected by wanting to sleep in comfort. When one is not used to, sleeping on the floor, it can be a nightmare. The body will be affected and will have aches. In the cold season, the floor will be cold and that could affect the poor widow’s health. People do not know that this is the time they are supposed to care for her. Making sure that she is very comfortable and able to sleep. Sleeping can help her to relax and get strength for the next day’s activities where she is the centre of attention.

If the deceased husband did not build a house in the village, it becomes a problem. That means the family will depend on a small house that belongs to the parents,

which may not accommodate many people. Depending to the relationship the deceased had with his family, some relatives may not want their house to be used for the funeral if there is no house for parents. They may be forced to use a small house available with one room for the funeral, which can accommodate only a few people. Therefore, in such a situation, it will be the widow and her mother-in-law in that room. In the absence of a mother-in-law, the family may choose an older widow to sleep with her and assist her. Stretching in such a small house will be a problem, and the widow is required to sit there all the time. Such a situation has an impact on the widow. They may have a good house in town but the members of the deceased family insist that he is buried at home. Shisanya comments that; "Choosing an elderly woman to assist a young widow creates some problems because of the generation gap. The deceased wife should be allowed to choose a close friend to guide and counsel her during this trying moment. In any case, a close friend can console a widow better than a strange elderly woman who may have very little to share with the young widow" (1996:191). Whilst agreeing with what she is suggesting, two things have to be borne in mind; that her friends may not be willing to stay with her in the room where the body is laid in state because they are afraid. It may be that the family may not want a stranger to sit with her because of the beliefs they may have; at least a person she knows and can communicate with easily would be better.

In Malawi mourning, the deceased means living your comfort and joining others to sleep on a hard cement floor for over a night and more. This means that the widow has to leave her comfortable bedroom to go and sleep on the floor. This may not be for a day; it may take a number of days before she can go back to her bed. The sleeping place cannot only affect her health it can also emotionally affect her. It is a quick reminder that she is not the same person, her husband is gone. People have not sat to evaluate this kind of treatment whether it is suitable for the widow. A widower on the other hand is allowed to go and sleep in his room. Why double standards. Why should the widow be made to suffer this much. Other places have gone to the extent of making the widow sleep right where the coffin was before burial. It is a time of torture, to make her feel it.

The researcher will now analyse several practices that affect widows during the period of mourning.

4.3.2.3 Widowhood Cleansing

This practice is in two different forms. In some cases, people have done it without knowing that it is widowhood cleansing. The researcher as a minister was confronted with a situation to assist a family who had a challenge after the death of their father. 'I have been asked by my aunt to go home and have sexual union with my husband tonight and come home tomorrow with a cooked meal to give to my mother. I am confused, how can I go and sleep with my husband at this time when we are mourning the loss of my father? How can I leave my mother alone at this stage to go and sleep at my house? How is sex connected to this? Help me Reverend is this a Christian practice?' The aunt in this case only told her what to do. She did not explain what it was for. She was left confused and thus why she came to seek advice from the reverend. She was the oldest daughter in the family and had two senior brothers. Why did the aunt not approach the brothers to do the same but went to the sister? Years later, when she looked at her situation she realised that it was widowhood cleansing. The aunt wanted her to do the ritual of cleansing on behalf of the mother. She was so happy that she did not listen to the demands of her aunt. This explains that some people have done widowhood cleansing without knowing that it was cleansing. They just think that it is one of the formalities of mourning rites. The question remains as to why sex is associated with death rituals. Some of the rituals are not explained as to why they should be done; there are only instructions as to what the widows must do.

The practice of ritual cleansing is present in many traditional African societies. However, some traditions are stopping the practice because of the influx of HIV and AIDS. The practice is based on the belief that the person who is most affected by the death of a husband is the widow and is unclean. Rituals are performed after the death to cleanse or purify the affected person and in this case the widow. They do

this in fear of the evil spirits that are regarded as agents of death, and if this ritual the spirit of her deceased husband does not cleanse her will haunt her. In this case, a widow is regarded as being ritually unclean, because of her husband's death.

She goes through many hazardous experiences in order to appease the spirit of the departed husband. Even though Malawi as a country is trying to educate communities through their traditional Authorities about the dangers of practicing such rituals, because of HIV and AIDS, some families continue to practice cleansing rituals secretly.

White et al clarifies cleansing in the following; "Cleansing literally means making clean what was dirtied and/or defiled. This implies that the death of her husband makes the widow dirty. This is disempowering in itself because a dirty person is looked upon with contempt in society. A widow then cannot be fully accepted as a woman in the society until she is "cleansed." The cleansing ritual is therefore directly linked to property dispossession because in her state, the widow is not expected to take part in important discussions including that involving property" (2002:63). Those that still practice feel that mourning the deceased is complete when the wife performs the required rituals. Perry et al continues to explain that; "Among the Luo community of Kenya, according to tradition, after a woman's husband dies, she must engage in a sexual intercourse without a condom with a "cleanser" often a non-relative of the deceased husband, to remove the impurity she is believed to have acquired from the death of her husband" (2014:1). This practice is practiced in some parts of Africa and leaves the widow in danger. In Malawi, this harmful ritual is what they call *kupita kufa* or *kuchotsa fumbi* (which means, taking away dust after death).

In this practice, a man is identified in the family of the deceased to perform the ritual of cleansing. If the woman refuses the relative to perform the ritual because of her closeness to that individual or there is no one in the family to volunteer to do it, they go to the community to look for one, they hire a cleanser. This person from the community is hired and paid, the family may contribute towards the payment or the widow is left to pay herself. In many cases, he may not be doing it for the first time.

There are those whose income comes through this practice and they are hired all the time. His responsibility is to have sexual intercourse with the widow. In performing this ritual the family and community believes that they are cleansed from the evil spirit that causes death. The family is protected from the calamities that could have happened after the death of the brother and now they are safe.

This raises many questions, what does sexual intercourse have to do with cleansing of the whole family? Why should it be the widow who is already devastated by the death, who is experiencing loss and made vulnerable in most cases? If she gives consent to the practice, why not give her a choice of a man to do the ritual? The man asked to do this ritual is called '*fis*' meaning hyena. He is called by this name because he comes in the night without people seeing him and when children in the home are asleep. Manala further asks the following; "The practice undoubtedly exposes all involved in the sexual cleansing act to the risk of HIV infection. Where are the compassion, respect dignity and solidarity in such practices?" (2015:7).

In most cases, this man could be someone without good reputation in the community, someone who other men could not feel jealousy with. The practice has no respect for the woman who was the wife of their deceased brother, the woman they respected, and now all the respect is gone. They can pick any man to go into their daughter in-law and it is all right with them. Kunhiyop further adds; "She may be seen as impure, a potential source of danger and defilement. The cleansing ritual may involve being bathed naked before the crowd during the funeral ceremony. It may also involve sexual intercourse with a relative of her husband to prevent "the spirit of the deceased coming to seek sexual union, which is believed to be possible and dangerous" Only after completing this ritual can "the surviving partner...safely enter new sexual relations with the blessing of the family of the dead relatives" (2008:261).

She does not just lose a husband; she loses her integrity, her identity, dignity and her property. She is seen as someone without a right to be heard. This may happen in a Christian family and the church may be aware of it and do nothing to protect her. The family and community reinforce this practice instead of protecting and respecting the widow. They are supposed to show *ubuntu*, making sure that her rights are not violated. Metz in explaining *ubuntu* says that; “Communal relationships are well understood in the sub-Sahara tradition as a combination of what I call ‘identity’ and ‘solidarity’. Part of what it is to enter into community with others is to identify with them, or share a way of life with them by which is meant roughly enjoying a sense of togetherness” (2014:309).

If this is the understanding of *ubuntu* and is applied by members of the community, it means that the widow in this case can be protected by the community and will not allow harmful practices to be imposed on her. Manala further cites Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s words of wisdom, ‘when I dehumanise you, I inexorably dehumanise myself’. “According to this insight, it is unthinkable for people who take *ubuntu* as their point of departure to treat others in impolite, painful and dehumanising ways as believed to be the case with African mourning rites practices” (2015:7). Part of the problem we are facing is globalization, which has changed the mind-set of Africans.

The fact that the practice of *ubuntu* is declining, means the widow has no one to turn to for support and understanding in such a situation. The elderly people have no option but to reinforce the ritual they themselves went through to another generation. This harmful ritual practice causes more damage to the life of the widow than one can imagine. The widow is left with a mark that will always remind her of the ordeal she went through. White et al confirms that such practices have consequences affecting the widow in the long term and writes; “one destitute widow revealed that the “cleansing” ritual entails that a widow has to sleep with one of her late husband’s male relations. For this widow, the ritual resulted in the procreation of a child, whose father remains unknown up to this date...The widow’s in-laws conduct this ritual.

A widow may, therefore, not want to annoy her in-laws by fighting for property since they can opt not to “cleansed” her as a way of punishment” (2002:63). This means that widows are exploited in such a way that they have no choice but to accept the ritual. The result may not only be pregnancy, the other possible scenario is that the widow may be infected with HIV and AIDS or STI’s. She is so vulnerable in many ways. Reggy-Mamo confirms this and gives an example of what happened to a young widow who refused in the first place to be cleansed; “When my husband died, I refused to be inherited, in spite of the harassment from my in-laws. However, six years after my husband’s death, I received a message that my father in-law was seriously sick and I should go home quickly with the children. When I got there, the in-laws were waiting for me. They told me if the old man died, I would be blamed for the death. They then took me into a room and brought a stranger to me- a fisherman. ‘We brought him to cleanse you,’ they told me. They left me in the room with the man; they stood outside the door. I begged him to use a condom; he refused. He came to me with brute force. Afterwards, I got a venereal disease; I vowed never to go back” (1985:46). Women have suffered this silently as other women have forced them to go through the experiences they had when they were in a similar situation, saying that it is the best way of respecting the in-laws.

In this practice, if the widow is sent back to her family, she may be required by her family to be cleansed again. She is seen as bringing in death to her own family hence, the need for her to be cleansed again. Therefore, the family will look for another man to do the cleansing again. All this happening to the poor widow because of the death and she has no say. If she says no, she will be an outcast.

4.3.2.4 End of Mourning

Death will only be completed when the widow has finished all the required rites before she is set free. This differs from one family grouping to another. Among

Malawian families, the period is one year. In others, it is forty days. During this assigned period, the widow is expected to continue with her grieving and to behave like one who is mourning. She may do other things to keep her going like, working or running her business. During this period, the widow should know that she has a responsibility of erecting a tombstone to finalize the period.

Society expects the widow to be responsible for the costs of burial and the tombstone. In cases where the deceased husband was working, more pressure is put on the widow to give money for the expenses of the funeral and other costs. Many times, the widow may not have financial assistance for such costs, and is forced into debt in order to pay for the costs. Cultural beliefs state that her deceased husband will haunt the widow if she does not do the last ritual of erecting the tombstone. How can a husband haunt a wife for not doing this when he left the wife with nothing? How can she be haunted when all property has been taken away?

Many widows will comply with this in order to bring closure. Food has to be prepared for people to come and eat. During the funeral, they were not able to eat because of sorrow and on this day, they want to eat at the expense of the widow. A day is set for the function and the two families gather to discuss the finalization of the process of grieving, as now they want to release the widow. The in-laws may ask at this time for some of the belongings of their brother if they had not done it already to take back with. Such items may include clothes, bicycle, radio, and other things that were used by him.

For some widows it is a day they look forward to, so that the grave is done and that they have given the deceased husband a befitting closure. It is also a day where the in-laws will thank the widow for that entire she did for their son, and what she is doing in looking after the children. They appreciate the work she has done in erecting the tombstone. They then officially release her and tell her that she is free to remarry if she wants. Other widows may not look forward to this day because of

the hardship they have gone through. This day is another day of insults, and she may not be appreciated for all the work she has done. Still in the minds of the in-laws, she is the one that killed the husband so that she could benefit from the property. This is where the source of the problem lies.

In order to punish the widow, some families may delay this ritual so that the widow is not set free. It may work as a trap to see if she may not be faithful. So even after all the abuse, the in-laws will not want to let her go; they want to continue to harass her. Nevertheless, this ceremony frees the widow, and the in-laws may not interfere with her life thereafter. She may be allowed to go back home if she was still in the patrilineal home at her wish.

After this, she is not restricted to dressing or doing anything that she may wish. She becomes a free person at last. At this point, depending on how she was treated, the relationship with the in-laws may continue. To others it's the end of everything because of the experiences they have gone through. When the widow is freed finally, she is allowed to remarry.

Those who are young and did not have any issues with the in-laws find it easy to go ahead with life and remarry. However, for those who went through a difficult situation, to start a new relationship brings them the bad memories of what they went through. They are afraid of what will happen to the children and possibly going through the same ordeal thereafter.

To those widows who have been left with property and were not tampered with by the in-laws find it very difficult to remarry even when they have been freed. The fear is that of not being sure of the reaction of the in-laws and the property they have. If the children are of age it is easy because the children can look after the property if she decided to remarry, but when the children are still young, she faces the challenge.

Sometimes the reason for some widows not to remarry is that the in-laws watch them. Their eyes are on her; watching all the movement, she makes, so protective over her as if they care, when they are actually protecting the property. Some widows are afraid to remarry because of some men who may come in the pretence of love, when actually they want to enjoy the property and making sure that it is finished within a short period of time and then to leave them with nothing.

4.4 Widowhood Inheritance

Inheritance should be looked at from two perspectives. The first one where the in-laws inherit her together with the property and the second one where the widow is dispossessed of her inheritance by her in-laws be it she is from matrilineal culture or patrilineal cultural practices.

Even if the husband provided for his wife in the event of his death, widows cannot always be sure that they will have access to that provision. A widow cannot be sure that she will be allowed to keep the money and property that she herself worked for and earned. If an inheritance is available, such as a house, cars, cattle or money, the widow's in-laws often lay claim to it. In this way, a male member of her dead husband's family will inherit the widow herself in the patrilineal tradition. This is so because they can control her, the property and the children. According to the tradition, this practice was in good faith that they would not want to see the wife of their brother suffer.

Nkhoma and Kirwan explains that; "Widows who do not leave their late husband's village are "inherited". To inherit a widow means to take care of her as a husband would do, but does not include a sexual relationship...As inheritance in Tonga

society is associated with economic support...In the case of younger widows it is acceptable for a brother to inherit his brothers widow as a wife...Widow inheritance was a traditional way to show concern and provide care for a widow...However, its modern application sometimes conveys more concern for the dead man's property than for his widow and children" (1997:15).

People have become greedy such that they eye the property of their relatives, and when they die, they are quick to grab it without considering the widow and the children.

The widow is not given a breather to concentrate on the loss, but she goes through another tragedy, this time of losing all the property. White et al tells a story of how one widow suffered such a practice; "Sara's husband passed away in June 1999. When they were just married, her late husband who hailed from a nearby village, convinced Sara to move to a neutral area. They subsequently moved to Kachere, a peri-urban area in Blantyre District. In Kachere the couple invested in a block of four houses for leasing to tenants, and a grocery shop, which Sara managed...Sara's brother in-law ordered her not to return to her matrimonial home.

Instead, they took over the home and all the investments at Kachere. They did not even give her a share in the property. Sara complained to the Chief who distributed the property. Sara and her children were given two houses. Her in-laws were given the other two houses and the grocery shop. After this, Sara was still advised by her in-laws to return to the village" (2002:56). The in-laws inherited everything that Sara had worked for leaving her and the children with nothing. Many widows have experienced such treatment from the in-laws. Thus, it makes the widow lose completely everything with no consideration for the work she was doing and the children that she has.

In the patrilineal societies, the man holds total ownership of the property. After his death if there is no will, or written document on how the property should be

disbursed, the control vests in his father or brothers and sisters. The widow will be required to stay in the husband's home village and use the property there. She is not allowed to start her new life afresh. If she wants that, she must leave everything behind. Sometimes if she asks to leave, she is thought to have plans of re-marrying.

The case in the matrilineal society is not that different. Even though there is no *lobola* at marriage, and the husband comes to stay with the wife in her village, the practice of property inheritance is the same to that of patrilineal society. The people from the deceased husband will come and claim all property, which is male. In many cases, the so-called "male" items in the family are the ones that have a value. The wife is left with items that are termed "womanish" which includes only cooking utensils. White et al describes the matrilineal society as follows; "In matrilineal societies, perpetrators are said to range from *ambuye* (uncles), brothers, parents and even nephews. Although the sisters of the deceased husband do not, on the face of it, feature among the list of the perpetrators, among the Lomwe in Mulanje when nephews dispossess the widow, sisters of the deceased husband are normally the driving force" (Ibid:65).

This suggests that women are only honoured and respected by the in-laws when the husband is alive. When he dies, anything can happen to her. The widow suffers after many years of working in the home and having acquired property together with her husband, all is taken away and she is left with children without money to survive on. Moyo narrates an experience of a widow she interviewed and says; "My husband was a retail shop businessman...After his death his brother locked up the shop and he could not allow me to access money from it. After six months, I went to confront him. He told me that if I am interested in the benefits of the shop then I should cooperate with him. I said I was willing to work with him. He told me he would come to my house later on after closing the shop. He came and that is when I realized what he meant by cooperating with him. He allows me to have cash whenever I cooperate with him" (2009:155).

The woman is a victim after years of working together with her husband. She does not just lose a husband, she loses the property, she becomes a sexual object and is abused, for her to access the money she worked with for her deceased husband, the money that belongs to her. Kabonde articulates to this practice and says; “a woman is more like a spectator who is told do this and that without the power to refuse what she does not like...in many cases women remain with the children while the relatives take all the money and property. Sometimes, this is accompanied by insults, for a widow is not regarded as part of the family anymore” (1996:197).

Ownership of property in both cultural settings largely belongs to men. Since men have power and control, they are able to determine who gets what. Even in situations where the woman is a breadwinner, the property is labelled male. The family does not even care to understand who was doing what in the family, and how they accumulated what they have. In so doing, their interest is to distribute the property even if it means to distant relations.

Women who have higher paying jobs than the husband are at a disadvantage, because anything accumulated in the home is seen to be done by the man. Some women have been robbed of property that belonged to them and still had to pay the loan they took to obtain that property because of in-laws who are greedy. “This happened to a friend that at the death of her husband, his family came from all over and even outside Malawi. After the funeral, they proceeded to share amongst themselves all the property, including a car she had just bought from a loan at her work. Luckily, the widow reported the car stolen by the in-laws and it was registered in her name. The police returned her car as it was about to cross the borders of Malawi” (Kapuma, 2012:65).

Sometimes property may be taken away or left with the widow depending on her conduct. If the widow is seen to be a good woman who cared for their brother even during illness up to the time of death may she be rewarded by leaving all the

property in her care. However, if there are doubts about her behaviour and that she is not in good terms with the in-laws the property may be taken away.

The story of Mrs Kulekana as presented by White et al reports that; “the relatives of her husband were of the view that Mrs Kulekana was a ‘whore’ and a ‘slut’ not deserving of the widowhood status since she had not behaved “properly” during the deceased man’s illness. This was in specific reference to the fact that the widow continued to run the family business, which sometimes took her away from home, during her husband’s illness. They, therefore, felt she deserved to be dispossessed of the property” (2002:60). This is difficult to understand, because the woman may be doing this to bring money into the house, which would even assist with the house keeping including expenses of the illness.

The absence of a will and ignorance of the law has left many widows with nothing in their possession. Unfairness will start from the district assembly offices where the Administrator-General will unfairly distribute the death benefits to the deceased family if a will is absent. Cases have been found that the members of the deceased family would go behind the widow to claim all the benefits, even that which belonged to her, and not give her anything. If she happened to be included, she was given the least share. The officers in these offices would be bribed at the expense of the widow. Ignorance of the law and the proceedings of death benefits have made many widows to lose their share and that of their children. In Malawi, the issue of a will is a delicate issue, and many fear to even talk about it.

Some men may write the will and not inform the wife, thinking that if she is told about it, she will kill him in order to enjoy the benefits. Therefore, the absence of this information will make widows suffer when actually their deceased husbands had made a provision for them.

White et al has an example of what happened to a widow who was ignorant of the law and lost the property. She writes; “Mrs. Labana’s husband died in November 1999. At the time, the couple had amassed a lot of wealth including a nearly completed commercial building, two residential houses, a plot of land and three motor vehicles. They were also selling bricks. Before his death, Mr. Labana wrote a ‘will’ and deposited it at the district assembly. He distributed his assets amongst his wife and children. Unfortunately, the will only carried his signature and was invalidated by the court. His brother took advantage of this and took over the running of the family businesses. He ended up using the proceeds for his ends. On some days, he would give the widow very little money to buy food for the week. According to Mrs. Labana, her brother-in-law was not taking care of her as he claimed, but she was being robbed. This was because as an individual, she already knew how to run the businesses herself since that was what she used to do with her husband. The amount of household money that her brother-in-law was giving her was far from adequate” (Ibid: 83).

With this story, we can see that the absence of proper documents made the widow to suffer in the hands of her in-laws. The ignorance in this case was not only of the widow, but also her late husband. The district assembly did not help him to verify the validity of his will. This ignorance of the law and proceeding of the will made the widow not to be able to claim. The authority of his brother to administer the property was also at fault. One may wonder why this was so? Was there no one who could help the widow in this case? Was this done deliberately so that the brother in-law continued to enjoy the deceased estate? This area requires pastoral care by the clergy and the church.

There has to be an intervention that will help and prepare couples to understand the importance of the will. This can help many widows who may have this as a challenge. Malawi is highly dependent on subsistence farming, where families get their income from the crops they produce; widows have been robbed of such land and left with nothing even in the matrilineal tradition where she owns land. These

are some of the struggles faced by widows in Malawi, and this needs pastoral intervention. The church should know what happens to the widow after burial, to be able to follow up on how property was distributed and how she is settling and coping after the loss. There are other challenges that they need to explore. For example issues of children.

4.5 Impact on Children

Death of a father has made many children suffer without a good future. As a widow the mother does not just fight her loneliness and other problems, she has to fight for her children's' future. She has to help the children find a place in the society that can welcome them as they are, and also help them understand and accept the new status in their life. "My daughter had problems to accept the passing on of the father because she was very close to the father. In the time prior to his death I was concentrating on my studies, thus many of the child-rearing responsibilities were taken over by my husband. One result of this was that he and my daughter became very close. Not only was this relationship taken away from her at his death, but she also had to go to boarding in the following year, even though she was still very young. I remember her being sad, wishing her father could fetch her from school when the holidays came, as all her friends' fathers were fetching them" (:67).

Helping children adjust and go on with life without their father is one of the biggest challenges a widow goes through. In unfortunate situations when all property is taken away from them the children, find it difficult to adjust to the new situation and environment. They have many questions and do not understand why they are in that situation. Questions like when is dad coming back home are one of the difficult questions the mother has to answer.

They may ask why they have moved from the town to the village where there is no running water. She may not explain well about what is happening and that their dad will not come again, because she is also in pain and full of emotions. Mlowoka shares his experience; “My mother went through a sad experience after the death of my father in 1980. In fact, she was forced to be inherited by the elder brother of my father in the name of “chihalo” (This means inheritance by a brother to take over responsibility of the family which means being in control of all the deceased property). He was already married with a wife and many children.

Some few months later after their marriage, the relationship between my mother and uncle’s wife became sour. My mother and ourselves, meaning children, were badly treated and insulted by both our uncle and the wife to the point that my uncle went to the surrounding schools, ordering them not to allow us to go to school. This really made the whole family to live a more miserable life than what we were used to.

Our father did not only die but his death took away everything that we had. All these affected me personally in many ways. I was delayed starting my primary school. When I was selected to go to secondary school, I had problems to find school fees. You can just imagine that my mother had to struggle through making pottery in order to get my school fees and clothing. Unfortunately, both of my sisters prematurely got married and my two elder brothers dropped from school. This situation affected our family severely”. In this case, the family had no one to go to for support and or counselling. Instead of her concentrating on and nursing her grief, she had to assist the children to cope with life through the difficult times. The pain will stay much longer, and it will be difficult for her to move on with life. She had to try many things for survival of her children.

In another situation, a woman was married to a man she met at work. They had one child together and invested in a house together. The man went to work in another country and left the family behind. Unfortunately, he died whilst there and the

remains were brought to Malawi. What shocked the wife is that the funeral was at his brother's place instead of their house. The family took all the property from his work and left the wife and child with nothing. The child was going to a good private school and now the mother could afford it. Some friends helped her to pay fees, but it was only for one term. This has affected the child; her performance at school has dropped and she is psychologically not right, she got depressed. She does not want to see people; she wants to be alone in her room. She feels embarrassed to see her friends having everything at school when she cannot afford to be with them. Therefore, dispossession does not just affect the widow; it also affects the children and their future.

Many times, parents forget to check on how children are coping with the loss. The children may seem to look normal, but with many issues and questions in their minds. The widow may not notice this because she is handling her own grief or may be busy solving issues so that her children may succeed. They are not able to talk about it and in the outside world the children are being reminded that their father died. They feel isolated from the friends they play with, because their friends are always whispering when they see them.

Matheka further explains that; "Children are prone to react to their grief outwardly. Tantrums and attention seeking are common in younger children. Their performance in school may also drop. They can also be sensitive sometimes and may have intense feeling of anger. The loss of their father often means a loss in their sense of security" (2013:69). Lack of pastoral care for children has affected many children to be insecure and to lose concentration at school. Small, small things will matter to the child, and if the mother is not aware, she will get to know it when it is too late.

The situation may be worse with adolescent and teenage children. There is so much happening in their body, strange developments, and they do not know what these are. These and the loss of their loved one may contribute to a different behaviour.

Grief in children may last a long time depending on how the situation is. If life completely changes and the children have no one to talk to, and express their feelings, the children may end up thinking that no one cares for them. “The funeral was tough and going back to school was really hard, but eventually adjusted to the fact that dad wasn’t coming back. Then things started changing so rapidly. My older sister graduated from medical school and got married. My other sister graduated from law school and got a good job. My next sister was making new friends and moving on with her life. I sort of felt like the one everyone was moving on with his or her life and I was still grieving. I couldn’t understand what was wrong with me, or if it was my fault. I sometimes felt like everyone had forgotten about dad” (Reggy-Mamo, 1999:99). Children miss their father, but they will not talk about it. What may be seen are symptoms or reactions to the situation. The struggles that widows and their children go through happen in the community where there is the church. The question one may be tempted to ask, is; what is the church doing?

Dispossessing the widow from all the property that they had affects the children. Some children have not been able to continue with their education. When this happens, children are affected when they see how their mother is being treated as a widow. It affects the children to see their family and community members mistreat and disrespect their mother. In the context of South Africa, at church the mother will have to sit at the back because no one is supposed to sit behind her as she is carrying a dark cloud. This can have many different consequences. Some children can become depressed and unable to perform at school.

Facilities to take such people for help may not be available. The nearest available institution is the church. Some of the mothers in their own state of grieving may find it difficult to help the children which will end up in them losing them to other forces. Because she does not have the strength and capacity at this time to help her children, who are also grieving, pastoral care for her and the children will help to solve the situation. A caring church can save many lives of children who lose hope after the death of their father

4.6 Trauma, Pain and Stigma

During this time of loss, a widow may go through difficult times in her life. These difficult times will need some assistance of some kind. This is the area where pastoral care is needed. Below are some of the experiences she may go through:

4.6.1 Trauma

Death comes as a shock because of the loss of the beloved one. The person finds herself in a state of not knowing what is happening. The situation traumatises the individual. Trauma is a difficult experience that many widows have experienced through the death of their husband and through the abuse, they get from the in-laws. This kind of experience is often left unattended to pastorally. No one understands what the widow is going through at that time, and such experiences may result in serious psychological and emotional damage. According to Collin; “The immediate effects of trauma or other stress-inducing events are well known. They include physiological change in the body-such as more rapid heartbeat and breathing, increased muscle tension, and more adrenaline pumping through the system- along with emotional responses such as fear, uncertainty, anger, or confusion. Sometimes other reactions appear such as headaches, nausea, vomiting, fainting impulsivity, or the appearance of well-known psychological defence mechanisms” (2007:766). These symptoms go unnoticed because of lack of care and support. People surrounding the widow may think that everything is normal with her. The challenge could be coupled with having no good health facilities in the area for the widow to go to for medical examinations.

Death of a husband will come as a blow leaving many women in a state of shock. They do not want to believe that it is actually him who has died. It is worse when it is tragic death, e.g. accidents, suicide etc. One young widow shared her traumatic experience on how she could not believe the news broken to her by the police that her husband was killed in a car accident. She thought for a moment that it was a joke that they were lying to her; it could not be her husband but someone else. She

told them that they took her husband to the mortuary alive. She went on to tell them that she could only believe them if she touched him where they had put him. She was in a state of shock and could not believe them. Sometimes people are not sensitive enough as to how to break such news to individuals. It could be better to break such news where there are people who can assist in any emotions that can come after the shocking news. Our African communities are supposed to be supportive in times like this, but may be confronted with cultural practices that may prevent them to be close to the widow before her own family is there.

Many people no longer live in family units or clans as it was before, so that in such times like this there is no-one there to support them. Death may happen whilst the immediate family members are away. If it is in the village, it may be that the close family members are not around, or they may no longer stay in the village. In some cases, it could be that there are few women around to assist the widow with the tragedy. Cultural practices may demand that burial takes place the same day. In an unforeseen circumstance, this may happen when the wife is not there like the case of Anagama in the background story of this research. She had no say on what happened to her husband's funeral, which made her not to be present at the funeral. Because of the situation she found herself in, the trauma she experienced of seeing her husband die, raised her blood pressure and she was admitted for medical attention at the hospital. This made the family of the deceased husband to go ahead and bury him without the consent of the wife.

People are not aware that the cultural practices affect widows in different levels. These practices can be challenged and changed for the betterment of people. It is through other people's experiences that we can make people understand the negative side of life and bring about positive change. Maluleke and Nadar agree with Racoczy that: "while cultural norms and values are very important in our lives, they are not absolute. Cultures are not static, but undergo change over both short and long periods of time" (2002:14). The family members and the community should

be able to understand and use *Ubuntu* in dealing with sensitive issues like this. That is, the woman (widow) is a human being with feelings and needs to be assisted.

The woman is seen at this time not to be in a position to make concrete decisions. Decisions are imposed on her. She cannot decide on how her husband's funeral should be organised. Even though Collins puts it that: "grief usually involves intense sorrow, pain, loneliness, anger, depression, physical symptoms and changes in interpersonal relationships" (1988:347). However, this should not make the family of the deceased husband to take things for granted, that the widow is not in a position to make her own decisions. In some families, they discuss all the funeral arrangements behind her back; they even decide on who has to inherit the property without her consent. She is made vulnerable and expected to go through all the customs/traditions and rituals without question. The older women of not crying loudly for everybody to notice that she was the widow accused Fulata Moyo (2002:400). This case may suggest that people do not come to comfort you at a difficult time, but they come to see and witness the way you are handling your grief and then talk about it behind your back. In the state of trauma, so many things go wrong and decisions happen without the wife's knowledge making it a painful experience.

4.6.2 Pain and Stigma

"The pain of loss was unbearable. One moment he was here with me and the next he was gone" (Matheka, 2013:46). The experience of widowhood is painful. "Becoming widowed, and the choice of words is deliberate, is possibly the most painfully difficult thing one can ever have to undertake in life. Firstly it is never a choice one makes; it is a situation that is forcefully imposed on one" (Rowland, 2016:4). Many women are left to keep their experiences of pain to themselves without someone to share with. Sometimes it is because there is no one in the community she can trust and confide with. Someone who will keep her stories a

secret. On the other hand, the community expects the widow to adhere to all death rituals without questioning and in some of these rituals; she has to distance herself from people because she is seen to be unclean.

During this time, the widow has so many things going on in her mind. She does not understand why this has happened to her. She has physically lost her soulmate, he is no longer there to touch, hear or smell he is gone, a painful experience indeed. “I conducted a Widows retreat in June 2002 with women who were widows within the community of Fort Hare University in South Africa. The experiences of these women were very traumatic. They never had a chance to talk about what they went through during and after burial of their husbands. Some of them had been widowed for more than 20 years and still hoped that one day their husband would return. There were some who were afraid to sleep alone in the bedroom because of all the nightmares they had” (Kapuma, 2012:68).

There are so many stories that widows have that they have not shared. Some would sleep with the door open thinking that the husband will come whilst they are asleep and should not miss the door that led to his former bedroom. Matheka further comments that: “Many have experienced waiting for him to come home, while others pick up the phone to call him only to remember you cannot talk to him” (2013:57). This is a reality in the experiences of widowhood. Some try to reach to him in their bed only to find themselves down on the floor on the other side of the bed because he is not there. After such a long period, these women were still in pain, because they had nobody to share their experiences with which could help to bring healing. Maake Masango explains that; “African people need to turn to basic values of the village life so that they can recover the concept of caring. The emphasis in the African village community is on communal life. Once this concept has been revitalized, codes of living and caring for one another will be respected” (2005:924). The widow is marginalized with no one to turn to for support. The pain of loss, loneliness, cruel rituals and cultural expectations can make the widow live in pain for a long time. Pain of being accused that she is the cause of death.

In the church where she can go to for refuge and or solidarity, they treats her as an outcast. The pain of being seen as a threat to people's marriages and not trusted when she is in the company of men. She is not expected to celebrate communion with others in some Churches. She sits at the back and is the last one to be served so that she cannot bring bad luck to others. The Church, which is the body of Christ, forgets at this moment that one part of this body is in pain, the Church should feel the pain as expressed by Paul. As said already that many times people around her are not aware of the challenges she is meeting in her daily life. Now that she is single, she is thought to be available to men. She goes through the pain of being taken for granted that she is now available for sex with anyone. Her status and dignity is gone she is just a woman.

She was respected because of her marriage and now that the husband is gone, she is a nobody. In her daily life, she is reminded that she is single. She is confused, she is in pain of not knowing who she is now, where she belongs, whether single or married. She is reminded of her vows and that death has set them apart, a painful experience. Stigma is attached to her name.

At home, she is reminded all that time that things are not the same when she walks into an empty bedroom. When he is no longer on the chair, he used to sit on. When she fails to do simple things like replacing light bulbs, paying bills, fetching children from school, the things that the husband used to do and the pain of losing out on everything. The feeling that people want to see her behaving differently, makes her think that she no longer has a life. The husband died and was buried. She is still alive and has a future to look forward to.

How can these women be helped to understand death and to go through the grieving stages, which will help them accept it at the end? "African people still have the weakness in their caring system, because of confusion of trying to live their lives while being influenced by Western lifestyle. As human beings, we still need the support of others (Ibid: 917). For the Church to know what is happening with widows when they bury their husbands, it needs to open its doors and hear the negative experiences of widows. Such an action will not only help one person, it can also

help many who are struggling with closure. Helping many women with similar experiences to tell their stories of pain – someone who will listen without judging them.

4.7 Lonely and Isolated

Death has come to you as an intruder and taken away your loved one, your friend and companion. Life will never be the same. You have several questions in mind, which may even question the wisdom of God in taking away your friend. Many widows have expressed that the most torturing experience they went through was when they were left alone with no one to talk to. Owiti (2011: 82) says, “But after the burial you don’t see a single church member coming to visit. You are left in a very, very lonely situation”.

Remember that decisions are made for her to follow without questioning the motive behind it. She has no choice of clothes as she is expected to wear black or insignificant clothing during this mourning period. She is not supposed to wear fancy clothes, or put make up on, as a sign of a mourning widow. For those that choose to wear the mourning cloth they pick the black colour as the sign of mourning.

A widow becomes a different person with a different appearance and left alone. What will be in her mind? In some traditions she cannot eat with others and in some traditions, she is only allowed to use old plates, which will be destroyed after rituals are over. She is surrounded by a dark cloud and seen as unclean, she cannot share with those that are clean until a ritual is performed she is restricted socially. She is not allowed to visit other homes or shake hands with people. At a time when she needs support and comfort to help her begin to get to terms with what has happened, she is made to be alone – lonely with no one to talk to which in many

cases affects her physical health. To be silent and not seen talking is one of the virtues of a good grieving widow – so this is believed and taught. Suddenly she becomes a sexual threat to the church members and society. She is not free to talk to any man and even the minister who can assist her through her grief. “A common comment is that widows, especially, are seen as a threat to couples in social groups. Widows can be seen as piranhas, out fishing for men” (Rowland, 2016:19).

She is marginalized and without decisions to make, only following the dictates of the in laws. Many women suffer silently and become lonely which leads to depression. This has resulted in some women dying early thereafter because of such treatment.

Of course, people’s ability to talk to widows is not always the result of cultural constraints, but also because of ignorance of knowing how to talk to someone who is grieving. They may not have words because they do not know what to say. “One of my friends told me that she found it difficult to talk with me during the period my husband died, as she felt she did not know what to say to me. I could not understand the difficulty, why could we not talk about the things we used to talk about. If she felt that talking about husbands was a sensitive issue, there remained many other topics, as our friendship was not restricted to talking about husbands. Yet every time we met, she only told me that I was ‘looking good’. After some time, she explained that she kept on expecting me to look different and not presentable. I had to look like someone who was mourning, for how long” (Kapuma, 2012:66). The friends one can turn to for solidarity are the first ones to shun away from the widow. A widow does not just lose a husband; she also loses all the family friends, the very people she spent time with are the very people that run away from her. The question one may want to ask is whether the church has seen this taking place amongst their members? If so what is their responsibility?

As single person, the widow begins to experience what single women go through. Owiti (2011:82) an ordained minister in Kenya continues to share her experience and

says, “As a clergy, your social networks are curtailed as you are under surveillance from both your colleagues and the church members. You are seen as a sexual threat to the church and society. I am not free to talk with clergy men, just as they are not free to come to me”. If a widow is not free to talk to her minister, how will she be helped with the issues she is experiencing? She must not speak to men otherwise she is perceived as enticing and seducing them, she must be very careful of what people will say, or what the wife will say. It is as if all the men become her relations. She is afraid on how to address certain issues with men; she will need someone to be with her as a witness. In the professional world, it is difficult because she cannot work with women, especially when she is a member of the clergy or working with many people in a busy institution. A stigma is attached to widowhood just like with single women. This may suggest that as a widow, she has no choice; any man regardless of his status is suitable for her. Loneliness can lead to depression, which is a very serious psychological problem. When such people are not treated for the problem of depression, the results have not been good.

Isolation can be worse if your widowhood is HIV and AIDS related because of the stigma and discrimination that is attached to it. Kwamboka shares that she did not know that she was infected with HIV after the death of her husband, until when her baby got very sick and was tested positive. Apart from losing a husband and herself getting sick, she was discriminated against and isolated from the community. She says: “At home I lived a life of shame and embarrassment as I was thin and I looked very bad. My family saw me as a failure and I was asked to stay away from the public eye especially when we had visitors. I was very bitter with myself and my family for the way I was treated, but I forgave them and myself when I learnt what the disease was and committed my life to Christ. Looking back, I do not blame my family because of the context and the little that was known on HIV and AIDS” (2011:72). In a home where she expects acceptance and understanding this may not happen. Her own family sees her as an outcast, and she will ask herself what more then will the other side of the in-laws say to her? It is a difficult time needing support and counselling.

4.8 In-laws

In-laws play a very significant role in conducting rituals pertaining to widowhood cleansing. They make sure that all rituals are followed before they release the widow. During sickness and the funeral, the in-laws observe the way the wife of their diseased brother behaved. Her behaviour will determine whether she has to be treated with dignity or not. If the in-laws saw that she was rude and stubborn, they could punish her for that. Some of this may not just be the result of the funeral. In-laws may have had their issues with the daughter in-law way before the death. They may see her to be a proud person and would want to deal with her when the opportunity arises.

Some of the women are more educated and established professionally, but in the eyes of the in-laws, it is their brother who was making her prosper. If as a couple you are no longer able to assist people in the village, a time like this becomes a difficult time to the widow because she will receive all the insults from the in-laws. White et al comments that: "Conduct that may prompt dispossession also includes being seen in the company of other men either during the husband's illness or before *nsudzulo* (After the husband has died). Rudeness and hostility towards her in-laws during the subsistence of marriage is also unacceptable conduct for the in-laws. In Mulanje, even the conduct of the widow's relatives during her late husband's illness is monitored" (2002:82).

In-laws will justify the treatment given to their brother's widow because they want to teach her how to behave. The grieving widow cannot take such challenging experiences lightly. She is frustrated and feels sorry for herself that such things are happening to her. Death brings to an end the relationship they had with this woman who they once adored and respected. She becomes a nothing and they play around with her emotions with her having no one to turn to for support. The widow has many unanswered questions. Why should this happen? Why are they mistreating the

soulmate of their son, the one who will continue to take care of the children? What will she tell the children about the in-laws? Will she allow her children to be associated with such people?

Sometimes you may think the in-laws do that because they are jealous of you, they do not want to see the widow prosper and want her to suffer. Sometimes they may ask her to return to her home with nothing. After years of marriage, she goes home empty because she did not agree to the dictates of the in-laws. So much is forgotten that the marriage between the two brought the two families together in a relationship. Their children became the bridge between them. After death all, this relationship is gone, and the widow reduced to nothing. Why should our culture treat the widow this way? Why is it that the elders of the community do not put this to a stop so that the widow is treated well by the in-laws? This means that as a married woman, she will always be a stranger in the hands of the in-laws and she has to behave very well in order for them to treat her well.

4.9 Role played by Women

The men in their families use women to reinforce cultural rituals. As custodians of cultural practices, they make sure that their practices are passed on from one tradition to another. Hearing from the sad stories of widows, it is women who bring pain the most in their journey of grieving. If the widow did not have a good relationship with the women in charge, she will experience negative responses from them. Moyo in agreement with this says; “Within these experiences, it is frustrating that in experiences of widowhood like this one, it is women, in the name of being faithful to tradition, who become agents of inflicting more pain to widows” (2002:400).

There is a case of an in-law who mistreated the wife of her late uncle. She made sure that she had no peace and lived a miserable existence. Two years after this happened she lost her own husband. Her own family and that of her deceased husband told her that it was her turn to suffer the same. She could not stand the pressure and left to settle in a new place on her own. There is a saying that goes; “Fire goes where there is bush left”. Women should know that the negative treatment widow’s experience now might come to them later. They should learn to treat others with love.

Sometimes women will pretend not to be seen as the ones reinforcing negative rituals or treatment. However, they are the ones acting in the background. Mothers will indirectly encourage their sons to go and take the property from the widow because it belongs to their uncle and, therefore, it is theirs now that he is dead. “Sometimes, even before the death of the uncle, their mother may incite them to spy on the condition of the wife so that later they find an excuse to dispossess the widow. Some women therefore, oppress other women. This could be attributed to women’s struggle over scarce resources. At the end of the day it is the sisters who use the property” (White et al, 2002:66). These women are not just ordinary women; they are Christian women who belong to the women’s guild. They forget the objectives of their association and begin to exploit another woman who may belong to their group. The same women will gossip behind the widow’s back that she is after their husbands. They are the same women who will say that she has not taken much time to grieve; she is already doing things normally. A woman in the women’s guild why she was already driving and going around in town asked a widow. The widow only responded to her that if she had a choice she would not be driving but that she had no choice and there are things that have to be done thus that was why she was driving.

4.10 Christian Teaching and Prophetic Role

The Christian teaching is centred on love. That is to love one another and to be there for each other. These are the values that many Christians have but one wonders why it is not shown in practice. Some of the teaching known to all members of CCAP Blantyre Synod, *Kulewa miyambo yonse yoyipa ndi zones zotsutsana ndi mau a Mulungu* (To avoid all harmful cultural practices which are against the teaching of the Good News). If this is so, why is it that some members of the Synod are forced to go through harmful cultural practices when those in the forefront are members of the Church? Are the rituals that widows go through not seen to be harmful? What widows experience is not from outside. Those forcing the widow to be cleansed belong to the same church but will say its culture. Where is the boundary between cultural practices and Christian practices? Are people not practicing both at the expense of other people who are seen to be vulnerable during their time of loss? The Church may have relaxed in its teachings giving chances to those that would want to maintain their harmful cultural practices.

The Church teaches also of the Ten Commandments that should be followed to keep the Christian values of how one should be living. How can this be justified when a widow is forced to have sexual intercourse with an in-law or a stranger and say she was being cleansed? Is that ritual more important to prevent bad calamities to happen to the deceased family than the values that she may want to keep? In other words, the widow is forced to commit adultery by her in-laws. How are the Christian practices different from those of non-Christians? The Church is called to be present in the midst of people's situations. How can she continue with the prophetic role if there so much that is compromised?

The Bible is very clear in its teachings of love and caring for others. It is also very clear on how God cares for widows. If this is the case what stops the church to remain to its teachings other than following that, which is not accepted. If through

marriage a husband and wife become one flesh, it means that this union extends to the two families making them one family. If this is the understanding, then there is no reason the other family would want to harm a widow who is flesh of their deceased son. In this case, one may start questioning the roots of our Christian faith if we have double standards like this.

4.11 Presence and Role of the Church

Many people continue to become Christians because they want the church to be present when they die. They want their funeral to be a Christian funeral where the clergy will come in their attire and the women's guild will wear their uniform. The church is present at funerals, but the rest of the time decisions are left to the family members, not able to protect the decisions made by the member when she joined the church.

When death happens, the women's guild members are the first people to appear and show support. They will come in their numbers to help in cooking, singing and helping the bereaved family. They do all they can up until the burial. After that, they all go to their homes leaving the bereaved family alone. This is the time the family takes advantage of the widow to bring into practice their cultural issues.

Women do not stop there, even when they go back to their homes after burial. They are able to set time to go back, visit the widow, and share with her the word of God. They try to encourage her to be strong. The only problem with them is that, they are not caregivers who have been trained and do not know how to console the widow. To them they are doing their best. Some of the verses quoted from the Bible could be misinterpreted in order to provide comfort to widows. For example, the common passage used is Isaiah 54:4-5, which says; "*Do not be afraid; you will not suffer*

shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget your shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. For your maker is your husband- The Lord God Almighty is his name” (NIV).

Widows are often reminded through these verses that they are not alone, that Jesus Christ is going to be the father of their children who will provide them with everything they need if they ask of him. The women may be trying to help, but not knowing that they are adding more pain to the widow who does not stop crying all night for help. The widow may be asking for the presence of God in her situation. Most Christians are guilty of misusing the biblical texts and it may apply to ministers too. The Church has the duty to engage its members on issues of death and dying and help them discover how they could use a better theological framework to help these issues.

In some cases, the minister will only come for the funeral service. He/she may not give time to go and see the widow and talk to her. How she is feeling, the issues she has, what are her fears? Her relationship with her in-laws is also not discussed. This is important for the minister to know before the service begins so that he will know what to say at the right time. All these need to be taken into consideration so that there is a holistic approach to the funeral service and thereafter.

When the service begins, a part is given to the church until the burial is over. Then a spokesperson of the church will say, “This is the end of the Church service and hand over to the family or the Chief”. The fact that the Church is openly saying this, gives the family of the deceased person to have courage to apply their cultural rituals. If the Church was to be present throughout, some of the issues raised above could not have taken place. Kabonde further comments from the Zambian experience that; “In our society the problem of the widowhood affects both Christians and non-Christians. There are many women in Zambia who experience these problems and their suffering may vary greatly indeed. The Church should be able to offer them something. As it is, some Christian widows have ended up killing themselves as a

result of their depression...It is time that someone stood up to fight against the evils that widows currently have to face” (1996:196).

The Minister may come from a distant place and cannot stay to oversee all the procedures, but there are elders within the area who can stand for the church. The problem is that it is the very elders who are the custodians of cultural practices and would want to see that all the rituals are followed. The church is not strict on the use of harmful cultural practices. It does not bring the culprits to book for discipline, nor take a prophetic stand against that practice as such and or violation of other people’s rights. There are several challenges that take place in her life within a short period and these may continue for a longer period if not attended to. The community and the church take it for granted that she is going through her grieving period and handling it well, little do they know the actual pain she is going through at that time and what will need attention. The shock of losing a beloved one and to begin a new life and the trauma that follows because of the traditional rituals that the widow will go through is a challenge to the church today. The church’s presence should be felt in all her grieving period and should be giving the helping hand.

The story of Mwingi from Kenya gives us an example of how she missed the presence of the church at a critical time of need. She says; “I had lost my husband, my child and my dad and now I was sent away by the church. The recent experience made me reflect on the situation of widows even more, especially the humiliation they go through both in the church and society. You may think people sympathize with you until the end...I was left as a nobody in the church and in the society. It was not easy to cope with this” (2011:78).

The Church is seen not to be available which makes widows to feel that they do not exist anymore. The church will go ahead to organize activities for different groups in the congregation, but has never organized anything for widows. Instead they are asked to assist in those other activities and do many voluntary activities in the church

because it is thought that they are available, they have nothing much to do at home. Oduyoye comments that; “Women would agree that to be caring and helpful, to share with, provide for and minister to the needs of others is to be truly human. But to be made to do it, to be taken for granted when you do it is to be treated as less than...The lack of respect for women’s feelings and perspectives should be seen by theologians as lack of recognition for women’s humanity” (2001:74). Women are human beings created in the image of God and this has to be seen and emphasized by the church.

4.12 Long term effects of Widowhood Experiences

Issues of widowhood are of great concern because these women are members of not only the community, but the Church also. Not anything concerning the members should be taken lightly; they should be a concern of the church. “Christ loves his church and the church is called upon to listen with love to the many cries of people in and outside of the church” (Kapuma, 2015:266). The above experiences and stories of widows speak for themselves as to how much work has to be done to address them. There are issues of poverty, abuse of rights, ignorance of the law, ill health and gender based violence.

4.12.1 Poverty

Poverty is a serious concern among women in Malawi. Women become poor due to many reasons such as being deprived of the necessities of life or disadvantaged because of their status. Those who are not able to obtain a minimal required standard of living may be seen to live in poverty. Many widows live in poverty after the in-laws take all their possessions away. In Malawi, the condition of poverty may be seen as lack of a productive means to attain basic needs of life such as food,

water, shelter, health and education. The plight of widows is when they have no means to start a new life again. Everything may have been taken including land, which she could cultivate, and help her to get food. The land she may have cannot produce anything without applying fertilizers and manure.

White et al explains that; “In Malawi poverty is largely feminised. One major recent change in family household structure, which has attracted much comment, has been the rise in the proportion of households headed by women. The reasons for this increase are diverse for different countries but it is generally evident that the number of female-headed households is related to marriage strategies, property and inheritance issues...In Malawi where most female headed households are divorced, widowed or single, opportunities for female headed households to engage in self-employment and productive work are limited due to competing demands and their time in terms of child care, household tasks, and their main responsibility as the main economic provider” (2002:27). The experiences of some widows will make them fall into this category not by choice but because of selfish in-laws who do not take into consideration her upkeep in the long term. Chebet and Cherop further comment that; “Gendered poverty and the right to human dignity have been recognised as the central challenge to the development of humanity. Poverty is a dehumanising condition for everyone. It violates the human rights of the affected, whether women or men. Poverty subjects an individual to a state of powerlessness, hopelessness and a lack of self-esteem, confidence and integrity” (2015:195). For those widows living in the rural areas where the land has become degraded, management of such will be difficult and this will lead to malnutrition and continuous illness. She may not even have proper shelter, which will affect her living condition. In such cases, poverty may include lack of clothing; beddings, which makes them, sleep in the cold and basic necessities like soap to wash and bath with just to mention a few.

4.12.2 Abuse of Human Rights

Women are supposed to live with dignity as those created in the image of God. They are supposed to be treated as human beings that have rights. In as much as we talk about African culture, the culture is not static but dynamic. Things have to change with time. Women have to be recognised as people having their own rights to exist. Baloyi further comments that; “Cultural widowhood rituals clash with the rights of individuals involved in the act. Despite the widow’s tears, many African women continue to instigate this practice even if it threatens someone’s life. A culture that disregards one side of human individual rights but promotes the other fails to acknowledge what it means for God to have created a human being as complete. It fails to recognise that human individual rights are essential steps towards reaching full development for women” (2017:4).

It should be noted also that women would want to have a good quality of life and live happily. Their rights should not be violated and taken for granted and that they will abide with the violation of these rights. Chitando further says; “Personhood in African cultures has been construed and constructed in a hierarchical manner, with men enjoying full and privileged status...Expunged of its patriarchal underpinnings, *ubuntu* can socialise boys and men to fight sexual and gender-based violence. Currently African men committing violence are not exuding *ubuntu* (particularly in its refined form). *Ubuntu* can empower men to realise and accept the full humanity of women” (2015:276). When men are empowered to understand issues of oppression and dehumanisation of women, they will be able to protect women and give them the dignity they deserve.

Malawi has signed many protocols on human rights and these are not supposed to be just on papers. These are laws that have to be followed to protect the lives of innocent people, women included. White et al quotes the United Nations Human rights Declaration as follows;

- All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
- Both men and women are entitled, without any discrimination, to equal protection by the law.
- Everyone has the right to own property alone and/or in association with others.
- No one should be arbitrarily deprived of his property.
- Everyone has a right to a standard of living and a right to security in the event of...widowhood (2002:31-2).

These human rights laws are part of the Malawian law and if they are exercised, women will not suffer injustice and abuse. The problem is that these laws are not known and women when found in a situation of exploitation do not know that the law of Malawi protects them. The harmful ritual practices mentioned above, do not just oppress and abuse the widow, these practices undermine her rights as a human being. The fact that she is a widow does not mean she is a victim of any unwanted behaviour and discrimination.

As a person, she needs protection. This protection is not available from her family and community where she lives. The Church is part of that community and should make herself available to assist and journey with the widow. Nyangweso strongly says that; “Although indigenous practices and attitudes are culturally legitimate and meaningful in social units which they are found, it is imperative that moral principles remain a fundamental responsibility of Africans. Recognizing that some of what is upheld, as culture is incompatible with the welfare of significant members of African communities, ought to be central to efforts to promote human rights in Africa. It is particularly important that the rights of women be centralized in moral discourse of African virtues” (2017:287).

4.12.3 Ignorance of the Law

The above incidents that women found themselves in, is a clear indication that they do not know the law. Because of this ignorance, they are taken for granted and deprived of the things that belong to them. Women can inherit property without other people interfering. However, the cultural practices have made them to believe that they have no rights to fight against the injustice done to them. The ignorance of the law is from the family to the institutions that help to distribute property. Because of grief and lack of support, women keep quiet and accept whatever is done to them. White et al explains from the Malawian perspective that;

“Property dispossession takes many forms. These include grabbing, seizing, diverting or disposing of deceased property. Of these, property grabbing is the most widely used term and is sometimes used to entail all forms of property dispossession. There are however problems with the term “property grabbing” because it is incorrect term to use to define taking of property from widows. The term is androcentric because the act is perpetrated against women because they are women. It is a term for circumventing the act of theft since the grabbers take what does not belong to them against the property rights of the widow. The term also fails to describe the aspects of violence that occur when property is taken from the widow...The injury perpetrated against the widow transcend to physical injury and in some it is hidden because of socio-legal norms and the vulnerability of women” (2002:24).

Such ignorance of the law and what it means to an individual has made many widows lose what belongs to them. They have also not done anything about it because they do not know what to do and where to start. In this case, the presence and knowledge of the church in these laws can save the widow from being exploited by greedy in-laws.

4.12.4 Poor Health

Widowhood conditions are likely to leave the widow with dilapidating health. From the time of death of the husband, the widow is exposed to many hazardous health situations. She does not have a proper place to sit comfortably, and is meant to sit on the cold floor for a number of hours. In some case, she may not cover herself well in the cold weather, which will lead to having fever and flu. The sleeping conditions and the long nights and days coupled with crying may lead to some serious health problems.

Stress related problems if they persist may lead to depression. Depression is one of the health problems that is not noticed easily. The lack of good health facilities may aggravate the problem. In many health centres, the personnel do not take a serious check on the patient; they only treat symptoms and not going into the causes. Many people, who may not have medical aid, will go to the clinic and get only panado.

When going through some of the hazardous ritual practices, some widows have been infected in the process with STI's and HIV and AIDS making them more vulnerable with no concrete support systems. With the absence of health care systems, many widows' health may deteriorate and they may even die early leaving children as orphans with no one to care for them, or having the burden of caring for each other at an early stage.

These issues need the church's intervention to assist. Illnesses may not affect the widow only; the poor living conditions and lack of proper food may affect the children more especially those under the age of five, which may result in death. If such unfortunate situations happen, the widow will suffer a double blow of not only losing a husband but also a child. It may not go well and she may need both medical and spiritual attention.

4.12.5 Gender- Based Violence

Violence targeted at women happens everywhere even in places like the home, where one would expect to get maximum security. It is a conduct intended to show the other person that those in control have power and can do anything. It is also intended to undermine a person's humanity, identity and dignity. It encompasses acts of physical as well as emotional abuse. The act of making widows go through difficult ritual practices and stripping them of their possessions is a violation of one's rights. "Violence against women should indeed be viewed as a form of gender-based violence directed at women because of their gender. Violence, therefore, is an engine for the maintenance of unequal power relations between men and women in society...neither can it be limited only to the physical aspect. It extends beyond the physical to include emotional, psychological and sexual abuse" (White et al, 2002:24).

The ritual of widowhood cleansing and dispossession of property are acts of violence that affect the widow both physically, emotionally and psychologically. Zulu alludes to this by stating that; "Despite the fact that this cultural practice applies to both men and women, it is in most instances the women who are subjected to it in practice. This is so because in most situations the woman would be dependent on her husband for her livelihood. One also sees that this gender-based prejudice or treatment of women is linked with other culturally legitimised forms of discrimination- in some contexts, with a women's inability to inherit from her husband, or women's inability to own land...Men would often use her fellow women to subject her to all sorts of practices in the name of culture" (2015:93).

The problem at hand is that gender-based violence issues are there in the communities and there seems to be no one to address these. The fact that the society is patriarchal in nature, and that power resides in men, men will not risk challenging their own privileges to favour women. Patriarchy will make sure that men are benefiting at the expense of women even if they don't deserve it.

Issues of violence should be at the heart of the church because it deals with humanity. There should be ways that can help restore the dignity of women so that they live a life that has meaning. Le Roux suggests that; “The challenge is thus to find a way of challenging culture and the cultural practices which empower men at the expense of women, and which enable and lead to VAW, while at the same time not denying or denigrating the importance of culture” (2015:239).

What this means is that culture that is oppressive and exploits people in this case women cannot be accepted. Nyangweso comments that; “The major oral concern with regard to widowhood rites is that they violate many basic principles contained in all key international human rights conventions. A culture that undermines one’s health, freedom of choice and general welfare is a violation of the basic human rights and should be considered problematic” (2017:374). Culture is dynamic and there is a need to look at all the positive elements of culture that makes us who we are and get done with those practices that are inhuman and dangerous to women. The hope is in the church to bring back *ubuntu* to reality.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter critically looked at the situation of widowhood in Malawi. That is the challenges and experiences. The chapter discussed and put to light various forms of rituals that some widows go through in the name of culture. In all the arrangements, the voice of the widow is silent, anything can be done to them and they are expected to accept and follow without questioning.

These practices have people who enforce them and those that benefit at the end. The perpetrators of the various abuses that widows go through are mainly the male relatives in both traditions of patrilineal and matrilineal. Women though may seem to be silent as they only act behind the scenes. They are also perpetrators of the

negative practices enforced on fellow women. They are the ones that make sure that widows follow and do the exact things at the required time. In-laws take the centre stage in making sure that the widow is dispossessed of her rights and property. The widow is left empty to start a new life with nothing. She has the task of taking care of children when there are no resources for it. She is stripped off all her dignity and seen as a nobody.

In respect of the widows themselves, it was discovered that they lacked knowledge of some of the issues that made them suffer. Women are ignorant of some of the laws that can help them out of the negative treatment they get from their in-laws. For support and solidarity, widows would expect the church to journey with them, but the church has not acted according to her teaching and pastoral care roles. Widows are left to journey alone, which delays the healing. Hence the challenge for the church and a call to make the church alive, present and to take action.

The next chapter will discuss and explain in detail the real issues of widowhood as narrated in the interviews that were done. It will help to hear what the stories of widows are and how these have affected their personhood, what mechanisms are there to help the widows in their healing process and to continue with life positively. The following chapter will help us understand what was discussed in this chapter and relate to the literature that talked about widowhood experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERVIEWS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses in detail the living experiences of widowhood. There is so much that is not known about the experiences and challenges widows go through. The interviews have brought into the open some of the experiences. Things that we take so much for granted are the very issues that widows are struggling with. The experiences are going to be narrated by the widows themselves.

For us to understand and appreciate the stories narrated by the widows, the narration from the widows will be divided into three parts. In the first part, the author will give detailed experiences that emanated from the case study interviews.

In part, two are the group interviews. Widows will narrate their experiences and will be able to analyse such experiences and issues that emerged from their situation. The group interviews were held in Blantyre and drew the subjects from widows coming from the different parts of Malawi. This group has different traditional practices, and the women are either working and or are running businesses.

The stories narrated from part one and two will be written exactly from their own words and directly translated into English. The stories from both the case study and the group in Blantyre will set the scene to help in the understanding of the challenges widows go through.

Then the third part will be from widows coming from Zomba district. These widows formed the second group that was interviewed. The stories narrated were analysed in themes. The common issues discussed or narrated by the participants were discussed under the different themes. This helped to analyse the common problems that are faced by widows.

After the narration of stories from widows the researcher will present the findings from the interviews held with the leadership of the church, the women's group leadership and the interview held with the Chief. A summary of the findings and issues raised follows.

5.2 Stories from the case studies.

Two women were interviewed from Chikwawa district in the Southern of Malawi. The traditional practice in this district is patrilineal. Women go to live in their husband's home. After death, it will be up to the deceased family to allow the widow to stay with them or to let her go home. These two widows interviewed found themselves in Chikwawa by default and have continued to live there. The initial plan was to interview one widow because the author was not sure of finding widows who would be willing to be interviewed, but the research ended up interviewing two widows who went through the same cleansing ritual. This is of advantage to the research because these women raised different issues during the interviews.

The local minister in Chikwawa was contacted, who said that he had women in his congregation who went through the cleansing ritual. Therefore, he identified the lady who was willing to be interviewed, who then decided to bring along her friend who was a widow and went through the same. This was to the advantage of the research and both were interviewed separately. This was very important because two different experiences came from these two widows, which were rich with informative.

5.2.1 Interview with Mayi Mateyu.

My name is Mayi Mateyu (pseudonym) and I am 56 years old. Originally, I come from Mozambique. I came when I was small to stay with my uncle at Fatima. I got

married in 1979 and my husband came from Lilongwe. We had 8 children now left with 5 children.

A crocodile at the garden caught my husband when he went to look after the crops. Our garden is in the banks of the river. When the usual time of him coming home passed, I followed him to the garden to check what delayed him but could not see him. I searched for him all over the place but was nowhere to be seen. The people I asked of his whereabouts said they did not see him. It took a long time for me to know exactly what happened to him. The people around and his friends were afraid to tell me that he was caught by the crocodile.

This happened in 1998, and I was nine months pregnant. I struggled with this pregnancy because of the shock I had of my husband. Why was he killed from the same garden we go to all the time? What was he doing? Why he was not helped? I was confused. I did not see his face or his remains. My husband came from another tradition different from mine. He came from Lilongwe; they do not practice our tradition of kupita kufa. I refused to be cleansed because of his tradition and I was very advanced with my pregnancy. When the child was born, my family and the community forced me to go through the ritual of kupita kufa and frightened me that I was still keeping the death of my husband, which was a taboo to the community. I could not understand why my own family was forcing me to do that, when that was not the traditional practice of my deceased husband. I still refused and told them that if it is dying let me die also.

When the child was four years old, she got sick with malaria, which turned to become cerebral malaria and eventually died because of poor treatment. When this happened, the whole family was against me. You see, you refused to be cleansed, your child has died. You are going to kill us all. The village is not safe. At this point, I was so afraid that I could lose all my children, and then I accepted to be cleansed. This meant that I had to be cleansed for two deaths, that of my husband and my child. They said if I don't do the ritual, I was going to bring strange diseases and

calamities to the family and community. I had no one to understand me, I was all by myself. Everyone was afraid of me because I had death around me.

The man was identified and charged me MK17, 000 (this amount of money was equivalent of a minimum wage of casual labour per month, a lot of money for someone in the village to have). They said I should pay this alone as a punishment of not following what the tradition demanded. The man who is called fisi (hyena because he only comes in the night), came.

- The first night he came after releasing himself said 'ndapita kufa kwanga' (now I am taking the death)
- A day passed and came the following day for the second time.
- He will come for the third time, and after releasing himself he will 'ndapita kufa kwanga (I am taking my death).
- He came for the fourth time. They call this 'Unyalumbi' meaning finishing the whole ritual
- As if that was all. He came again for the fifth time called 'Nyakanjenje' meaning "now I have finished the cleansing that I was asked, you are now clean".

After this, the next morning the family members shared powdered row tobacco. They sniff it all and that makes them sneeze. When they sneeze, they say thus the end of the cleansing- now she is clean, and the family is free from any misfortunes. This was not the end of my problems. I had just started another (she takes a deep breath and continues). This sexual relationship with the hyena, made me pregnant. You can see the days were many. I told him that I was pregnant. He said he did not want money for making me pregnant, but could take me as a second wife because he enjoyed his responsibility with me as a hyena. I refused. I accepted my fate. What could I do? Nothing I was a victim again. Nobody would speak for me in the same way they spoke before the ritual. I was all by myself. To face the period of pregnancy, the shame and the child thereafter. My child was born in 2002 and now is in Standard seven.

When I came back to church, I was called to the session who disciplined me because I had a child without proper marriage. I had no choice; I wanted to be a full member. I accepted the discipline.

Asked what she thinks about this cultural practice, Mayi Mateyu had this to say;

- It is our culture and you are expected to abide.
- I was made to commit adultery against the teachings of my church.
- It was my family that was threatening me, I was called names.
- The death of my daughter pained me most. She was a reminder of the painful death of her father.
- The man hired as a hyena was cruel. He came with force. It was a painful experience. At the end of his duty every time, he had to say something. I did not like it. It pained me more because I knew he was only taking advantage of my situation. He came all those days because he said it was for two deaths.
- Personally, I don't believe in this. People bring in witchcraft elements to prove themselves right. I know my child died of malaria not because I was not cleansed.
- Women are very hard- they are the ones that will make sure that you go through the ritual. They are the ones that make your life difficult.
- The church was not there for me. They did not understand what I was going through. They did not come to me. The church only applied the rules on me without understanding what I went through. The church is seen far during this period, instead of being close to shield you and cover you.
- It was a painful period. I lost my husband, child. Then having unwanted child because of the cultural ritual.
- No one understood what I was going through. I suffered alone. Every time I cried for my husband.
- I am now back to church and a deacon. Life is not easy I struggle to take care of my family- but life must go on.

The result of such an experience.

The researcher was able to analyse the following as the problems that has affected Mayi Mateyu up until now.

- **Family Pressure:** She experienced family pressure for her to go through the ritual without them understanding her position. Her own family instead of supporting her they were the ones in the forefront forcing her to do the ritual. The family did not take into consideration, in the first place, that she was fully pregnant, and that it would not be good to have a sexual relationship with a stranger at that advanced stage. They also did not consider that the deceased husband did not come from this tradition and that there was no need for the family to impose such a ritual on her, they also did not take into consideration the kind of death he died, that the wife was still traumatised. They were only thinking of themselves during their daughter's situation. The family was not able to feel with her when the child died. Instead, more pressure was put on Mateyu to do the rituals. This time to include the ritual of the child who just died. They could not support her even financially. She ended up paying the fee by herself. The family, which was supposed to be with her, to understand her emotions and to walk with her, was not there for her. What was important was that as a woman, she had to fulfil the traditional rituals for the family to be cleansed and freed from other calamities.
- **Pain:** Mateyu's story is a story of pain. She was traumatised by the sudden death of her husband. Which was a painful experience. Whilst going through this pain, she had to go through her last days of pregnancy with loss and no husband to support. Because she refused to be cleansed, the family may not have supported her to the fullest when she went into labour. The pain of raising the child by herself was immense, though she says she was a reminder of her husband.
- That was not all the death of the child brought more pain when the whole family turned against her. She had no shoulder to lean on for support. The pain of having a man come to her against her will. The painful experience, as she narrated that he was forceful, took advantage of her, and came several

times, which resulted in the unwanted pregnancy. Forced to commit adultery as she puts it. She went through the pain of carrying an unwanted pregnancy. The pain of having that child. She had no choice to love her but was always reminded of the rituals she had to go through because of her two losses. She was required to go through another ritual of weaning the child as they call it. This means another sexual intercourse with an unknown man. She had literally refused to do this ritual. The pain of being judged by the church and going through discipline without understanding her situation was overwhelming. It is a story of pain and she did not receive any support even from those that could support her.

- **Loneliness:** Her story explains that she was made to be alone. She was an outcast. People and the family feared her because she was carrying death with her. This experience increased her pain where she felt like dying. The family did not see this, what was important were the rituals not the well-being of their own daughter.
- **Financial Support:** Mayi Mateyu lives a miserable life. She is living in poverty. She was not wealthy when the husband was alive, but they were able to manage life together. Now that she is alone, she struggles to care for the children including the out of wedlock child. She spent time in an isolated life, which was not productive to her. Knowing what had happened, the family did not help her even to pay the hired man. She struggled herself.
- **Relationship between her children;** the child who was born as a result of the widowhood cleansing has relationship problems with her siblings. They tease her and tell her that she is not part of the family. The older children have been told by neighbours who she is and thus why they isolate her from themselves. This situation is very difficult and painful to the mother. The child keeps on asking the mother who the father is, but the mother cannot reveal this because she knows what happened and this may not go well with the child.

With these experiences, it can be concluded that the death of her husband brought misery, misfortune, ridicule, discrimination, exploitation and poverty to her life. The

church was far away from her, it added more pain to her experiences and challenges.

5.2.2 Interview with Mayi Damiyano

My name is Mayi Damiyano (not real name). I was born in 1962. I got married some years back, I have forgotten the actual year, but it has been many years. I have five children and four grandchildren. My husband died on 10th June 1994. He was sick for three years and I took care of him. We found ourselves here in Nchalo because my husband was working with the sugar factory company.

When he died the members of his family asked me to bury him here in Nchalo because there was no house at his home village in Nsanje, which would make it difficult for the funeral. After the burial, my brother in-law wanted to do the ritual of 'kulowa kufa'. I refused because this was the real brother to my deceased husband. I saw him growing; he was like our own child. Secondly, I told him that I was a Christian and my husband died as a Christian, thus why the minister came to the funeral. I cannot do that because it is against our Christian teaching. I stayed without doing the ritual.

Three years later, I was on and off sick. When I went to the hospital, they could not find anything. My family accused me that I was sick because I was eating warm food (It's a belief that when someone has not been cleansed and eats food from those that are sexually active can affect her health). Because of my illness, I accepted to be cleansed so that I stop the accusation that was taking place in the family and being isolated. They found the man to do the ritual and was asked to pay myself because I refused my brother in-law to do it. I looked for money, which meant doing peace work to get that money. I paid him Mk10, 000. The man came for three times, one day apart and at night when children were asleep so that they could not see him. I did not accept him to come for the fourth time called 'Unyalumbi'. I felt

that, what they wanted was enough after the three times. After a while, I had a terrible diarrhoea that came with blood. The treatment from the hospital was not working. My family started talking again. I then went to a herbalist who gave me medicines and told me that my problem was as result of not following the traditional procedure well and the hyena was not happy that he did not complete. There was no 'unyalumbi' to finalize the ritual which could make me clean.

I feel that through this ritual, I contracted HIV. The hired man died few years later of AIDS. This cultural practice is done through meetings from both sides to discuss your cleansing. Whilst waiting for the cleansing, you cannot cook for people to eat and you cannot eat food that has been cooked by other people. When you do the ritual, everyone is happy and you have a good relationship.

I did not get the money that the company paid as benefits to the work of my husband. The relatives of my late husband took all the money. I was left with nothing including the children. I went to the office several times and was told that the money was in the hands of a cashier at the district offices. Whenever I went to the offices, I was told he was not available. Then later I was not that the cashier died, and they cannot help me. That was the end of the search and the beginning of our problems.

When a husband dies people take advantage of your situation. I do not believe in our practice of 'kupita kufa' its 'mafano' (superstitions) and not important. If one refuses, they take advantage of that and bring in calamities and misfortunes on your family. This is done to prove the tradition right. I feel that this practice should not continue. I have been in it and I know what it means. Instead of freeing, you from what they believe in, it brings more problems to your life than the ones that you already have. I was not happy to practice this ritual. I felt like I was committing adultery when I was forced kulowa kufa. My life has never been the same. The other problem is that you cannot express your inner emotions. The pain just stays in

you and in your heart. I was not happy because I felt being used, that I was not worthy the woman they knew before. The pain has continued because I was infected by HIV in the process.

I got married, only for a few months. It did not work. When the man realised that I was pregnant, I was starved to death with nothing to eat. He did not want my pregnancy. I had one choice. I went back home. The child is now grown up and stays with her father.

After all this, I came back to church. I was disciplined for not having a proper marriage and getting a child from that. I went through the prescribed discipline, of the Church by attending class, and was later re-instated. I am now in the guild and I sing in the choir.

Researcher's analysis of the narrated story;

Her situation may be the same as the first case because they both went through the ritual of 'kupita kufa' after being forced by their situations to do it. There are some challenges that have been picked up from the narration of her story.

- **Pain:** She felt pain when she was reduced to nothing looking at the age of her brother in-law who was younger and wanted to have sexual union with her to cleanse her.
- It was like an insult that a younger person had the strength to approach her for that. She was in pain because of her Christian conviction. It was a painful experience when she realised that the hired man just wanted to use her. A painful experience to lose all her dignity in order to fulfil the demands of a traditional practice. A painful experience to realise that the cultural process made her contract HIV. Which tell us that the hired men are picked without knowing their status, which is dangerous to women. In pain because of the pregnancy and that, the man disowned her.
- **Her Status:** This is a serious issue; more problems were added to her existing problems. In her journey of widowhood, she has to remember to care

for herself every day in her life with the concerns of her children in mind. She may have been chased from the second marriage after a short period when the new husband discovered that she was HIV positive and pregnant. He may have not wanted to take on the responsibility of caring for her.

- **Property:** The relatives shared the benefits from the husband's years of work without considering the family. They are the ones that directed her to bury the husband where they lived rather than taking the remains home because there was no house. This should have concerned them to find ways to help the woman have a house. They lied to her when actually they had gone to collect the money. Made her go to different offices when they knew the truth. She was just used in the marriage. She did not have a word. Even though the husband was the one working, she contributed to that as a wife and the benefits should have helped her and the children.
- **Support:** The story shows that Mayi Damiyano had no support of any kind from her family and other people in the community. She went through all the negative experiences alone. In that community the church members were there and what they saw was the failed marriage but not what she was going through.

5.2.3 Interview with a Senior Chief

Having heard from the two widows the experiences they went through and the culture they belonged to, the author went ahead to have an interview with the senior Chief of this area as a custodian of culture to understand in depth the meaning and beliefs on the cultural practice of 'cleansing'. This is what the Senior Chief had to say;

“Women experience a lot of hardships in our culture. They have to undergo different rituals for them to be able to cleanse themselves and the community so that they are able to participate in any activity of the community. Without this cleansing ritual, she can be seen as an outcast.

When a husband dies, soon after burial, the wife has to undergo a ritual of 'kupita kufa' (death cleansing). This has to be done immediately so that she can cleanse her family and the community. The family members organising a man to do the 'kupita kufa' ritual do this. If a relative is not available, the family contributes to hire a man to do the ritual. In this ritual of cleansing, the man has to have sexual intercourse with the widow for three times as per required and up to five times depending on the situation and also it depends on the man himself and the reaction of the widow.

In the process of doing this, she may be asked to return to her maternal parents. If this happens, she may lose everything for example, house, cattle, and goats and including children. The relatives of the deceased husband take this property. She is sent back with children if she is lucky or she goes back empty.

When she arrives at her maternal home, she is a stranger- who is coming with death. She will have to be cleansed again in order to protect her family. The family will look for a male relative to have sexual intercourse with her (kupita kufa). Her own people will demand that this cleansing ritual has to be done so that she can eat and be among them. Even if this ritual was already done at her deceased husband's home, she has to repeat it. If she does not adhere to this, she will remain an outcast. The chief will not be happy with her situation because she is seen as someone who will bring bad omen to the village.

Long time ago, death was very rare in the community, people would die, but after a period. When this happened, the chief demanded that there should be a cleansing of the village so that no one dies. This was done to protect the village from death. In this case witchcraft was also part of the danger in that if no cleansing was done, the practice of witchcraft would take advantage of the situation, and strange things would happen, then people would say because there was no 'kupita kufa'. In as much as this practice is for both men and women, more focus is mainly on the widow than on

the widower. The widower may even have a choice of who he wants to do the ritual with”.

Why is it that the cultural practice of cleansing has to be done through sex? Is there no other ways that the widow can be cleansed without going through an act of sex?

The Chief continued to say that; “When death occurs, it is believed that both of that is the wife and husband are warm- meaning that they were meeting as husband and wife. So the fact that the husband is dead, he lives his wife ‘warm’ and there should be someone to remove this warmth through sexual intercourse. The woman as someone, who has been married in that family, has no choice but to accept the dictates of the culture. She will have to be made cold so that she can then associate with everyone in the community. When this is done, she can cook, and people will eat her food and the same way others can cook and she will eat. Without this ritual, she cannot cook for other people.

No protection is to be used during the intercourse because the semen has to get into the woman’s body directly. Using a protection like a condom means that it’s left in a tube and that the woman has not been touched. In the context of HIV and AIDS, it is a big problem. People may think that the practice has stopped, but in actual sense, it is done underground.

Frankly speaking, this cultural practice may not be relevant in the modern times, but because people have their belief that this has to happen when death occurs. It is very difficult to change the mind-set. It is a big challenge to us chiefs though different organizations come to help people change this, but it is not changing. Instead, they do it underground. Such beliefs make the community not to choose a chief who is educated, they say such, will dilute the cultural practices that have been passed on from our fore parents. This understanding has resulted in choosing chiefs in the villages who are strong rooted in traditional beliefs and are illiterate.

He further said that they have a new way of helping people go through this ritual as a way of accommodating the practice called *modification*; it is difficult to stop this practice when death occurs. There has to a 'kupita kufa' ritual. For this reason, there is a modification to this ritual. A couple is identified to do the cleansing of 'kupita kufa'. When this is done, the widow is cleansed and made free. The fact that the cultural practice denies that this cannot be completely stopped, it means (mwativura) you are putting us on the open. Therefore, as a compromise let the couple do the ritual on behalf of the widow.

It is a big challenge to the Christians and not easy to encourage them to stop all harmful cultural practices. It is very difficult to convince people who have lived in this practice for a long time for fear of witchcraft. For those that are strong in their conviction will use the modification method of asking a couple to do the ritual on their behalf.

Take note that the woman is vulnerable at all times when she stays with the man to cleanse her called 'fisi' (hyena) – he can do anything. He can be brutal, he could be HIV positive and he can continue coming and saying that he has not finished the cleansing process.

As a Christian and spiritual father, I feel that the church is not doing much. The church has the responsibility of teaching its members the dangers of the practice. Helping people to understand even through sermons. In doing this people will begin to understand and help each other when it happens at their door step. There is also a need to continue engaging the leadership of communities to understand the dangers and the exploitation done to the widow at the pretence of cultural practice.

5.3 Group interviews with widows in Blantyre

This group had about 12 widows in the beginning but two dropped out and it remained with 10. Towards the end, two other widows joined after learning from their friends about the group. This group met for several times because the researcher wanted to give each widow enough time to narrate their stories. In each meeting, some of those that had already narrated their stories had something to add. The process helped the widows to feel safe and free to express themselves. It was so obvious that at each appointed meeting the members of this group looked forward to participating. It was so difficult because the widows wanted to bring in their friends to join the group. It was not possible because this could have been difficult to have many widows to interview. Below are the widows that were interviewed, and the names used are not their real names.

5.3.1 Interview with Mwai

My name is Mwai (not real name), I was married in 1996 and my husband died in 2004. I was left with two small boys with the youngest still breast-feeding. I come from a poor family. I am a teacher by profession and the only daughter in my family. My father died early and was left with our widowed mother. My situation is a very sad one. I became a widow when I was very young having lived together with my husband for few years. He suffered from Meningitis in 2004 that took his life.

Before his death, we had just moved to a new place. In this place, there was no electricity. Therefore, my husband said that we should keep all the electronics in the bedroom since we were not using them. He did this as if he knew what was going to happen. When he died, we took his remains to his home village for burial. Two days after the burial, I was told to accompany his uncle who was asked by the family to go and count the property we had. We went together with my sister-in-law who liked me so much. When we got to the house, my sister-in-law stopped the uncle who wanted to go into our bedroom. She told him that he could not go into the bedroom just

because my husband was no more. She told me to go and bring his belongings. I went and brought back with me all his cloths. The uncle took them all. I thank God that the sister in-law helped to stop the uncle from seeing what we had in the bedroom. Because they were not successful, they told me to move back to the village so that they can help me to look after the children. I told one of his friends what they were planning to do. Since my husband was a minister, the friend intervened on my behalf. He told my in-laws that the responsibility of taking care of the children and me was in the hands of the Synod since my husband was a minister. To make it easier for me it would be good to remain where I was or go and stay with my mother who was closer to the synod. He was God sent because my in-laws were claiming that they paid lobola for me and I should go and stay with them. I was in pain because I did not understand why my in-laws were so cruel with me. I had my two children to look after and by two brothers who were in school and I was the breadwinner. I knew that if I go to my husband's home, that will be the end of my brothers and mother who was struggling. I chose to go and stay with my mother so that my mother would help me in taking care of the children when I went to work.

I struggled to settle with my mother because there were also other challenges. It was difficult time. Every time the children were sick, I was reminded of the hardship I was going through. The decision I made to go and stay with my mother, made the husband's family to cut herself off. We do not communicate. They haven't seen the children. I was always praying to be strong and for God to provide. God kept on sending angels. Some ministers were very helpful. Their wives would send me food staffs. Some would send people to check if I had food. This did not come without 'chitonzo' (stigma). Some women would go to the minister's wife and tell them to be careful with their generosity because I will eventually full around with their husbands. Others said I was a second wife to another minister. These UN wanted comments were very painful. I would find myself crying, and not wanting to receive anything from anyone.

The school I was teaching when I first moved to live with my mother was far. I would leave very early in the morning to walk to school in order to save money for food.

Later I was transferred to a nearby school. That made me to start offering part time tutorials in the afternoon, which helped the finances in the house. In 2006, I sold most of the electrical items we had to send my brother to the university. We struggled and he did very well and he is now working. Both of them are now independent and my son has done well to be admitted at the university.

I have received painful comments from guild women in the church and from friends. They wanted to see me struggling all the time and they are happy. When I look good, they associate me with bad behaviour. They have even said that I am a widow during the day but at night, I am something else because I look good.

Apart from the friends of my late husband, the church has not done its work. We are supposed to be cared by the church, to see how we are faring, but that had not been the case. Minister's wives are the obstacle between the minister and the widow. They are negative, thinking that when the minister (their husband) goes to see and help the widow he is in love with them. Widows are not being helped because of this; they forget that one day they will be in the same situation. In my situation, the women in the church have contributed to my misery. They will say how many ministers wives do we have? Meaning that I should just be a member without title, yet they are the same women who will call me Mayi Busa (minister's wife). This has made me not to go to church regularly. I will take a month also not to go to church for me to have peace of mind. I feel I don't belong. I don't want people to raise their eye blows when they see me. I do not want to make the minister's wife uncomfortable because of me. Within the association of the minister's wives, the widowed wives are not included in their actives. If we were included, we would be in a position to tell them the challenges that are experienced so that the widowed amayi abusa would be treated well.

On a positive note, hardworking has yielded me good fruits. My brothers are doing well. They invite me to spend holidays with them just to spoil me. My son has gone

to university and my brother is taking care of everything. I thank God for giving me the strength through the difficult times.

The following was picked from Mwai's narrated story;

The journey of Mrs Mwai's widowhood has not been easy. One may make a mistake to think that as a minister's wife, she was supposed to get all the support from the church. From her experience, she received support from her husband's friends who helped her out of a difficult situation. The researcher noticed that her fellow women, both in the church and community, made her go through the painful experiences.

She feels more at peace with her friends at school where she works as a teacher than in the church. Women that are guild women would want her to look like a widow and remain in that position. What this means is difficult to understand. Her life of struggles would prove her widowhood status; otherwise, she is reduced to someone who gets help from other men. She is seen as a threat to both the women in the church and to her fellow minister's wives. There is no support from her fellow minister's wives. She is only remembered to go and support the new widow when a minister dies because they see her to the experience. She is in pain because of the ridicule she experienced that even stopped her from going to church. The church is not a place of refuge for her.

5.3.2 Interview with Nyagogo

I am a woman who was married only for two years and one month (2yrs and 1 month) that is 1988-1991. Then took with me this ugly name called 'widow' all these years. My husband was not sick. He was an auditor at his work. He just collapsed whilst at work and was rushed to the hospital. He was on oxygen for one week. They queried cerebral malaria. Eventually he died. I was heartbroken. I did not understand what was happening. It was as if I was watching a movie with me as a victim. It was a painful experience to begin to arrange to take his body to his home village from Blantyre to Mzimba in the North (600 kilometres) for burial.

My experiences in the village were very bad. I was told to do many things to show that I was the widow. Every morning I was told to cry loudly whilst crawling saying 'my lord is gone' (fumu yane yaruta). They slaughtered a cow and brought the fresh skin for me to wear on the wrist and ankle. This I refused. This wanted me to smell as the skin started to rot. They gave me old women, those that have stopped menstruation to look after me. The water I was bathing was poured in an old earth pot that sometimes people in the village would use to put water for their chicken or goats to drink from. These old women would stand watching me to bath. Was not allowed to use soap. Food was served in very old plates, which had holes and the gravy spilling. I could not stop crying with such treatment. I was failing to understand whether this experience was because of the death of my husband or there was something else I was being punished for. The whole period I was in the village I slept on a cold cement floor.

It was announced that final funeral rites would be performed after forty days. Because I refused to wear the animal skin, they went ahead and made me a dress from the cheapest material with a chitenje (wrapper). I was told to wear this for the required period of forty days. I would wash the dress every night to wear it in the morning. Sometimes I would dry it with the iron. I could not go to church in this state. I took leave from work because I could not imagine myself wearing that dress going to work. This dress reminded me that my status had now changed, that I was not the same happy woman, beginning a life of misery.

It was communicated to me to bring a pair of my husband's underwear and a pair of mine, the dress I wore during this period together with the chitenje. I was also told to bring all my husband's cloths with me. On the morning of the assigned day, we went very early to the river with my in-laws my aunt and the old ladies. They dug along the banks of the river. Then they throw the underwear together with mine and the dress I took it off in their presence. Everything I was wearing I had to remove and remain naked. They burned all these together. After that, we went to a crossroad.

Mind you, I am naked. There they wanted to shave all my hair including the pubic hair. At that point, my aunt intervened and asked my in-laws if she could do the shaving not them because I was still their in-law. They accepted, and all the women stood watching. The old ladies making sure that my aunt was doing the right thing. They were all able to see my private. Then they gave me a chitenje to wear. We went back to the house. On arrival, I saw a big crowd of people; I was very emotional and started crying again. I was told to go and sit on the middle of the circle that was made by the gathering. Twenty-five sticks were put in front of me for me to choose one. I could not understand the meaning of this. The crowd made me to cry more because I was so afraid. I started asking questions that no one would answer. In my crying, I asked my husband why he left me to experience this. Why did he not take me along with? My aunt came to me to comfort me and she whispered to me to pick all the sticks. When she left, I continued to cry and the noise was mounting from the crowd that I was delaying them. I wiped my tears stood up and took all the sticks into the house. There was noise outside. The crowd was angry at my decision. The twenty-five sticks represented men who were brought for me to choose one from them to replace my husband. Each stick represented a person. When I took them all it meant that all of them are my husbands a thing they never expected. Burning our underwear at the banks of the river meant burning the relationship; I had with my husband to begin a new relationship. The shaving was to prepare me for a new sexual relationship with the man I was going to choose.

- It was a painful experience and felt like the in-laws were mocking me.
- They never assisted me with the growing of the son because I refused to be inherited.
- They gave me a white necklace to wear and never asked what that meant.
- When I asked to go and do his tomb stone, I was told you cannot do only one there are many other graves that have not been done. So, if you are prepared, do them all. This is my challenge. There has been no closure. Not all this treatment has stopped me from visiting them. Every year I make it a

point to and visit them for the sake of my son and fact that they paid lobola for the marriage.

- The experience I went through with my in-laws has made not to even think of remarrying. I do not want to go through that humiliating experience again. I was made to look like a nobody.
- The church is not there to help with the pressure you are going through. Some of the men in those sticks are married, which means the tradition is fine with that. Among the members of the family and the community in that area are members of the church, yet they allow this to happen.

The following analysis was picked from the narration of the widow:

The researcher found that the participant was in pain. She could not understand why the same people who loved her when her husband was alive could turn against her in that manner. She felt she was reduced to nothing. She did not have any rights. That is, right to privacy, right of choice. The respect was no longer there. She felt the in-laws were forcing her to choose a husband when she was not ready and even not of her own choice but what they wanted. This has made her to have a negative attitude. She is in pain because there is no closure. If a tombstone was erected to honour her deceased husband, it would help to bring closure. She visits the family every year thinking that the mention of the tombstone will suffice. The painful experience she went through has made her to be negative about re-marriage.

5.3.3 Interview with Chiyembekezo

We got married in 1978 and my husband died in 2001. He had sugar diabetes and died in hospital on 28th May 2001. He was a policeman. He was such a good husband who provided us with what we needed in the house. Because of this, I was not able to do any small- scale business. I was very dependent on him. When his family came to the funeral, they gave me a big cloth to cover myself up to the head and was told to sit next to the coffin. I was also told to cry loud all the time for people to notice me as a widow. I should not be quite as if their brother was not married.

No one gave me water or food, and I was very hungry. I had spent sleepless nights before he died, and I was exhausted. My in-laws were very difficult and wanted me to feel their presence. They came with the spirit of wanting to punish me. I was able to bath and eat when my family came.

Two days after the burial, we had the shaving ritual. They shaved my hair and few others. Here the aunt to my deceased husband said that no one should take the property we had accumulated because there are children. I stayed at my husband's home for one week before returning to where we lived. According to the police rules, I was given three months to stay in the house.

5.3.4 Interview with Mary

My name is Mary I met my husband at the University of Malawi, Chancellor College. We started dating in 2006 and got married on 2nd October 2010. Our daughter was born in 2012. When I met him, he told me that both his parents had died. On our wedding, his uncle represented the family. We took his young brother to live with us. He was not happy with what he was doing and decided to go back to school to study law. This meant that I was left with many responsibilities including his upkeep. He sold his car and started a business with friends in Zomba. The business was doing well and assisted him with paying of the fees. I took a loan at work to buy a car. We were using this car for easy travel. He was able to visit us every weekend. Towards the end of his second year, he came home and decided to go back on Saturday because exams were starting the following Monday. In fact, I did not expect him to come because of the exams. On Saturday when he was leaving the house, he told his brother to look after the baby and me. It took so long for him to call that he was in Zomba. Only to receive a call from a guy who said your husband has been involved in an accident and husband been rushed to Zomba General Hospital.

There was a laptop in the car and some important things that can attract people. I have taken these with me. This is all I can recall.

I called my aunt and friends. We left for Zomba. On the way, we saw the car some meters away from the main road. We did not stop, but rushed to the hospital. When we got there, I was told they are waiting for a doctor you cannot see him. We waited for a long time, only to be told that we had to go back to Blantyre. What surprised me was that I was told to be on the middle of people at the back of the car. They did not explain to me that he was dead. I was taken like child. When I look back, I think they thought that I knew what had happened. Funeral arrangements were made and we went up North to Chitipa to burry my husband. I had never been to his home since we got married because there was no one at home. It was painful to visit his home because of his death. I felt very bad. I felt like rewinding our past to correct the mistake but it was too late. We only stayed in the village for two days. I wanted to stay longer, but was told that there was going to be no transport. I left with everyone with a heavy heart that I was leaving him alone. I could imagine the grave, which was so thick with natural vegetation, that I had left him there alone. The thought of that made me cry all the way back to Blantyre.

Since then, I never saw anyone from his side apart from the brother I was living with. Four years after, I received a telephone call from someone who claimed to be my late husband's uncle. I didn't know him nor my brother in-law. I was excited and when he asked to come home to see the child, I accepted. He came home to see us and told us that he was an uncle. Few days later, he called me asking me to teach him driving. I told him that I did not have money to pay to the driving school since the brother in-law was selected to the university to do accounting. He told me that I should teach him with the car that I have. I told him that the car was not mine it was a company car. Since then I have not heard about him and I live in fear.

I am reminded most of the time when my daughter asks me when dad is coming. I told her that her dad is in heaven, and then she challenged me to say why can't we also go to heaven to meet with dad. The little one even said that she would start serving. It has not been easy. I had to clear all the loans we had and the debts he encountered with the small business he was running.

In the second meeting, Mary had these new developments to say:

Because of the long silence of my in-laws, my father decided to go to Mzuzu to meet with the uncle to my husband. He went to ask him when the family was going to release me as a tradition so that I could be free to do what I wanted. He said this to him because they had indicated to us that we couldn't do his tombstone because there were many other graves that needed to be done. If I was prepared to do his grave, then I should also think of doing the other ones, which were older than him. The uncle referred my father to a woman who said she was my late husband's aunt. My father called her and introduced the subject to her. She in response insulted my father. She further said that I spent all my husband's money and property without sharing it to them. Their son had a car and I used all the money alone. She went on to say that, I am enjoying my husband's money thus, why I want to be released to enjoy it with other men. It has been a painful experience to my parents and to me. They do not understand the situation my husband left us with. There was no time that we sat to discuss it. There assumptions are that all that I have was inherited from him. For this reason, I should have shared it with them. They cannot not appreciate that I am keeping their son and paying a huge amount of money for his fees, which was a huge responsibility for someone of my age. I accepted to continue with the responsibility of taking care of my brother in-law because of the love I had for my husband and that his brother had no one to take over the responsibility of educating him. It is painful and there has been no closure. It feels as if we just met in the streets and married. My daughter only knows the uncle we live with as a member from her father's side. Death really separated us.

As if this was not enough, my sister in-law who I have always got along with, called me one day that I can now go and do the tomb stone for my husband's grave, I was so excited about this development. However, when I told my father about it, he was naïve about it. He told me that in the first place they have used a wrong channel to inform you of that important function. They have used the sister in-law because you go along with. They are after you. Don't go. I insisted that this was my opportunity to bring closure to my husband's passing on. I was shocked to hear him tell me that if I insist to go, he will not come with. I went to see a Pentecostal pastor who is somehow related to my late husband to tell him how I was so disappointed with my dad. After narrating the story to him, he advised me to take my father's decision that I should not go they must be up to something. Therefore, I finally listened and did not go.

After this experience, my father told me to change the married surname I was using and to return to my maiden name. After consulting my friends who are lawyers, I have started the process.

This needs a sub-heading to introduce it as the end of the narrative and beginning of the analysis.

The narrated story was emotional. The researcher noted the following:

- Age: Mary is young in her late twenties. At such a tender age, she lost her husband. It was a traumatic experience. The way she was handled from the time she got the phone call that her husband was involved in a car accident to the time she realised that he had died was not professional. She did not participate in anything and was only told what to do. It was a painful experience because they were just a young couple.
- **Pain:** She has gone through a painful experience as a young person. The pain of the traumatic loss of her husband. The pain of not having a continued relationship with her in-laws. The pain of having no closure. At least to have been allowed to erect a tombstone. The pain of being accused of enjoying

the property when actually she had suffered to pay the debts that were there. The pain of being reminded by her daughter the whereabouts of the father. The pain of being single again.

- **Support:** She did not get support from her in-laws. She also did not get support from other people like the church, though she continued to be a strong Christian. She has survived because of the support of her parents. They have continued to support her and to help her get through all the stages of grieving. Some of the support was from a widow's forum she joined. This is the time the church could have helped her in all the challenges she was facing.
- **Re- marriage:** She is still young and should be encouraged, if chances are there, to re-marry. For her to get to this stage, she will need to be encouraged and need people to journey with her. The role that the parents are playing needs to be supported by an institution like the church. The fact that they have made her a deacon in the church, should not be a way to stop her from socialising for her to get someone suitable to marry. This is the opportune time for the Church to build what was lost in the past and help her in the journey.

5.3.5 Interview with Grace

I was married on 1st July 1972 and my husband died on 21st June 1994 with short illness. I am grateful that he was able to say his last words. My husband new his relatives very well that they were greedy people. He would talk to us about them and to always be careful. Because of his education he was able to accelerate in live to the position of vice principal of the University of Malawi. With this position, his relatives thought he had money around him. They wanted assistance from left right and centre. Because of this experience, he was able to make a will for the family. This made us not have a good relationship with his family thereafter

My experiences of widowhood were largely on taking care of the children. The youngest was seven years old when my husband died. It was tough to make sure that they all had good education. I was always cautious that the children should get the best even in the absence of the father, so that I am not blamed one day for failing to look after them. My family supported me all the time and were there for me

The painful experiences came from women who did not want me to move ahead with life but to always look like a mourning widow. If I dressed well going to church or other functions, I was always challenged with questions like, what is the occasion. This would make me ask questions in my mind of what they think of me. Dressing up well by a widow means, she is up to something, a very sad ideology. It looked to some men that I was available. This you get from their negative comments. One day I felt sorry for myself when the former driver of my husband who used to call me madam called me by my first name when we met in the bank. When I turned to see who called me and found that it was him, I quickly said to him, can you quickly say what you just said. He felt embarrassed in the bank and disappeared quietly. He felt he could do that to me because no longer the same woman. I became an ordinary woman to him.

In the Church, I was able to be a Clerk of session. This meant that I had to be close to the minister all the time. This position came with many challenges. There was either lot of gossip that I was in a relationship with the minister, or some of the male elders. Very disturbing and painful. Some of the ministers I worked with were younger than me and I would feel sorry for myself on such comments. I used to think a lot about it and worry too much until one day I told myself to be strong. I felt at this point that the gossip would be one way of making me fail my duties and paint a wrong picture that women cannot make it. I struggled; women in the church would smile at you and behind gossip about you that I was a threat to their marriages.

Though I worked as a session clerk, I feel that the church did not help me go through the negative experiences I went through. Because of this, I found myself working very hard, to make sure that all was going well in the congregation. I also made sure

that I had a good relationship with the minister's wife so that she does not doubt my working close with the Minister. It was tough and very stressful. With this experienced I decided to try my best to visit the new widows who were coming, to encourage them to be strong. Since that time, I try my best to be there for my fellow women. Just to give them a chance to talk about their problems.

The following came up from the story above;

Mayi Grace was not spared from elements of discrimination. She was undermined in her position to be able to have the capacity to deliver as a successful woman in the society. The gossip from different quarters pained her more as if she was not the same woman who was respected more when her husband was alive. In this context, it justifies the statement said in chapter one that marriage becomes the coverage of women. Without marriage the women is reduced to nothing. The Church saw her potential to lead the congregation but did not put guidelines in place to protect her.

5.3.6 Interview with Chifundo

I got married in June 1979 and my husband died in March 1997. My husband was an economist and worked in the civil service. He was dismissed from work on political grounds. This made it difficult for him to get a job. He was depressed, but I did not know that my husband was going through depression. He became quite and not sociable. He was diagnosed with malaria and that his kidneys had packed. Upon this news because I am a nurse by profession, I knew what that meant, I collapsed. Before I gained complete consciousness, my husband died. It was a very devastating experience that as a nurse I did not see this coming.

We took the remains to his home village in Nkhatabay North of Malawi. When people brought in condolences in form of money, my in-laws took all the money. Before we left for burial, they even went into our bedroom to admire what we had

and what to take. Now because of shock, I was not in a position to see that happening. They took advantage of my situation and arranged everything without consulting me. After burial, I was told that I had to stay in the village for one week. All my relatives left because some had to go back to work. I was left with my friend. Who continued to assist me. I was given cold water to without soap and was surrounded with old women to watch me when taking the bath. My friend brought in soap secretly for me to use, when these old women saw it, they took it away from me. I asked them why they were following me like that, and even checking when I was bathing instead of giving me the privacy. They responded saying that it was one way of checking whether I was left pregnant. In this one week, I slept on an old mat surrounded by these old stinking women. After one week, I asked to go back to Blantyre. They accepted and told me to leave behind all the cloths that I wore during that week. The in-laws took all the money and they gave me exact transport money to Blantyre using the ordinary bus. They told us to come back to the village after one moth to finalize the death rites.

When we got back home in Blantyre, I found it difficult to go into our bedroom. I decided to sleep with my daughter because I was so afraid to sleep alone in our room. When I finally read the death certificate, it said cause of death was because his brain shrunk. Depression made him to go into this situation. I could not believe this, and even that my husband was dead. My husband loved me so much. I could see myself as a spoiled wife. Therefore, this premature death was still a shock to me. I did not know what to do and where to start. The world was so small for me. I kept on crying and when I look back, I see that it was difficult for my daughter, but she did not complain.

After one month, we went back to the village. This time I decided to take only old clothes. After discussions, both my family and my in-laws agreed that they should not shave my hair. They in-laws stressed that I was part of their family because I was still married to them. This meant that, they could not free me to re-marry. After all the formalities, I went back to Blantyre leaving all the cloths behind. I learnt that

the cloths you use during the funeral are given to the old women who surround you during the funeral. The belief is that they are dirty and have death. You as a widow should not wear them. Those old women who some are widows can wear them because they are advanced in age and cannot do anything sexually.

After a while, my brother in-law who was a session clerk of the congregation in the village came to visit us. When I saw him, I felt that he was such a kind man to follow us and see how we were coping. Little did I know the agenda behind his coming. Seeing him made me to weep more. One evening when I went to sleep and crying, he called my daughter, and told her to tell me that I should not cry like that, My husband has not died he is available and thus why he came to take over the responsibility. When I heard this, I woke up and went to tell him to pack his things and go. I could not believe this. This session clerk leads the church, is married with his own family, and wants to inherit me. I felt reduced to nothing. It really pained me because I did not expect him to do that.

Because of my reaction, when the benefits of my husband came, the money was distributed to his twelve relatives and nothing for me and very little for the children. It was painful to now think of how to raise the children without the father and with no money. The relationship with my in-law changed. When I took the children to the village, we were not made welcome. We had to bring everything with us; otherwise, there would be no food. My worry was how to educate the children when they get into college education. I then went to the United Kingdom to work as a nurse. I worked there for few years. The money was enough to assist my children with high education. I thank God that now all my children are working.

Now that the children are independent, we are received warmly when we visit the village. I did not want to cut my relationship with my in-laws because I wanted my children to grow up knowing where they came from and the extend family.

The researcher analysed the following from the narration;

This is really a story of pain. She narrated this with emotions. Like other widows, she did not have support to lean on. The in-laws took advantage of her situation to collect and take with them all the money. The children were not a priority to them when she refused to be inherited. It was a painful experience because of the love she experienced from her husband. Families can break apart easily because of death, and money. Out of this experience, she became strong to stand on her own feet to work for the future of her children. Being a strong church going person did not help her when she needed help.

5.3.7 Interview with Lala

We got married on 10th may 2014 and he died on 7th march 2015. On this fateful day, he made breakfast and we ate together. We had just moved into a new house and I was busy cleaning and putting things in order. In the afternoon, he told me he was going to watch football with friends. Because of working all day, I was tired and took a nap. I dint know that time had passed. At around 10pm my phone rang, it was my family asking me if I was home. Few minutes later, they knocked at the door. I let them in. They told me that my husband was involved in an accident. Nothing went into my mind that he died. I went and started packing his cloths and mine to go to the hospital. I remembered that he had not eaten and could be hungry, went to the kitchen to pack food. My sister came to me and told me that he had died. It did not register to me. We left the house, on the way we passed the hospital and I said where are we going? Drop me first at the hospital. At this point people realized that still not aware that he was gone. They just said lets go and fetch mum. When we got to his parents' house, thus where I was welcomed with crying and the family mentioning him. I could still not understand that my husband could die just like that. I was in another world. I did not understand what was happening.

The following morning, they asked me to go and chose cloths that he can be dressed, still in denial I told them that I would only believe them after seeing him. We went home to pick the cloths and on our way, back went to the mortuary. The People understood my situation and took me in. Thus, when it registered that he was dead because he could not talk to me anymore. I could not understand why this happened to me. Why so soon? Being young, and in shock, my family did not consult me for anything except for the choice of cloths. I was in denial and in another world; I cannot remember what was happening.

My in-laws have been very good to me. They treat me like their own child. Both of our parents have helped me in my grieving process. Everyone would sympathise with me because of my age and the short- lived marriage. My wish was, if only I was left with a child, I would be comforted with that.

The researcher found the following in Lala's story;

It was an emotional narration of her experience. She had a painful experience of marriage. Very sad that it was indeed a short- lived marriage. She was fortunate to have supporting parents from both sides. What she needed was an accompaniment as she went on with her life. She is very young. The church has been absent.

5.3.8 Interview with Vitumbiko

My husband was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2008. He survived it until 2013. This meant staying in hospital for a long period. I went with him to South Africa for treatment for 13 months. I continued to nurse him here at home all by myself. He was a huge man and it was not easy. When he died, I did not experience any problems because our son is older and was able to arrange everything. We went to bury him at his home village.

Because of having grown up children, they organised everything for the tombstone and got that done at home. The local ministers there supported us. Since we lived in Blantyre for a long time and our house is there, we agreed to have a Memorial service in Blantyre at the Church he used to go. Unfortunately, to my disappointment they did not allow it. It pained me so much when I knew the amount of work and time my husband had given to this church. He was an elder with different responsibilities. He was even a parish chairman for a long time taking care of the minister's welfare. Not all this was taken seriously. The minister totally refused to have the service in church saying that as a church we do not worship the dead. He was a new minister that just came and did not know my husband. Even though this was like that, the elders in the church could have helped him to understand. We decided to have it at the house. I went ahead and invited minister from our village congregation to come and lead the service. Other friends stopped that Idea and asked the minister to come to the service at my house. Of which he did.

I was very disappointed with him, and stopped going to church because I didn't see the reason. I started attending fellowship meetings. On two occasions, the leader of that fellowship approached me and told me that I was a very angry person. Asked me to pray for it. After a while in another prayer, worship I was told the same. I knew I was very angry with the minister that I didn't want to see him. After this experience, I realised that God was asking me to forgive. I went to his house and told him on the face that I forgave him for what he did to my family. I also told him that he was doing that because he was young he has not experienced such things that people need closure after the departure of their loved ones. After this, I started going to church with a clean heart. Why do you ministers do that to us? Why are you different? Do others get different training?

The above narration has the following;

Vitumbiko was in pain because of what the minister did to her. It took her time to recover from this. She was emotionally affected by this because of the role the

husband played in the church and after his death, it was not important. The leadership did not know that by having the memorial service as per request of the family was one way of helping them heal from the loss. The unfortunate thing is that the system of the Blantyre Synod is that of transferring ministers after a period of five years. The minister who was present when the husband died had just been moved to another congregation and this one was a new minister. In such a situation, it could have been good to check with other ministers what do, so that the decision would help the family that needed the presence of the church at that time.

5.3.9 Interview with Nachanza

I was married for 31 years to my husband. He was diabetic and spent many times on and off from the hospital. Every time I went into hospital, I was alone; none of his relatives came to assist me. What they would do was to come and ask for assistance from him. For this reason, my husband decided to build a house at his home village contrary to the matrilineal culture that we come from. When he died, we went to his home village, to our house for the funeral. My in-laws did not take any part in contributing towards the funeral as it is normally done. The role they took was that of controlling everything during the funeral. They wanted money from me but did not want me to take any part in the arrangements of the funeral. Any condolences in form of money that came they took it to decide what to with instead of adding it to the budget of the funeral. Money and food was a big issue. They wanted everything, because it was their brother who had died.

I am very fortunate that I have a very supporting family. They were there for and supported me to make sure that all went well during the burial sermon of my husband. Since my in-laws were not able to control what they wanted to get, they have not been able to come and see us. I could say that there is no relationship. What they think is that I received huge amounts of money from the Church for my

husband's benefits. What can one get from clergy money? They have not responded yet as when we are going to erect the tombstone.

Being a minister's wife, life has not been easy. I have lost all the friends. It looks as if we have nothing in common to maintain the friendship. The ministers wives are supposed to support those that have lost their husbands during and after the funeral. This is not there in practice. When a minister dies, they expect us to go and be with the widow. May be because we have a common issue. Our ministry of meeting and helping those in need is just on paper and on lips; minister's wives do not assist their fellow women when such a situation happens. It is also a challenge to worship in the local congregation and be active in the guild; you are seen as wanting to take over from the minister's wife. To be widowed as a minister's wife is not easy, more especially if you do not have any skill or business to bring you income. I am surviving because I told myself not to depend on people or handouts but to work. I work hard to sustain my family.

We have been in the church for the longest period of our lives. We were moved from one place to another. We have been able to contribute to the life and work of the Synod. Now you are forgotten. You do not exist. When you want to associate yourself with friends at meetings or conferences, you are looked down upon. Your part is finished and not need to ask for anything. This is my understanding of the situation.

The story of Nachanza has these issues;

The situation is not different from any other widow; one may think that as a minister's wife, the in-laws and the community would treat them different. This is not the experience of Nachanza. So much was expected from her. The in-laws do not appreciate her after so many years of nursing the husband. When she had to go along with all the decisions, the husband was making on his own like that of building a house at his home without her consent. She was faithful to her call as a minister's

wife helping her husband's work. The treatment given now that she is a widow by her fellow women in their association is uncalled for.

5.3.10 Interview with Olipa

We got married in 1976 and have three children. My husband was sick and on and off in hospital. The day he died, he did many strange things. He woke me up to help him bath, and afterwards he told me to bath and take him to the hospital. We took him to the hospital on 30th December and died on the dawn of 31st December 2010. When he died, we thought it was going to be easy and that we were going to bury his remains at his place of choice. We were wrong, because as soon as the message of his death reached his family in his home village, they demanded that he was to be buried in his village. Instead of them coming to be with us in town, they all assembled in our house in the village. The children tried to negotiate with their uncles that the decision of their dad was to be buried at the Blantyre Mission cemetery. They were put off and told that he was their father when he was alive, now that he has died, he is in their control. That meant all the funeral arrangements had to change and go to the village. I was in shock to hear this coming from my in-laws.

5.3.11 Interview with Alinafe

We got married in June 2006 and my husband died in July 2014. I was left with two children. The youngest child was three years and seven months when this happened. Everything went on very well and was buried in his home area. I was asked what to do in preparation for the burial of my husband. My family and his family came to ask me what I wanted done for the funeral.

To be a single parent is not easy. I have struggled to raise my children. The problem I had was that my children were very close to the father than they were to me because of the work I have that I work in shifts. After burial, I was challenged with questions from my children. 'Mum where is dad? Why did we have to leave dad in the bush and in that box? How is he going to breath? These were the painful questions that I had to go through. I dint know what to answer them, and all I did was to cry and they cried too. Raising Children after the death of a father is a challenge. His family was concerned with the children's future that who was going to assist them. With the work that I had, I could not afford.

I have not been able to sit for exams to upgrade myself because it is difficult for me to concentrate. I have not accepted that he is gone and will not come again. I am grateful that you have allowed me to tell my story. Just coming here and seeing you all, I feel relieved. At least I am able to empty some of the issues that have been in me. Other people look at you and judge you, but being part of this group I feel at home.

5.3.12 Interview with Ananyoni

Ananyoni (not real name) started by saying "experiences of widowhood are different. Even when we look at age, those that are young may experience death of a husband differently than those that are older. It may also depend on the understanding of the family where your husband came from". Having said this, my long-time friend and partner died in 2004.

My husband never got sick; we were only advancing in age. He had a heart attack that killed him. Very difficult to forget because of this kind of death which was sudden. He died on my lap. As a professional nurse, it was so difficult to see it coming in my family. When his family was informed, the family leader was difficult. He came with a difficult question, 'what have you done to him' as if I did something to

cause his death. Having lived in Blantyre for a long time, we agreed that he would be buried in Blantyre when time came. This was not the case; his family demanded that he be buried in his home village. We did that and he was buried in zomba. In my Ngoni culture, we mourn for forty days and this is called 'Uyeni'. After the cultural practice of my husband's family, I went into this mourning period with my family. After the forty days, we went back for final mourning formalities.

After two years, we erected a tombstone. This was also an issue, but the fact that we have grown up children, they understood it. We have been going to visit his grave every year, then after ten years, we only visit once every two years. My husband being an elder in the church, and having lived in the community for a long time, both the community and church supported me. The congregation helped greatly in all the arrangements and came to the house to pray with me. Even during the unveiling of the tombstone, they came. They honoured him. This support did not leave me without challenges. I had to begin to adjust to living alone, and it has not been easy. I am grateful to God because of the children who are all grown up and are there for me. My family too continued to support me. As I said at the beginning, death is not a simple thing more especially when it comes at your doorstep.

5.4 Interviews with the second focus group

This group has widows that come from the semi-rural areas of Zomba district. In this district, the traditional practice of marriage is matrilineal. This means that the husband goes to stay at the wife's village. If they are away from home because of work, they are expected to build a house at the wife's village. With this group, the women came from two traditional practices. There are those that lived in their home as per tradition and five of the widows lived at their husband's home. These differences bring a lot of dynamics and challenges to the widows. Such challenges include, house, land and property.

The widows identified were twelve in number. These were picked from a workshop that was done in the Presbytery. The researcher was invited to go and talk on “Challenges facing the widows and single women in the Church”. After the presentation, the researcher asked to meet some of the widows who were present.

Overwhelmingly, almost half of the participants in this annual women’s leadership workshop were widows. The researcher could not take all of them to be interviewed. Instead, widows were taken from the different congregations they represented. When the twelve widows were invited to the first meeting, they brought five of their friends who were widows. Two female students at the Theological College who are widows were invited to be co-researchers and assist in taking notes. Since they were widows themselves, they also shared their stories and experiences of widowhood.

The process was to let them talk about what happened and the journey they had walked. Those who felt like talking about the cause of death did so, but it was not part of the questions expected to be answered by the widow. This was very important in the context of HIV and AIDS, as we did not want the widows to disclose what killed their husband. This would help to avoid any discrimination that would be attached to the story being told. The focus was on what the experiences were and how they were managing their lives in the absence of their husbands.

From the emotional stories that were told and the experiences these widows went through, themes were identified, and the experiences are narrated in the different themes. The widow’s names are not disclosed; instead the alphabet was used to specifically state what that particular widow said.

5.4.1 Grief

Almost all the widows in this focus group revealed that they had never talked about the death of their husbands. This was well received with some emotions. They all said that the death of their husband was a devastating experience. Some of them had hope that the husband would recover.

“My husband loved me so much. I did all I could to save his life. This time when we went into hospital, I thought he would be fine and be discharged. I had no one to help me, was up all night with him until he died. I could not believe it. I asked myself several questions, where did we fail? Did I bring him late to the hospital? I was tired and thirsty; no one gave me water or food (widow F).

The death of a husband does bring many challenges. The same people you know can turn against you.

Widow E says that; “My husband was sick for only few days and then died. This shocked me because I did not expect it to happen. In the process of arranging for the funeral, I overheard my in-laws discussing that the wife poisoned him. I could not believe this. It was painful to hear them say that. I felt left alone with no one to turn to for support. I could not believe this because of the relationship we had. I asked myself why would I poison him? Who is the loser? All these questions were in my heard”.

Grieving for the husband becomes more when the woman is treated as nothing. When not all the sacrifices she has made are taken into account.

Widow P narrates her experience in this way; “After retiring from work in 1981, we decided to come and settle in his home village. I come from the Central region of Malawi. He acquired land not far from his family land. We worked together to develop that place. When he died, they wanted me to go back to my home. I asked

myself go to where at my age? They began to call me all sorts of names, even called a witch. I will cry every night and blame myself to have accepted to come and stay in his village. I was so lonely with no one to talk to. Someone who would understand what I was going through. Death is an enemy; it brings so many negative experiences to people especially widows”.

Almost all the widows were emotionally grieved because of lack of support even from the people they trusted.

“My in-laws did not discuss anything with me. They asked me to give money for the funeral. After the funeral, I did not hear anything from them. Just heard from distant friends that they had the tomb stone erected. A very painful experience as if I killed their son” (Widow R).

“They wanted me out of the house soon after burial. I could not believe it that our relationship of years was over” (Widow K).

5.4.2. In-laws

In-laws have played a role in the negative experiences of widows. Almost all the widows interviewed had some story to narrate about their experiences with the in-laws. The woman that their son married was no longer the same now that he was gone. The patriarchal power made them to treat the widow in a negative way.

“As soon as my in-laws came, they took a big cloth and covered me with only the face showing. The family was difficult. They made it a point that I should feel it as if I killed my husband. I was not allowed to wear shoes, thus a sign of happiness” (Widow F).

The in-laws were able to impose on the widow some tough practices. Making sure that she did not have time to see what was happening.

Widow C narrates her story in this way; “There was a misunderstanding between my family and the in-laws. Why was the money collected during the funeral given to me through my family? They wanted to finalize all the funeral formalities there and then. They wanted to count the property that we had together. To them their son who was working, they forgot that we were both teachers. Unfortunately, this pressure was not coming from my immediate in-laws; it was from distant relations of my deceased husband. It is difficult to tell whether they were sent to behave in this manner or it was their own making”.

“There is no good relationship with the family of my late husband. They are cruel people, they wanted us dead also. We were left with nothing. No school fees for my son. They are bad people (this was said with emotions) not gone back to them” (Widow D).

Widows have struggled immediately after the death of the husband. They are ill-treated and made to suffer.

Widow B explains what happened to her immediately after burial; “I was at my husband’s home. Immediately after burial, problems started. I was told to move out of the house because a stepson built it, so I had no right to continue to live in the house. I resisted that it was the house that I was staying with the deceased husband, if I move who was going to live in the house? I was seen to be rude and not cooperative. Then I received a summons that I should move from the house and sell it. When we went to court with my in-laws, the court judged the case in my favour that I should continue to live in the house and cultivate in the gardens that were there for us. I continue to live in the village now with grandchildren. The relationship with my in-laws is there but not strong. I have learnt just to tolerate them”.

In-laws are not able to appreciate the role the widow played in their lives before the husband died. All this is forgotten, and they want her to move away or they take all that belongs to her.

“I went to live in my late husband’s home. I took care of his children from another relationship and his mother who was blind. After the burial, they wanted me to go to my village immediately, but because of the sick in-law, I resisted. I felt that I had an obligation to look after her, besides there was no one to care for her. When she died, his family started ill-treating me. They burnt the house I was living, took the property, and would steal whatever I had. They did this to make sure that I leave. It was hell to live in that village. I left and went back home with nothing, they took everything including beddings” (Widow K).

“I have had problems with my in-laws. They accuse me of having relationships with the male elders because I am an elder. They want to see me miserable and not going on with life” (Widow Q).

5.4.3 Property Dispossession

The outcry of the majority of widows in this group was on how the property and land was taken away from them. Land was taken away from those widows who lived in their husband’s home. For some who lived in their own home, the in-laws had ways of dispossessing them of the property they worked for a long time. In some cases, the widow was left with nothing to start a new life from. Nothing to help her with the care of the children she was left with.

Widow’s experience was inhuman. She narrated her story in this way; “My husband was diagnosed with kidney failure and died in 2015. The family took all the six houses we were letting out. They took all the money benefits that came. They also sold the land that belonged to us. I was left with nothing. I could not send my son to school because there were no fees. Having in mind the life, we had before and the hardships that we were going through, my son attempted to commit suicide. Thank God that he was found before it was too late. This happened when he was selected to go to secondary school and there were no fees. It was a difficult situation coming

from a somebody to a nobody. They took everything from us and as I say now, his grave is not done. How can I forget? I hope he sees that it is not my wish not to have a tombstone on his grave, but that the greedy relatives are the ones. I have no relationship with them. I was a person of respect when their son was alive, but when he closed his eyes, they did what suited them”.

Many widows are not aware of the laws that are available in the country that can protect them from being dispossessed. Some of this is done when the widow is still in a state of trauma and has not started doing her everyday routine work.

“They wanted the bank book immediately after the funeral. I refused to give them. They went and took control of the Guest House that we had as a business, and one peace of garden, which was more fertile. We had nothing to live on except for the small garden” (Widow B).

“My brother in-law took a bank card but unfortunately did not have the pin number. They wanted to take with them all the benefits from us. When they failed, they demanded that we erect the best tombstone. On the day of the unveiling, they said that they wanted to eat good food because they were not able to do so during the funeral because of the loss. Now they wanted to eat. Was asked to buy more meat and rice for them. I did everything so that I have peace” (Widow G).

The treatment of widows does not stop immediately after burial. If they see money and property, the in-laws will try their luck to get what they can.

“My late husband was a carpenter, when he died the family wanted everything from us. We had nothing to give because we sold most of our property to help us with his treatment when he was sick. They ended up taking the carpentry tools. I asked them if that will not be used by the children when they grow up? This went into deaf

ears. There was no relationship for a while, Now, they are coming back to us for relationship” (Widow E).

“When we went to collect the benefits from the police headquarters, the nephew who we raised in the house and was now a matured person and working accompanied me. On our way back, he told me that he would take the money to keep it safe for the night. I trusted him because he was a person who I raised in the family. When I went to his house the next day, he told me that I should not bother him. ‘You need to be looked after by your family not us. Our father is dead and thus the end’. I was shocked to hear this from him. The police helped me to get all the money, but not all was released. I went with the children to start a new life from a scratch” (Widow F).

When the home you come from is far they take advantage of that. They forget the sacrifice that the wife took to come and stay with in-laws after leaving her own family.

Widow P narrates her experiences with the in-laws with bitterness; “When my husband retired from work, we agreed to come and settle at his home. We bought land not far from the family home. We developed the place and the land. When he died my in-laws wanted me to go back home. I asked them where will I go? I have been here for a long time; my people do not know me. I have my children and grandchildren here, I cannot leave. They decided to do the last ritual so that I could go back home. They were doing this because they wanted the land that we had developed. How could I have good land a person not from their family? They forgot the time I spent to develop the land and make the home good. They want all that. I refused. They took me to the village Chief so that he could agree that I go back home. Many people came to listen to my case. I was accused of not wanting to leave my husband’s land to his people because I was a witch. That I wanted to stay to kill the people. It was a shameful accusation; I could not believe that this was happening and that my in-laws could turn against me in such a manner. Some of my

in-laws accusing are elders in the Church. I thank God that the chief ruled the case in my favour”.

5.4.4 Friends / women

Widows expressed their disappointment that there had been lack of support from women and friends. They felt lonely because those that they could interact with were not there. It is as if they were outcasts and that no one should be near them.

“Friends were not the same. They behaved to me in a different way. I have always wondered whether I am different, or something has come out of me” (Widow I).

Widow H adds to say; “Friends have not been the same. They gossip saying that they want to see how I am going to raise the children alone. My husband had a good job and used a company car, my friends would say ‘we will see if she will be riding on those cars again’ saying this in a mockery way. I was so lonely that I stayed in the house most of the time to avoid the gossiping around”.

The experiences are painful. This makes it difficult to forget.

“You have no one to lean to for support and solidarity. Those that were your friends including their children mock you every day. I would spend time in the house crying and asking God, why me?”

Widow N narrates the following; “You are left on your own. Friends run away from you. Because of my age, they see me as a threat to their marriages. One friend openly said to me that ‘I hope you will find another husband soon so that our husbands should stop admiring you’. I was hurt I didn’t expect such a comment to come from her. She thought she was joking, but it helped me to understand what was in her mind against me”.

“When we went to the village for the funeral, we went together with many women from Mvano (guild). I felt good that they came to support me. When we got there, I did not see the women I came with. They left me alone, I was a stranger with no one close by to talk too”, lamented Widow L.

5.4.5 Children

The death of a husband does not only affect the mother, it also affects the children. Many times, children are ignored thinking that they are able to handle the death. When children are very small, it may be easier, but those that are grown up find it difficult to adjust to life without their father.

“My son wanted to commit suicide because of the struggles we were going through. He could not understand that I had no money to pay for his fees at school. He was selected to go to secondary school, but there was no money. My son knew very well that we had property, and he wondered where all this went to without considering his future. What pained him most was to see his cousins whose parents used to come to his father now enjoying” (Widow D).

Widow O narrates her experiences that; “When my husband died, I struggled with the six children. One of them was selected to a Technical college; I struggled to pay for his fees. I had no help. He ended up not writing his grade 2 examinations. This frustrated him. He could not understand why his uncles took the money from them and could not support them”.

When the in-laws taken away property, no consideration is given to the upkeep of the children. Children, then suffer and their future is jeopardised. Very few widows manage to support their children’s education.

Widow F explains that; “It was not easy for me to care for my children. I struggled because I had to build a house for us to stay at the same time. I thank God that, I managed to educate two who are now working and supporting their siblings”.

“I had problems to raise up my children because we had no money. My brothers helped me to educate them. They did well and have jobs. With this development, my in-laws now want to bond with the children. They tell them that they are their uncles, that even if their father died the relationship remains. They are now saying this because they have nothing. All the money they took is finished and they want my children to help them” (Widow E).

“When my husband died, I was a student and depended highly on him. I have not finished school and have the responsibility to look after my four kids. It’s not easy for me. I am staying at my husband’s home but no support for the children. Many times, they are left on their own and so much has happened. I always ask myself questions if I am failing my responsibility. I have to finish my studies so that I can support them better” (Widow S).

5.4.6 Moving Forward

It is believed that mourning the dead will come to completion when the tombstone is erected. In many families, they do it after one year from the day the person passed on. Many families take this time as a time to free the widow to go on with life. The erection of the tombstone helps the widow to settle with her grief. She is able to do the final formalities of death rituals. If this is not done, closure is difficult.

Widow A narrates her painful experience; “My husband worked in Zimbabwe and I was here with children. He died just few days before returning to Malawi after his retirement in 2015. He was found dead, and the body was not in good condition. He

was buried there in Zimbabwe. I did not go, only my in-laws went. I do not know where he was buried. I do not have a picture of him dead, I was only told. It is difficult to bring closure to this. I sometimes think that I will see him walking back home”.

In a similar situation Widow J narrates her sad story; “My husband died without me knowing. I was left in the village with the children and he was working in town. I have to know about it after one month of hid burial. In 2006, I heard that the family were going to have a function to unveil his tombstone. I do not know why my in-laws have done this to me. It looks to me that my husband had taken another wife. However, because I have children with him, and he never divorced me, they should have told me all the development so that I can bring closure. When I met one of the in-laws, he asked me if I am not married since my husband died. It is sad to be treated like this as if I am not a human being”.

About ten widows of the nineteen that were interviewed expressed that they found it difficult to achieve closure because they had not erected tombstones. This was also one way of holding the widow responsible. She was not expected to go on with life if the tombstone was not done. In some cases, the tombstone was erected without her knowledge.

Widow S laments that; “There is no good relationship between me and my late husband’s family. The tombstone is not yet done. They have said nothing about it. I do not know where to start from”.

“When my husband died, my employers helped me with almost everything. Instead of appreciating my situation, the in-laws came to ask me how much the casket was. Then they went ahead to erect a tombstone without my knowledge and I only heard about it from a friend. I did not go up until now. There is no relationship. This is difficult for me. How can I put this behind me? How can the children remember their

father if they haven't seen the tombstone? They don't like me I know, they want me dead" (Widow R).

Others felt that the period since the husband died was long without preparing the tombstone.

"From 2015 that my husband died, the grave has not been prepared. I find it difficult, as if I never loved him. But my in-laws ate all the money and now they can't do anything" (Widow D).

"I heard that his tomb stone was erected, and a date was set aside for the unveiling. My family stopped me from going to the function because of the treatment I was given. The in-laws did not inform me of what they were doing that, so it was going to be difficult for me to participate at the function. From 2001, I have not gone back to the family" (Widow F).

The other widows expressed that closure was difficult because of the way they were living, that their life style had to change completely. Such hardships reminded them all the time of the passing on of their husbands.

5.4.7 The role played by the Church

Almost all the widows in this group expressed that the church did not meet their expectations. They felt that the church was only there to conduct the funeral service and bury their husband. What happened thereafter seemed not to be the concern of the church according to the widows. They all were not happy with the statement that is said at the grave soon after burial by the church that; "The part of the church in this funeral ends here". It meant so many things to the widow.

“The Church did not come to help me when I was going through my problems. When the in-laws wanted to take all the possessions, we had. To help me with my case that is to be my witness” (Widow B).

Widow F said; “I stopped worshipping. I was bitter with God because I didn’t see his presence in my situation. Nobody came to ask me why I was not going to church. I was very lonely. Until one day, I had a dream pushing me to go to church in order to have peace. When I went to church that day I felt good”.

There is so much that widows expect the church to do for them in their time of grief. On the other hand, the church may not be aware of these expectations.

“In the manner, my husband died, that I was not able to go made life so difficult for me. In this situation, I expected the church to mourn with me for the loss. No one came to see me or comfort me for my loss. I was chair of the Mvano, but this had nothing. They could not come to be with me when I needed them most” (Widow A).

Widow C commented that; “Instead of the church being on your side, they mock and tease you thinking that I just have to take it and swallow it. When I came back from the final death rights, an elder said to me that, I have gone through everything easily, I have not felt what others go through. I was shocked with his comment because it suggested that he could have been happier to see me suffer or being mishandled by the in-laws”.

In some case, the church members are the very people that create bad stories against the widows. They suspect them of negative things.

“When you dress well, you are a prostitute. You want to get other people’s husbands. You are not respected. These come from members of the church you belong” (Widow I).

Widow N further said that; “When you are young you are mocked and teased by the very people you respect and are supposed to protect you. Because of your age, they think that you will be after their husband or maybe the men think that you are available for them. To be a widow at my age is so painful, because you have not just lost a husband, but your respect is gone. This is where I expected the church to be on my side”.

“I went into leadership of the Church, but every time I was reminded of my status that I was a widow and to be careful. When I was with elders it was another story, if I w a man gave me a lift, it was another story. Going to visit people with the minister turned out to be another story too. I did not enjoy my position of leadership because of the gossip that was there. On the other hand, the same people would say I am the right person because I am available; I do not have much to go to at home. Meaning that my home was not important anymore now that I was alone, and I could be sent anywhere at any time. You are not free in the house of worship, and you must be careful how you relate to other people of the opposite sex. Before my husband died, I was respected and admired. After that I became a centre of talk unfortunately” (Widow R).

Comments from other widows were almost the same. Their fellow Christians did not meet expectations. In some cases, the in-laws were in leadership of the church and yet made them suffer.

These widows had gone through traumatic experiences of some kind. If the in-laws treated them well, then it was the community and the church that did not help them in the grieving period. One widow mentioned that the in-laws gave her black clothes to

wear. When she went back to work, her boss gave her more days to go back to mourn her loss. She went to discuss it with her uncle who advised her to stop wearing the black clothes.

This did not go well with the in-laws. This was happening when the church had stopped this ritual way back. The delay in erecting the tombstone after one year is also seen as a deliberate action to extend the period of mourning so that the in-laws do not release the widow. Sometimes the delay could be because of scarcity of funds, which is understandable. What can the church say about all this? Is it aware of these negative experiences?

5.5 Interview with Women's group

The setup of the CCAP Blantyre Synod is that it has women's guild groups called 'Mvano' in each congregation. They have a Women's Coordinator in each Presbytery and a Women's Desk at the Synod. The Director of women's affairs at the Synod coordinates women's work in the Synod and works with the Presbytery Women's Coordinators. When they have issues affecting women, they institute programmes to address such issues. During the interview with them, it showed that they were aware of the issues affecting widows but at a small scale. At the 2016 Synod Women's Conference, they invited the researcher to speak on Widows and Single Parents. This was when the researcher had just started the project. The presentation was a revelation and the following issues were highlighted;

"That in the women's guild, women should be helped to understand issues of widowhood. It is not only giving them handouts but to be with them in times of need. We see this as a big challenge and that many women are suffering. We are grateful that the research is in progress, which we hope will continue to open our eyes and

empower women to understand the challenges faced by widows in our churches. Our hope is that the Synod should be able to implement the findings that will come from this research.

We also feel that those women that have not been widowed need to understand to be able to support those affected and be prepared when such a situation comes to them. We are grateful that through this desk women were helped to understand the negatives of wearing black after the death of a husband. This message went across and women took it seriously. We hope that when we are informed of all the challenges and pain widows go through, the women will be able to support this through programmes. We have to admit that this is long overdue. We need to work hand in hand with the church protocols to come with solutions that can assist our sisters who are suffering from the different negative practices that they go through”.

5.6 Interview with Church leadership

Interviews were done with the Synod leadership. The purpose was to have a chat with them and discuss the issues of widowhood. The questions that were formulated were just a guideline; it was an open discussion where more was discussed. The following is what came from the interview in their own words.

“We are as a church that there are different rituals that widows go through. Examples of some of these rituals are ‘kupita kufa’ (widowhood cleansing), use of herbs to purify the widow.”

A widow is a wife of the community and the family will demand that she should not go back to her home during the grieving period. Depending on families, widows are

given a period (caged) to mourn their husband up until they go through a ritual called 'kusudzula' (to release the widow from all mourning formalities and make her free to start a new life). To some this ritual of 'kusudzula' will be done when the grave has been done and on the day of unveiling the tomb stone, the family of the husband will set the widow free from all death rituals (kusudzula).

Widows have no rights, they are discriminated against. She is not supposed to take care of herself, like taking a bath the first few days of her grieving until the body is buried. The family would want to keep her in solemn mood all through the period so that she is easily noticed as the grieving widow.

With the many problems and issues affecting members, the Synod has not contextualised the local culture and what it does to people i.e. women in this context. We have not holistically looked at what the needs of the people are. The Church has not educated its members about death issues and that anything concerning death of a Christian should be done in a Christian way.

What the Church knows is that we have a space allocated for us in the funeral programme. In this space, we do our things letting the rest to be done by others. When our slot is finished, we announce that the programme of the church ends here. This has paved way for other rituals that are not Christian to take over. The church knows that there are rituals that are practiced by different ethnic groupings, but we have not addressed them.

"We could say that in a way the church has assisted the widow through 'mvano'. Women will organise themselves to go and assist the bereaved family. They go to sleep at the funeral home to support the widow and help in the night vigil. They also assist the widow in some way. Some of those who are widows have also done the same to go and comfort their friend. This is done willingly. However, the church as

a whole forgets her. The leadership of the church will come at the appointed time to share the word of God and then do the funeral.

- Little has been done to walk with the widow- we forget the process of healing.
- We do not know what her fears are.
- The assurance is needed even if we know that death will occur.
- There are many problems facing the widow when death comes. At such the time, the church is seen far away from the needs of the people.
- This could be so for the reasons that many ministers are not well vested in terms of pastoral counselling. They do not know what to say to the widow at this time of need. Instead, they run away and keep themselves busy preparing to preach on the day of the funeral.
- Society has put in place standards that a male minister cannot go near a single woman. In doing so, a widow who may need the presence of her minister at this time is disadvantaged. This also raises questions on how they can be approached at their time of need. We need skills to help us handle such situations.
- As a church, we do not have guidelines that can help ministers. We need a caring sample that will help all ministers and the lay leaders to know what to do when handling funerals. We need to know how we can approach different people with different ages. Today widows are in all age groups, we may feel comfortable to visit the older widows unlike the younger ones because of fear of what people will say, and yet they are the ones needing more help.

The Synod has not taken a stand on issues that affect widows. Women are not regarded as full members of the church with full status. Issues concerning them are pushed to their fellow women. Forgetting that they are full members of the churches needing support. A stand that can safeguard widows. The time has come that the synod creates a lectionary on the Christian calendar purposely to help churches talk about some of the issues affecting the church including issues of widowhood and or help members to understand issues surrounding death.

Speaking on issues of rituals, property grabbing and many more issue need to be categorised as sin. To take away the property that could sustain the future of children in school – that is killing the future of those children and should be looked at as sin. The Synod has not critically examined the Bible’s teaching with regard to injustice. We do not want to learn from what they Bible says. There is a lot of injustice done to the widows. Time has come that the Synod should come in the open to denounce property grabbing as evil. Those widows are human beings and need to be treated with dignity.

We have to admit that widows have not been included in the programmes of the church. It seems as if those that matter are the married people. Many programmes are made for them. Nevertheless, with widows it’s like water has spilled, nothing we can do about it. This is so because the church is not patriotic. We have not created a space for widows. Unless this is done, widows will continue to be victims of violence. There is a need to accept that widows exist. Identify who these widows are, appreciate what they are going through and work out strategies that can help them. A policy that would direct us on how to deal with widows in their grieving period and helping them to heal”.

How can widows feel accepted?

The leadership of the Synod continue to say that; “There is a need to have church programmes that are tailored in a way to care for widows. Widows themselves should be included to make them feel part of the body of Christ and feel accepted. For this to happen we also, need to empower them. Help all women before it becomes too late to understand how to make decisions. This empowerment should help women not to be on the corner but to be able to fight for what is there’s. With what is happening, and if the church does not take its role seriously the underprivileged women will always be vulnerable to bad practices.

Let us not make widowhood a taboo. We need to talk about it and empower others to understand. The church should teach about death and dying as a means of helping people to prepare. The absence of such teaching makes people to misuse the scriptures and power.

We are hopeful that the outcome of this research will open us up to act”.

The church was able to admit its failure to address issues that widows go through and failure to make herself present when needed most.

Preliminary Conclusion

This chapter discussed the primary sources of this research. Widows were able to narrate their experiences of widowhood. The stories are unique in that they give a comprehensive understanding of the challenges surrounding widowhood. They show how the society and more especially the church has neglected them. After burial, the society thinks that they have done it all for the widow and that her life has to resume to normal. Not much is talked about the experiences of widowhood thereafter; as a result, widows suffer in silence. This may not go well with other widows because health challenges may come in. Through the different stories that were narrated, the challenges and pain are easily noticed and the gaps for pastoral care can easily be picked up by the church to care for them.

Throughout the interviews, widows were able to open up to tell their experiences of widowhood. It was not easy but they had trust that it was for a good cause. Through the narration of their stories, memories were brought back and they became emotional. At this point, the author decided to change her position of researching to that of care giving. It was not going to be good to leave a wound open like that. A workshop retreat was organized for all the widows that were interviewed to help

them to begin to heal and put behind their experiences so that they could move on in life.

The next chapter explains in detail the whole process and outcomes of the workshop retreat. It also discusses how healing started in order to bring closure.

CHAPTER SIX

RESULTS and HEALING

6.1 Introduction

This chapter was supposed to bring healing methods that the Synod of Blantyre can adopt in order to help widows with challenges they face in their journey of widowhood. The initial plan of the author was to bring all widows together for a weekend retreat so that they could all begin a process of dealing with their experiences in order to heal. This retreat was planned to take place at the end of the research.

These thoughts were there before the research actually started. When the fieldwork commenced, things took a twist that during the research interviews, the author came across many challenges with regard to the stories narrated by the widows. Their stories were heavy and emotional. It took time for widows to express themselves because of what they went through and the pain it brought in their lives. During the interviews, it was like wounds that were healing were opened. One could also understand that the healing was not deep; it was on the surface just because of time. Things happened like this because the women did not go through pastoral counselling. They were healing on their own. It was at this point that the researcher with consultation decided to take her position of pastoral care to help the women so that the research would be meaningful and appreciated by the widows. A workshop retreat was needed to help these widows begin to heal from their past memories and experiences.

This chapter will then explain the process and procedures taken to organize the workshop retreat, which was held from 28th February to 3rd March 2018 in Blantyre, Malawi at Grace Bandawe Conference Centre. The purpose of using narrative (story telling) as a method in this research was not there just to hear the stories of widows, but to hear these stories and take action by helping the widows and the structures that are involved. AS Oduyoye, puts it that the African women's theology is a theology of commitment so that the lives of many women and widows included are transformed (2001:16). The Commitment and action taken from the workshop will help the widows to understand where they are and to begin the process of healing. It will also help women in general to understand the issues of widowhood and be empowered to act with knowledge in future if it happens to them.

The second part of this chapter will then explain how the healing process was achieved. This part will expand in detail to explain healing, and why healing is needed by widows when their husbands die. It will further discuss the key people that have to journey with the widows in their process of healing. After this explanation, the processes that the widows in the workshop went through to begin their journey of healing will be looked into. This will show how the women were transformed to begin to understand themselves in a different way, thus beginning the healing process.

The stories that were narrated in chapter five may be repeated in this chapter because chapter five is a narrative report of how the interviews took place and how the widows were able to narrate their stories. The reason in this chapter will not be to repeat the stories, but that; the same narratives have changed to healing narratives. It is out of these stories that widows will begin to find healing. Phiri et al comment further that narrative are important in the journey of women; "So that healing and wholeness can come to African women who have and continue to experience the effects of sexism and other forms of discrimination in the church" (2002:7).

6.2 Workshop process

It was very clear throughout in the interviews that the church was absent in the lives of many widows. In order to conduct this workshop, so that it was accepted by the Synod, the process began by working in collaboration with the Synod authorities. They were informed of the intended workshop retreat for widows and that it needed their full participation and support.

When the Synod officials were interviewed, they admitted that the church had been absent in the lives of many widows. If some were reached, they were very few. Therefore, this idea of having a workshop was a welcome development. In support of the workshop, the Synod provided accommodation for all the participants coming from outside Blantyre and asked congregations in Blantyre City presbytery and well-wishers to assist with food.

Since this was a delicate issue, and the first of its kind, there was a need to deal with the issue pastorally; The Supervisor Prof. MA Masango came as a facilitator together with his wife to assist in managing the workshop retreat so that the objectives could be achieved. The presence of Synod officials, and the academia, confirmed the importance of this workshop to the church in Malawi.

6.2.1 Purpose

As explained earlier that most of the widows were still grieving for the death of their husbands even after a period. The purpose of the workshop retreat was to invite all the widows that were interviewed to come together, in order to help them with the process of healing. Letting them come together from different places and different backgrounds, would help them understand what others go through apart from their own experience. The workshop retreat was aimed at having the church present so that the widows could be affirmed. This was done to allow the church leaders to

hear for themselves the pain and challenges experienced by widows who were members in the church and serving at different capacities. On the other hand, to help the widows see the church presence and that she was willing to journey with widows in their difficult times of loss. The process was meant to find a suitable pastoral care model that could help widows heal. Through all this, the hope was to help the widows present at the workshop retreat to find themselves, that is where they were in the grieving journey and to begin to heal.

6.2.2 Participants

The workshop retreat invited all the widows that were interviewed to come and attend. This included 17 widows from Zomba, 12 widows from Blantyre City, 2 widows from Chikwawa and 2 widows working as women's coordinators in the presbyteries. All those coming from outside Blantyre were accommodated at Grace Bandawe Conference Centre. Those coming from Blantyre commuted from home. These women had a variety of experiences and differences in age. The youngest widow was in her late twenties and was widowed when she was about 26 years. The others were in their late thirties, mid-forties and fifties. The oldest were in their seventies. The age differences helped them to gain experiences from one another. The oldest widowed participant has been a widow for 24 years. Some, who were of a young age, were the ones who had been widowed for a longer period.

These widows were to be affirmed by the church by ministers residing in Blantyre who were invited to attend including female ministers who came in their numbers. Representatives of different desks were also invited. These were from the Youth, Women, Evangelism Sunday School and Chaplaincy. The Principal of Zomba Theological College and the Dean of Academic Affairs were invited also. Four students from the Theological College came as recording officers to all the proceedings of the workshop retreat. The invitation was extended to minister's wives

and the leadership of the women's guild from some congregations within Blantyre. The number of participants was limited because of the budget constraints.

6.2.3 Publicity

The office of the General Secretary wrote a letter to the Presbytery officials and congregations in Blantyre informing them of the workshop. They also organized a press briefing with some of the media houses in Blantyre to inform and explain why the workshop on widows was taking place. This was done a day before the actual workshop retreat started. This helped people not only the Synod but also the whole country to know what was happening and the role the church had in caring for widows. This information was shared on both radio and television stations. Such publicity also made people to look forward to the outcome of the workshop and the commitment the Synod would take.

6.3 Topics covered

The workshop retreat started on 28th February, which was the arrival day. It commenced in the evening with introductions to one another and welcoming all the participants including the Facilitator. The session was closed with evening devotions.

6.3.1 Thursday 29.02.18

Day 1

This was the day set aside for the official opening of the workshop by the Blantyre Synod officials. The service started with the lighting of a candle of hope by the facilitator. This candle signified the presence of all that had departed. Having said

this some of the widows stood up in reverence to the presence of God and others kept silent not understanding what was happening. The candle was lit every morning throughout the workshop. The process and purpose of lighting the candle showed that they were going to be doing serious business said one widow. Then the service continued with the exposition of the word of God by Prof. Masango with the Theme; “What does the Bible say about orphans and widows?”

He said according to his knowledge, Blantyre Synod could be the first church to call a summit in Africa on the care of Widows.

.He skipped 1Timothy 5:1-2 because Paul rebukes the elders for neglecting the widows.

. He said the church is ordered to care of the widows over the age of 60 years so that they in turn could care for the younger ones.

. In the story of Elijah and the widow, He said that widowhood was not a punishment.

. He further said, the church cannot care for the widows who live a reckless life after the death of their husbands. The Church is called to care for one another and this call includes the care of widows.

6.3.2 After this introductory sermon to the workshop, the Researcher gave a brief background to the project. She said;

“Even though many have researched and written about widowhood, there was no one in Malawi who had researched on the experiences of pain and challenges widows go through and that it was a challenge to the church. Citing the methodology, she explained that Story telling (Narrative theory) was used to help widows narrate their stories of pain. The aim of the project was to come up with a pastoral care model, which could be used by the Synod in caring for widows. The researcher at this point of the workshop changed her position to that of care giving in order to heal the pain that the widows she interviewed went through.”

After this brief explanation, The Deputy General Secretary of the Synod of Blantyre gave his remarks in the following way;

He expressed gratitude to the organisers for thinking of having such an important workshop, which would at the end help to bring change to how we treat widows in our communities. The research was done at the right time to caution the church's role He alluded to the fact that he was raised and brought up by a widow and, therefore, understands the challenges that widows face. He pointed out that he was not different from others the fact that his mother was a widow and he does not like those that undermine widows. He said, "Widows have the capacity to work just like any other person if they are given the space".

He said that the time had come to speak out on the matter in order to raise awareness. Most of the times people have chosen to be silent and suffer inside which makes the problem to continue. He further noted that women themselves do not support one another, and that they are the perpetrators of some of the ugly experiences widows go through. He ended up by challenging the Synod to do something about the problems experienced by widows.

The Synod vice Moderator, in her official opening remarks, recommended the project and that it was coming at the right time in the Synod and the church in Malawi. She said the time had come to act and hear the stories of widows and help them to adjust well in their new roles as widows.

6.4 Self-reflection

The afternoon session started by breaking, the ice and making the participants feel comfortable. The facilitator started with a personal reflection of himself. This was done to help the widows open up and to be ready for participation. He started by

saying that; “I was like Saul in Damascus when he persecuted Christians”. He started his ministry in 1974 in a rural area. He did funerals, but never visited the families again. All the people who died in the congregation were remembered in January every year whereby he invited family members to a memorial service. He would pray for the members of the family. He would also pray by mentioning the names of the deceased and lighting a candle. The aim of this service was to remove all the names of the deceased persons from the communal role book. He would then put out the lighted candle. After this service, he would then light a candle at home and pray for both the deceased and their families. He never saw the families again; only at the grave and when they came for this memorial service. He saw them as not important. To him he had done the important ritual of burying them, but what happened to the families after this did not matter.

Then he talked of his experience when his cousin’s husband died. Death came on the doorstep of the family. He realised that when death occurs in the minister’s family, no one comes to console him except his fellow ministers. Christians are afraid to console the minister and yet they expect the minister to visit them.

However, who are we? We are human beings created in the image of God and loved by God, but have lost our loved ones. If I die, I wonder if the people will still love my wife as they do now? In widowhood, the character of the person changes, you are no longer the same, friends run away from you. People no longer trust you. The husband’s family side-lines you; they don’t involve you in deciding where to bury your husband. The minister is only interested in burying the dead and not to know your status and how you feel at that time. Friends, family, and even the church reject the widow. Therefore, the rejection, stigmatization and pain you get are the beginning of your journey.

In South Africa they bury the dead only on Saturdays and widows wear a black gown for mourning for one year. What if somebody is working? The difficult part is when

one is a nurse who is supposed to put on a white uniform when going to work. Nurses are allowed to wear uniform during the day and at home put on their mourning gown.

My journey from Saul to Paul reminded me of painful moments in my life; 'when my father died in 1993 I started to understand what widowhood was all about. From the father's side were Sangomas, doctors and nurses. There was one who when he looked into your eyes would tell you what sickness you were suffering from. At night, the granny would sleep with the sick person and would be shown what type of medicine you needed. On his mother's side were preachers. Therefore, we needed to know the background of who you wanted to marry.

His father expected him to be a Sangoma (traditional doctor) and one night he was fighting with his mother over him for the mother said he was a preacher and the father said, no, he is a Sangoma because preachers are paid less.

He went to the United States for his doctoral studies and his father died 6 weeks before graduation. He came home to bury his father and was angry as to why his father had died before he was a spiritual doctor. There is a time when you should fight God and ask why God allows certain situations. As ministers, we should allow Christians to be angry and fight God. His anger was why God allowed his father to die before he could bring reconciliation between the two families (Sangoma and spiritual people).

After burial people started, sewing black clothes and all the children wore black for six months. The mother was told never to be outside after dark. She could not even greet people by hand but just by clapping hands and greeting them. When his father died, the Church chose four widows, prayed with them and sent them to be with his mother for one month. That touched him. The women shared their experiences. One of the widow was 89 years old.

Two weeks after her husband died, she was told to be married to the younger brother of the deceased. She told them she would marry after one year. She was a year older than the brother was. After one year, she said no she was older; and she told them that they should go to the grave and ask the dead husband if she could marry the young brother, and if the dead man agreed then she could marry. They took all the property. The Church asked them to return the property and they said she was in love with them. The law was on her side, they were forced to return the goods.

Four women helped his mother and the youngest was about 30 years old. Her husband had died two years earlier. They slept on the floor and prayed together for a month. The younger widow explained that she felt her husband was still around and would even cook food for him. After a year, the mother took off the black clothes and it was her turn to go and help other widows. This was the only time that the Church was present. After the burial, it was only those four widows who were with his mother.

Through the above experience of where he comes from, it wasn't until the death of his mother that he saw the need of helping other people when death came into their families. This background story helped the participants to be able to share their stories of widowhood. It opened them up to share even more personal things that they did not share before. For the sake of confidentiality, their names will not be mentioned. Numbers will know them. Their experiences were narrated in short as follows;

Widow one; Widow one explained how her husband died and how his death shocked the family. After burial of her husband, a group of Women's Guild from her Cottage came to visit her. Her cousin stayed with her for one week. However, after that she was on her own and continued with life like going to drop kids at school and pick them up which she says was not easy. She was grateful that painful as it was,

her children who were grown up stood firm and decided where their father was to be buried against the decision that was being imposed by the in-laws. The church has never come to visit and or to see how she was settling after the loss.

Widow two; she narrated her story that she was widowed in 1993 and the children were very young. She was a Sunday School Teacher, so because of her role, the church, mainly Sunday school teachers, came to visit her after the loss. People used to say that she would not manage to look after the children, because their father, who was well- commotion, was gone. The husband's family took away all the property and left her with nothing. Women's Guild came only for the burial. After that, she never saw them again.

Widow three; she was widowed in 1990 when they lived in Lilongwe. She was left with 7 children, 5 boys and 2 girls. She was given black clothes to wear and stayed at the husband's home. The husband's family took her to be the cause of her husband's death. Seeing that the relationship with her in-laws was not good, she went back to her home. The church just buried her husband and never came back. However, at her home the Women's Guild visited and encouraged her. She was left in black without anyone telling her when to take it off. The communication with her in-laws was cut off. She took out the black cloth on her own. Unfortunately, someone died in her late husband's family. She went to the funeral without wearing black clothes and they said nothing. Thus, she felt free at last. In her home village, they wanted her to go through widowhood cleansing in order for her to mix well with her family, and she refused.

Facilitator's intervention; at my Church Women's Guild would go to one of the widows if you were a member. They would come, conduct prayers after six weeks, and invite you to come to Church. A few people hugged the widows. Normally if I greeted widows, they said that I was pushing my wife to the grave. Now Women's

Guild goes and tells the widows to go and worship with them, which shows liberation and a different treatment to them.

From the three stories, the C.C.A.P. is seen not to be caring for the widows and the orphans. The widows go through difficult times without assistance from the church. There is a problem in raising and rearing orphans and ladies in the Women's Desk should set up programmes so that the Church, even men, should embrace widows and children by caring for them and supporting them.

Widow four; a crocodile ate Widowed in 1986, her husband and she was left 9 months pregnant with 5 children at the time of his death. She was asked to go through a culture of sexual cleansing by her family, so that she was clean and the family was protected, of which she refused. "How could I have a sexual union with a stranger when I was almost due to have a baby"? Four years later the child who was born after the death of her husband, died of cerebral malaria. Nevertheless, the family instead, said it was because she was not cleansed and forced her to do it. Because of pressure and the actual death of her child, she became afraid that all her children would die and accepted to be cleansed. She became pregnant from the ritual and was excommunicated from church, because she had a child out of proper marriage. No one helped her. She has gone through this experience alone. She did not have any assistance except her minister was assisting that one child by paying fees for his secondary school.

Widow five; Widowed in June 1994. Husband was sick for 3 years and passed on. His body was buried in Ndirande in Nchalo, because there was no house at his home in Nsanje. She was forced to go through widowhood cleansing by the family. There was no assistance from the church and yet they came to bury the deceased husband. Some of the elders were the very same people who would push you and make sure that you go for this ritual of cleansing. This is one of many problems

where widows are not cared. They are forced to do ritual cleansing, and the church is absent.

Widow six; she was widowed in 2004. She realised that the in-laws took a front stage even if people have lived together for a long time as husband and wife. They do not respect the voice of the wife. The in-laws decision to take the remains and bury him in his home village was accepted by her family against their wish. In her case, the church supported her very well. Even after the funeral, different groups of church members visited her including the minister. They supported her during this difficult time

Facilitator's comment; It seems the church is only interested in burying the dead and not the one left alive. Widows should, therefore, write something that the church should do to help them when their husbands die. Then the universities should also be told what to teach so that future ministers should learn what to do in their congregations with widows.

My mother never went to church for three months. The Sunday she went, there was Holy Communion. She sat at the back and I joined her with my sisters and brothers. My wife also joined us. When my wife was told to go and sit where the Pastor's wives' sat, she said she would sit with her mother-in-law. An elder came to fetch me and I took my mother with, but the elder said to my mother, not you but this one. I told them this is the womb that brought me into the world. I went back and sat with my mother and I was happy because I gave mother my support. Another elder came, but my daughter said, don't worry Jesus is here with us.

We were the last to be served Holy Communion because my mother was wearing a black gown. They said anyone who served Holy Communion to a widow is cursed. So I took the elements and served my mother first, then myself. From that day I made a vow that, no widow would receive Communion as the last person. I now

start with widows to receive Communion, because I know Jesus came for the oppressed and he starts with the oppressed. Those in ministry should respond to the cries of widows.

Ministers' responses; after hearing the heavy stuff from the widows, the ministers present responded as follows;

Minister one; as a church we have failed by not helping the widow in healing the pain and giving courage. We have only concentrated on the burial. We are not even aware of the struggles they go through.

Minister two; we may not have failed completely. It depends on leadership of the church. Others follow and go to give support. As a Synod, we should do one thing and maybe this could be discussed during Ministers' retreat so that we can have one system that can support widows in their time of need.

Minister three; the church maybe goes back once to visit the widow. Ministers have failed. As a Minister, you can go back more than once to visit the widow and see how she is coping.

Minister one; strongly emphasized that; 'My answer was that as a Church we have failed in the healing process. This I am saying from the stories that have been narrated by these women. All of them have said the church was not there for them after burial except for one. As Blantyre Synod after this workshop, we should have a ministry at the church to look after the widows. I am grateful to these women because they have opened my eyes. I was not aware of the experiences that they go through. I am grateful to this workshop'.

Minister four; the church looks at who the widow is; if she is a member of the choir then the choir is responsible for caring of the widow. Which means those who don't belong to any ministry in the church will not be visited. As Synod, we should have one policy being to take care of all its members at the time of need.

Widow comment; At this point the widows themselves came in to comment on the discussion and said; “Everything ends at the grave. The widow and all go away from the grave to their respective homes, and the widow to her mourning house. No one comes back to give support. The minister comes to bury your husband but does not care to greet you, just to see how you are coping with the loss after the funeral”

Widow’s comment; “When widowed one needs love and support. There can be no healing process if the above is missing. People talk many bad things against you just to frustrate and make you live a miserable life. Even going to Church is a challenge for the widow, because of how people treat you and talk, and how they will judge you; you are not comfortable even in the house of God”.

After this, narration of experiences continued.

Widow seven; Widowed when she was young, and comes from the north of Malawi. She went alone with two friends to bury the husband. “These two did not come with me because they were Women’s Guild members, but because of our friendship. The Church just gave a letter confirming that my husband was a full member”. This allowed him to be buried by the minister in that area. She was there for at least a week. After coming back, the minister and his wife came to visit. After one week, the wife came again. The Women’s Guild where she was a member came to visit after 6 months.

What do we expect the Church to do?

Widow’s response; “If we did not love C.C.A.P., we would not have come back to C.C.A.P. after the treatment we received during and after the funeral. Our C.C.A.P. does not know what we expect and this discussion will help the C.C.A.P. to do what is expected”.

Minister two; The Church is growing. Earlier it was easier. Ministers cannot manage these visitations. At Church, we have committees but have not formed a committee to follow-up on widows. If there is a Condolence Committee formed, it will be responsible for this task.

Facilitator responded to Ministers; ‘We are opening a can of worms. There was no chance to speak out, but now as ministers, we have a time together to prepare something for the next generation. To the Moderator my fear is that the women who go back to their ministers who do not bother will remember their oppression. The Ministers who are not here, we do not know how they can understand what is discussed here.”

How do we end the pain, as there will be many widows coming in? What about widowers? At lunch hour, let us think of what the widows have said. As we discuss their abuses and violence, let us also remember that such topics should be included in the curriculum. Those who have first cared for themselves and understand the difficulties should care for the young widows. These stories were shared during session. At the end of the session, this question was asked.

During tea break and lunch think of;

What frightened you? What made you feel sad? How would you deal with it?

When the session was resumed after lunch break, a widow and one of the participants were given a chance to report on what they thought about the morning session. The widow said that, she felt encouraged by the way, the session went. That what she thought were big issue in her own personal experience were not anymore, because she saw that there were some widows whose issues were more frightening than hers. This gave her a peace of mind. She further said that she wished many church leaders had been present to hear and learn from what was happening. She said, “I will not go back home the same, I feel freed”.

The other participant, who was a female minister, felt that the session was too heavy for her. She learned many things that she didn’t know were happening. She was able to recall the number of funerals she went to, and was not able to go back to the widow. She agreed that she also was a Saul until she came to the workshop and will

be going back as a Paul. She thanked the widows for opening up so that others could learn from these experiences.

6.5 Culture that affects widows

After these comments, the researcher thanked both women for being honest about themselves. She encouraged participants to continue discussing the experiences when free so that they could learn more from each other. The facilitator then presented the following; Cultural issues make us fail to reach our goals. In the early times, a widow was not allowed to pass in any garden to protect plants from not growing well. She could not pass in between couples as they walked on the street; this is done in order to protect them from separation. She had to sit at the back of the bus especially when wearing mourning gowns. At night, she should be at home before sunset, in order to light a candle to protect the dead husband's clothes until distributed. She was not allowed to visit other families except closest friends. If there was a funeral, she would wash hands before going and not sit in the house of the funeral or enter the yard at the funeral.

In Swaziland immediately you have been told about the death of your husband you lie down on your stomach until the day of burial. Even when eating you lie down on your stomach, no matter how long it may take until burial. When a man died, the house was whitewashed. All pictures were turned; mattresses removed from the bed and put down on the floor. When a woman died, the husband would sit on the chair in the room. A night before burial a woman would shave her hair. If a woman died, a man would put a black band on his arm. He could change clothes, but the band would always be there.

In Nigeria, the practice is very ugly. When the coffin comes home on a Friday before burial, the younger brother of the deceased who is likely to take over the responsibility of inheriting the widow, would be asked to have sexual intercourse with

the widow in the room where the coffin was, to kick off the evil spirits of the dead man.

In Cameroon, they have ritual cleansing a few months after the burial. They engage a stranger to come and cleanse just like in Malawi.

In a Jewish culture, they cleanse with olive oil, which sticks on your body, and you cannot bath for 7 days. On 8th day, they take 7 women to wash you facing the west where the head is. The coffin comes out with the feet first and at the gate they turn and have the headfirst because he is the head.

Indians are the worst. On inheritance, as a widow you are not told to be inherited. You are just informed of what is going to be done at the funeral.

In Xhosa culture, if one dies in a car accident, the coffin does not come home. The funeral car will just stop at the gate. Only men will bury the body, women will remain behind. Those who are not members of the family cannot close the grave or a shovel cannot be passed on to the other, they had to put it down because they will pass on the accident. The lady minister cannot go to the grave. After 10 days, the woman will be taken to the grave. The cleansing starts in other cultures.

The western African countries faced Ebola and many deaths. Ebola spread because when you touched the dead body the virus would go into you. Bishop Temple helped the Church in Sierra Leone to stop the cleansing because more women died. It is important to note that when a woman dies, people say it is the will of God

Many Churches lost many women through AIDS because of ritual cleansing in the culture of inheritance. Many Churches agreed and stopped this inheritance.

In Greek culture, you wear black clothes until death. This culture oppresses women for a long period.

In 2015, the World Health Organisation for 2 years went through Sub-Sahara where they met widows and asked questions. They found 258 million widows lived in this area and if they didn't follow these cultures, they were poor and their children were married at the age of 10 to rich men in order to bring fortunes,

In Zimbabwe, after 10 days, if you want to be inherited, you put a calabash at the entrance of the house. Then they would bring the younger brother. Children, furniture and everything if you refuse, will remain and they will chase you because you are a stranger.

Malawian laws are good as we saw them in chapter two and four, but do our Ministers know these laws so that they can assist the widows? We may blame the Church, but we are the Church. What can we do to help other widows who are going to experience these issues in the future?

The issue of oppression of women is all over the world. One can also cite the issue of ordination. It took 60 years for the Church to discuss ordination of women in South Africa and there was violence in Soweto. Women challenged men that they came from their womb so they were ordained and finally were sent to rural congregations. Men who backed women clergy were also punished by being sent to remote congregations. They failed to attend Synod meetings because they were costly as they were placed far away. The South African Church has not said anything in the open, but allows women clergy to be respected and as ordained ministers cannot go and bury the dead, killed in an accident in Xhosa culture.

The Indian Culture; in Bangalore in 2015, a man who was working for the railway died and left 6 children with no pension. One of the children was 11 years old and a man diagnosed with TB paid a dowry to marry her. They were in marriage for 7 years and the man died. The husband's family took all the property and the widow was sent back home. In India, there are 40 million widows. When one dies in the morning, they burn the body in the afternoon and ashes are thrown into the Ganges River.

The widow sprinkles ashes on her head, gives bangles to the husband's family, wears simple cloth and puts a red dot on her forehead. In Bhuddist, culture there is a special man who shaves widows. There is a special diet for Islamic people. You cannot eat eggs, meat or fish. You cannot greet men with your hand. All baking is forbidden, you must eat food that has no salt, only garlic as pure food without salt. You have to wash clothes towards the sunset. If you have no children, you go to dumping areas to search for food. Bangalore has harsh treatment for widows.

The Church in Africa has to address the mystery of widows. Many children of ministers hate the Church because of the harsh treatment given to their parents. When ministers live in a Manse and the husband dies, the wife is not respected as before. Children hate the Church because it does not consider the work of the minister and the efforts made no matter how long the minister was in service. Clergy need to care for their families. Once a minister dies the next clergy must come in, it is important for clergy to save to prepare for death.

If you stay in a Manse save some money as if you are paying rent, so that half way through your service you can buy a house in preparation for any eventualities. Widows are treated in several ways

In Zambia when the dead body is washed, the water is given to the widow to drink and after that, the Minister will pray.

A case study in 2005 in Mchinji, Malawi; James Mbewe (not real name) died and was laid to rest 3 years previously in an unknown grave. The wife Bertha did not mourn her husband and nobody came to visit her. She hid in her sister's house to avoid cleansing rituals. The husband's family found her and had to deal with her husband's evil spirit. She hid her two children and had intercourse with James' cousin. As this was happening, she cried. After finishing she went outside and washed herself and thought that maybe he had HIV and if so what would happen to her children if she died. These stories share ways in which widows could be cared for. After listening to these stories, we broke into groups for healing those people through a process of discussion.

6.5.1 Group Discussions

After this presentation, women went into Group discussions. They were to discuss two questions from the widow's presentations earlier and from what the facilitator

presented on the effects of culture. The questions discussed in the groups were twofold. How do we help the Mchinji lady? How do we help the Chikwawa lady? In what way can we care for them?

Group 1 – Felt that the Chikwawa lady was afraid of man and not God. If she trusted God, she would not have fallen into that situation. She needed to be prayed for, for more healing. She knows she did not do something wrong and needs encouragement.

All Churches should come together against these rituals including chiefs.

Mchinji lady – Group 2 felt that it had already happened and nothing could be done now to reverse the situation. She needed to be visited, and prayed for in order for her to heal slowly. She needed to be encouraged to go for HIV testing and if positive to start medication. The Church should help in the healing process, by educating communities' members about the church and widows.

The Church should take a greater role in condemning this ritual cleansing. They should also stop the procedure of excommunicating women, and deal with the issue of inheritance. The government is already in the forefront condemning this, as one man in Nsanje was imprisoned for this practice.

At this point, the widow in question stood up to defend herself. She made participants to be in her shoes and feel what she went through. She repeated to say that; she was lonely and isolated from her family because she did not do the ritual. The death of her child threatened her. Made her to believe that it was true that the child died because of the absence of ritual of cleansing. She had no support from her own family or from the church. The church knew very well that this ritual was practiced there, but did not come to protect and care for her.

She challenged the participants to say that it was not a matter of faith. She even said that the child who was born after the cleansing ritual had to be weaned after birth, which meant another sexual cleansing. She has not done this because of her faith, and is not completely accepted in her community because they see her as

unclean and that the child is not protected. She is isolated for refusing to do the cleansing to wean her child.

Comment from participant; one of the participants who came from the same area commented that, it is difficult when you do not have people to support you. She further said that the family could chase you out of the village, with the agreement of the chief who supports the process. She disclosed that she was asked to go through the same ritual when she went back to her home. She refused and was asked to move out of the village, which she did. Now, she is away from people she once knew. The church is silent and does not even know why she moved from her village to settle in a new place.

Comment from minister two; He had worked in the area as a minister. He said that what the lady was saying was exactly what happens. He said the Presbytery tried to work on a policy on Modification of Cleansing Ritual. The presbytery was concerned with what was happening to women, which was putting them at high risk of infections. The Christian community was encouraged not to follow the practice, but used the modified practice of hiring a couple to do the ritual for them. Christians were encouraged to be in the forefront when a member died in order not to allow the culture to take control of the funeral. This meant that the elder of that area would do all the information and arrangements. After burial, the church would go back to the family to sweep and clean. This also meant that no other cultural practice should come in. If the chief asked when the cleansing would be done, they would indicate to him the day and this would be done by the hired couple, and not the widow. This is a new process of modifying the ritual of cleansing, as was indicated during the interview with the Senior Chief.

He lamented that the Presbytery did not continue with what it had started, and this was because of the transfer system the Synod follows. This has to be revisited, so that the church has control and can follow up on their members when death

occurred. It is one way in which the church is addressing the humiliating process towards widows.

Facilitator; Thanked the lady from Chikwawa for sharing her sad journey. It is sad that the church gave her discipline instead of finding out how it happened, as she was forced into that situation. Sad that even after coming back to church, the church had not followed up on what was happening regarding the demands of her cultural practices.

He reported that he wrote a letter to the Methodist Church to suspend a hyena in their Church because the Church was forcing him to discipline the widow. They replied by saying when did Presbyterians make rules for Methodists? What proof was there? When he told them, he would bring the widow to give her testimony they never replied.

The day's business was followed by closing devotions led by Ordained Felix Kuombola: Mark 10: 46-52.

Friday 02-03-2018

Day 2

Devotions: This was a women's world day of prayer whose theme was "God's Creation is good" from Gen.1:26-27.

Preacher: The Rev. G.A. Kapuma

The emphasis was on verse 27, that God created male and female in his image and likeness. Females, especially widows are abused and mistreated and people forget that God created these women. Widows are oppressed through the different rituals and abuses that they have to go through, but God loves them as his creatures. As widows, we should not think that we are the only ones with problems, because even

those who are married sometimes face difficult situations. We should cast our burdens before God. She completed the devotions with a prayer.

6.6 Biblical text on widowhood

In his enquiry on Biblical texts about widows, he found out that according to Psalms 82:3 the Bible defines the poor, the fatherless as afflicted, and the oppressed in many ways. Like women who have lost their husbands through death. When a mother loses a husband, the children become orphans and God in the Old Testament discharges the Christian community to protect and offer justice and care to them. Fathers play an important role in a person's life; and there is so much we can remember about our fathers that has an impact on us today.

At this point, participants were asked to share experiences they had and what they remembered about their fathers.

The Facilitator continued by quoting Psalms 68:5 where God is the father of the fatherless, defender of the widows. The church should be father to the fatherless and should defend the widows, therefore CCAP should defend widows and accompany them in their journey of grieving. The church should hear their cries and should be prepared to listen. Exodus 22:22-23 says that taking care of widows is part of religious duties and James says caring for the troubled is not optional. 1Timothy says widows should be cared for together with the orphans. Therefore, the church that disappoints widows is not the church of God. Jesus said if we love him, we should care for orphans. Several scripture passages guide us in how to care for widows and orphans. Some of these are indicated in chapter two.

In the New Testament name and her works, Tabitha Greek-Dorcas that simply means the useful one in the community who did tremendous work, and knitted for the extremely poor, mention a widow. Acts 9 explains her life. When Peter came in to raise her back to life people remembered her actions more than her words.

Widows need to engage in doing good works. Widows are generous and loving but the only problem is that they believe in everything. Elija went to a widow and she gave Elija the food meant for her and her son. Widows can give even their last and remain with nothing. For this reason, the scripture says that we should protect them and walk with them.

A good example in the Bible is Jesus himself who came into the city of Nain and went to the marginalized and served outsiders who were outside of the circle of people. Jesus brought back to life the widow's child. Most of the time we spend energy caring for other people who cannot care for us. Wives are caring and loving to men as well as children, who care for them? If we reflect on our husbands, they were just like our fathers. If the Father was alcoholic, you get married to an alcoholic. This kind of life continues with you. You move from an alcoholic family to your own alcoholic family. If not careful, this may continue with the children. At this point participants were asked to look back on the families they all came from. To remember the kind of husband they had. What is it that they miss from the husband? What memories do they have?

You have lost your husbands and fathers therefore I ask you to remember what your husband was like, and once you have done that write a letter to tell him what you could have told him while he was alive, or what you miss telling him now that he is not there. Those who are not able to write will tell the story and others will write it for them. Those, whose husbands are alive, write a letter to your late father and inform him what is happening since he has gone.

Participants spent time to write this letter to their husbands. Some questioned how the letter was going to get to him. Nevertheless, they were encouraged to write their feelings, trusting that this would give them solace. After this, they were divided into four groups where they shared experiences of what they had written. In their sharing, they were all appreciative of the kind of husband they had. That he was loving and supporting. This is one of the things they miss. Others expressed that they did not imagine a life to living without their husband. This kind of sharing helped

them to begin to feel as if they had really talked to the husbands. “I told him what has been in my thoughts that were making me not to have peace,” said another widow. Attached are some of the letters written by the widows. Some of them are just general, telling the husband how much he is missed and others explain what she has gone through, and the developments taking place with the children. Samples of some these letters are in Appendix A. One participant who was not a widow was very grateful to the way widows were encouraged to share and hear from others. Women should be grateful for the opportunity to come and share such thoughts. This shows that God loves us and is in control.

6.7 Problems of widowhood

Widow eight; after the death of Fredrick her husband, her in-laws behaved in a strange manner. They behaved as if they didn’t know her and wanted to get hold of the money that was given to her from the Police where her husband worked, but she didn’t give it to them. The Police personnel moved her from the house where they used to stay, to a small house meant to be a servant’s quarters for those with bigger houses and positions; this they did in her absence, when she went to the funeral of her husband.

This was an indication to her that she was not wanted, She decided to go to the plot they were planning to develop. The in-laws gave her 100 kwacha only to buy soap. Her own sister said she could only assist her and not her children, because they were many. The pain and difficulties of widowhood began to be part of her life. It pained her to see that the children were being seen as a burden even to her own relatives. She stopped going to church because women in the church were not kind to her. The women said that she was going after their husbands, this pained her and she decided to be alone at her house, and not to go to any church gathering, in order to avoid the embarrassment.

Comments from Participants; It was disappointing because she was removed from the house (police quarters) soon after burial when the rules stipulate that a widow can live there for three months before moving out. It was also disappointing because, the in-laws wanted to snatch the money that she was given from her husband's office, for their own benefits, instead of helping her to resettle with the children. The relatives of her late husband said they did know her; they rejected her now that the husband was gone after having seven children with him. She had stopped going to church because even the women at church, said, she wanted to snatch their husbands. However, later she went to the church where the sermon touched her. She was hurt; the church did not help her during her difficult times. She was alone because she could not abandon the children, in order to have a good relationship with her brother and sister.

Widow three; she came again to give her testimony of what she had to go through. She said that she was married to a rich man for 39 years who later died. They had a good business, but he died before handing over responsibility to the son who was already working with him. After all these years of marriage, the relatives of her husband did not consult, as to where she wanted to bury her husband. In fact, the husband had said that in the event of death, he should be buried in Blantyre so that it becomes easy for his family to visit his grave.

She thanked God that she informed the sister in-law about what the husband was going through before he died; otherwise, she could have been in trouble. The family insisted that he should be buried at his home in the northern region of Malawi. The daughter who is a lawyer spoke on behalf of her family and convinced the family that it was her father's wish that he be buried in Blantyre, and that she had the right to decide what the family wanted. The daughter sent them transport to carry them from the North to Blantyre and after the funeral was over, they were transported back. The church came for burial and later Mvano (women's guild) and zone members came to console her.

Facilitator's comments; the key issue from the story of widow three, is that we should still pray for a healing process to be done. Since it was not long ago since the husband died, she had to be helped to begin to heal. Thanks to her child who is a lawyer who protected her but in cases where there are no lawyers to protect widows from property grabbers the church should act as lawyer for widows. Actually, it is part of pastoral care.

Widow nine; the husband died in 2015 and her husband's relatives grabbed all the property they had together and even sold the houses they owned. Luckily, she survived because of the compensation, which she got from her husband's office. This only helped her to build a house in order for her to live with her son. She could not afford to send her child to secondary school when he passed his examinations. "With the little I have I managed to contribute towards erecting a tomb stone for my husband. I loved him and he was innocent in all the treatment that we received. The church did not support in any way."

Comments from participants;

She is generous because she contributed to the tombstone because she says she loved her husband.

- Property grabbing is prohibited, she should go and sue. Women need to know the laws that support them in the event of death.
- The women's guild department should invite different speakers who are conversant with the law to come and sensitize women on how to act if their husband dies.
- The church should involve the office of women's desk to help this woman to find a lawyer to help her.
- This is a problem because pastors / ministers do not have time to revisit the bereaved family after burial. There should have been a sensitization program

as a successful woman in the society for the ministers on how often they can visit and strengthen the family to ease their pain. There should be a policy set for all ministers to follow.

A participant shared that the dignity of a widow is not considered when the in-laws are prescribing what has to be done to the widow. She said that she was married for 16 years and after the death of her husband, she was confined and stayed with an old lady who was to make sure that she was not pregnant.

This process made her to raise the following questions; why give me old stinking women? Why not allow me to wash with soap? Why she was not trusted at this time? These may not be questions coming from her alone, but also from most of the widows who went through negative treatment from the in-laws. This proves that the treatment given to widows during the time of mourning is unacceptable. The fact that they have lost a husband, does not mean that they should be treated anyhow and as less human.

At this time, we asked widows to share what they had learnt so far from the plenary, and looking at their own stories.

Four participants volunteered to share what they had learnt from the experiences of some of the widows. The following were the comments:

.Learnt that culture or tradition has roots during funeral and religion does not count at all. Culture is overpowering Christianity when death occurs.

.Being a Christian or having any position in church does not mean anything when it comes to death rituals, and when you have money.

.During the funeral women cannot explain or refuse anything they are told by the in-laws. They cannot say no, say but receive anything that comes to them.

.We need teaching on what to do when widowed

. A young widow said that she was now determined that she will be able to educate her child, after seeing that some have managed to teach / educated 7 children on their own.

.Secondly she has learnt to forgive. She will have to forgive her in-law

.Ministers are different, she wished Rev. G.A Kapuma was there during the time her husband died. During that time, there were 3 ministers including one lady minister, but nobody hugged her only a handshake. Because you are widowed, they make you feel as if you have leprosy.

.With the experiences learned, she is going to help and encourage other widows at her congregation.

.As women's coordinator she will help other widows to form groups so that they should encourage one another. She will also help those that are not widowed, to understand the challenges that widows face.

.Women desk should be involved in matters of widowhood. Not only to provide food to those who are in need, but to help the church through the women's guild to care for widows. This process could be done through workshops, sermons and training.

.The presence of the Principal of Zomba Theological College is very important. Having heard the challenges faced by widow, the institution should now add curriculum that will address topics of widowhood, which would enhance ministers to act and care for widows accordingly and know what widows are going through and to pastorally care for them.

Comment from Vice Moderator; she said that, she felt ashamed of what she was hearing from widows. That in all the sad stories the church was absent. That the church allowed widows to suffer at the expense of culture. The workshop opened up many issues that were not known to her and the rest of the church. She said that the church should repent of its failure to reach out to the widows. "I am ashamed because I expect the same widows to contribute towards the development of the church, but when they need the church we are not there for them" (Vice Moderator's words).

At the end of this heavy session, four ministers were asked to pray for the widows who shared their experiences.

Closing devotions Romans 8:31-39 by Rev. Dr T Chitsulo (Principal ZTC) emphasis was on verse 35. Paul talks of experiences of daily life, which are weighed, and thinks that they are too much. These experiences push us far away from God as if he didn't care. Paul says that there is nothing, which will separate us from God. We might think God is inconsiderate because of our issues. If we feel God has moved, just think who has moved for God is always with us and never forsakes us. The weight of trials and temptations might make us feel God is away, but he is always around us at all times. Tears will not make us see clearly, what God has done in our lives. After a bad experiences there is light at the end of the tunnel. Let us go out with a heart that God is with us, and nothing can separate us from the love of God.

Benediction: The very Rev. Prof. Ncozana, one of the senior ministers in the church.

Saturday 3.03.18

DAY3:

Morning Devotion were led by; Rev. Cecilia Kotima, from 1 Samuel 1:26-28. In addition, the theme was, Courage in Serving God. In her sermon, she stressed the following points:

.Don 't question God about the situation in which one is going through because God is in control and allows His people to pass through such circumstances for His own good purpose.

.Christianity is a war that needs courage.

.We should not look down upon ourselves with the help of God we can be productive regardless of our status in the community.

.Let God lead us through in all our activities.

6.8 Widowed experiences continue

After devotions, participants continued with listening to experiences shared by three young widows. For the sake of confidentiality, these widows' names have been withheld and they were given pseudonyms. The researcher used the names that were previously used in the research. The three widows were Lala whose husband died after staying in marriage for 10 months only, Mary who stayed in marriage for only 4 years and Naphiri who was married for 13 years with one child. All these three widows experienced death at an early age.

Lala; was fortunate in that the parents of the husband took her as their own daughter. They encouraged her to join Women's Guild and they usually took her with them whenever they went abroad. Her own parents have been supportive throughout the period though they live far from her. According to Lala, the church was there and is there for her even though not constantly and not in the manner, she would have loved. More of the individual Christians visit her regularly.

In his response, the Facilitator asked the audience why the parents (in-laws) were behaving in this way. The audience resolved that they had deep Christian values, which were required to be portrayed by all Christians. Secondly, because they were elders in the same church Lala attends, they wanted to help her go through her grieving with dignity. They felt for Lala and were able to understand the pain that their daughter in-law was going through.

Mary; by the time the husband died due to a road accident he was driving a vehicle which was not fully paid for. The relatives of the late husband had an impression that their son was working and they wanted some of the property to be given to them including the car. Nevertheless, the deceased had stopped working and was a second year law student at Chancellor College.

A strange man called saying he was the uncle to the late husband. In excitement that the uncle had introduced himself, she invited him home. In the house, the uncle looked at everything she had in the house. The uncle later asked Mary to teach him how to drive which she could not do, because she didn't have a personal car. Even if she had, why should she be the one to teach him?

These questions were difficult. Did they want to kill her in an accident in the process of learning how to drive? Does this uncle think that this was the car their nephew was driving which they think belonged to him? She had not done the tombstone for her husband because the relatives of her late husband told her to do tombstones for all the other important members of the family apart from her husband's; which is not possible.

Her father walked with her, he confronted the in-laws regarding the way they were treating his daughter. The situation was not good, they humiliated him, and as a result, he told his daughter to change to her maiden surname. Because of the support she received from her parents and other people, she was encouraged to go on with life. She has finally found someone she is dating to marry. The church was not there for her in her journey. A pastor helped her more from another church that was her neighbour and saw the need of helping her.

Both Lala and Mary said that;

.The presence of the church should be felt in this grieving period and not only when they need ones services. They both made them work in different committees of the church without checking with them how they were coping with life

.As the attention of the church is upon the Minister who is in leadership, the minister should create space and time to journey with the widow.

.The Women's Guild only comes to comfort their own bereaved members. It is important to note that care in the church take different forms, for example, if one is not a member you will not see them visiting and comforting that person. During our time of bereavement, we were too young to join the guild. Yet this could have been an opportune time for the women's guild to encourage us to join by caring for us.

Naphiri; the husband was sick for a short time, both of them were teachers. After his death, they buried him at his village. After burial, some of the relatives were quarrelling over the property. However, fortunate enough the sister-in-laws were very understanding and they collected the money (the deceased's Estate) and told her not to reveal. She invested this money in building a house where she lives now. The relatives demanded the properties such as pictures, a bicycle, and a television set and she gave them together with his clothes. In short, things change when you are a widow especially in the absence of the 'Will'

Facilitator's Response;

.It is very pathetic to see such young ladies to be widows.

.They should be praying for themselves that God should redeem them.

.It is very important for the church to be on the forefront because it is very easy for one who has lost a husband to backslide and or to be taken by other churches.

.Widows needs the church in the process of healing not only during funeral services. Caring is needed after burial. Here are some of the comments said by widows:

.Young widows should be nurtured by the church and pastorally care for them so that they are able to see God in their grieving journey.

.With God everything is possible we need to put God ahead of us.

.We need to pray for one another. The harsh ritual practices strip them of their dignity

Four elderly widows were asked to perform the following duties:

One was asked to advise the young widows. In her words, the elderly widow expressed her passion for the young ladies, but advised them to continue trusting God even in this situation because he had allowed it to happen and he was in control. Being young, they had a bright future.

The other three elderly widows were asked to pray for the three young widows. This was part of healing as they began to care for each other.

After the prayers, the facilitator thanked the young widows for sharing their experiences. He assured them that what they suggested would be sent to the Synod so that they should be the last ones not to be cared for by the church.

The programme was not important to follow, but the lives of the widows who wanted to share their experiences was very important. The section continued with stories from other widows. Sharing stories was very helpful because it helped to begin the process of healing. Two elderly widows were given the floor to share their experiences, Mayi Nyagogo and Mayi Nachanza.

Mayi Nyagogo; after the death of her husband, she passed through very brutal cultural practices in this sequence:

. As they arrived in Mzimba for the funeral service, the relatives of her husband told her that she was Mfelekazi (someone who mourning) and according to the Ngoni customs, she was attached to an elderly woman and confined into the same room with her. She was told to mourn in a kneeling position until the burial ceremony. She and the elderly woman were given broken plates to use for eating food and bathing using a broken pot, with no soap.

. After the burial ceremony, she was given beads to put on around her neck and around the body. However, the uncle rescued her to her husband because she was not an Ngoni by tribe. The relatives insisted that she should remain in Mzimba for a month and she should not go back to Blantyre, which was not possible because she had a job to go to. She then was told to continue putting on the clothes she wore during the funeral for the whole month of mourning. However, the same uncle did

not allow this, because she was a working lady and that would not be conducive to her at the place of work.

. After a month, she was told to take all the properties in the house and surrender to them. But others from the side of her husband were of a different view. They told her not do that, and that if they wanted they should come to collect it themselves. Fortunately, this did not happen.

. She was told to take the underwear of her late husband and hers. After bringing them, she was taken to the river for a cleansing ritual. The aunt to the late husband dug a hole on the side of the river, burnt the clothes to ashes, and covered the hole with soil to separate the widow and the deceased's spirit. Then she was brought at the cross roads where four roads meet and shaved her pubic hair, the arm -pits hair and her head in the presence of women who were witnesses to what was happening.

. They gathered 25 sticks with names of potential men scribbled on them so that she could choose the one she felt is good to her. This was part of the process of being inherited. However, her aunt advised her to choose all the sticks to signify that she was taking all as her husbands.

Due to such bad experience, she vowed not to marry again in fear of passing through similar problems. Even though they treated her, in such a way, she still loved them and she visits these relatives annually. She has forgiven them and does this for the sake of her mother in-law who is also a widow and loves her.

Facilitator's Response; It is very pathetic that widows face such problems even in this present time. We are very sorry for you, for experiencing such problems. Be assured that God was with you during this period. Nevertheless, where is the church when widows pass through such notorious cultural rituals? The church should wake up and do something in order to deal with such bad rituals. Rituals that take away the dignity of women and treat them as if they were not human beings cannot be accepted.

A participant from the Ngoni culture felt sorry for what had happened to her. She said that some of the cultural practices that the fore parents used to practice are no longer being followed. Because she was not an Ngoni herself, they should not have imposed this negative ritual on her. They then stood up to apologise to her for the unexpected experiences. Nyagogo accepted the apology and told the group that she has since forgiven them.

Mayi Nachanza; She is the widow of a minister. They were married for 33 years. The deceased husband suffered from Diabetes and one of his legs was amputated. However, in November 2014 he died. When he started suffering, no one among his kinsmen came to be with them. His brother came for two days before his death.

During the funeral service, the condolence money was announced to be MWK 75,000.00 in the church. This money was collected by the church from different ministers who gave their condolences and from Presbyteries. The money from the Synod is not announced because the Synod does everything from buying of the coffin and the food that will be served to the people, from the day of death to the burial day. The money collected is for the widow to help her sort some of the financial things and help her in her new role. The in-laws started enquiring about the whereabouts of this money. They wanted to have it all. When she returned to the area where they built a home, the brother to the late husband followed them looking for the pension fund. This in-law followed her to the Synod office to make sure that he had a share from the pension fund. The Synod office asked her to give the name of a person whom she could share the benefits with from the deceased's estate, she gave the name of her mother-in-law and the Synod honoured that.

She thanked the church for the support she received through the following ways:

- .The women's desk helped her a lot
- . Ministers Wife Association
- . All the congregations they served visit them periodically.
- . In some congregations, minister's widows are recognized and used to help in the work of the church but in others, they are seen as a threat.

Facilitator's Response; It is good to hear that churches can still remember and support the widows of their late Ministers. This shows that the minister served well in the congregations that came to visit the widow. However, he wanted to know if there was any recognition of the widowers when a female Minister dies. This has not happened, and the husbands to the ministers have formed their own organization.

After these experiences, there was a role-play after a presentation of a case study, which was extracted from the Hindu community in order to see how cultural practices and beliefs perpetrate the abuse of widows. In this role-play, the men had different decisions, and the women handled the issues differently. This showed that women handle issues differently from men and many times this is done without thinking of the consequences.

The resolutions that were made at this workshop were presented before the Moderator of CCAP Blantyre Synod the Rev. Masauko L. Mbolebole as the message to the church so that the church could do something concerning the care of the widows. These resolutions form some of the recommendations to the Synod of Blantyre.

6.9 Closing the Workshop

The workshop was closed with the service of worship and the Holy Communion led by the Moderator of CCAP Blantyre Synod the Rev. Masauko L. Mbolebole at 19:20 hours Saturday, March 03, 2018. The readings were from Acts 6:1-7. He pointed out the following areas in the Sermon;

- . That the church is called to care for the needs of the people holistically.
- . Widows should be at the centre of the church's ministry, and the workshop has shown the failure of the church in that area.
- . The first Church was a listening church and CCAP Blantyre Synod is called to be a listening church

- . To listen and take action, not to be impartial, but accept and care for all people.
- . The church to see those that have the capacity to do the job, and to give them power and responsibility so that change can begin
- . The church to pray and listen to the cries of many and repent where she has not done well.
- . “Let’s begin to be active, teach people about death and dying and how we can prepare for it”.

In this sermon, the moderator affirmed the widows as full members of the church. He assured them that after the workshop, the church had to take action to begin to care for widows.

During the service, a ritual was done to put all the letters that the women had written to their late husband’s in a basket, where they were prayed. In her speech, a widow representative thanked the researcher for organizing the workshop, saying that they were enriched by it and felt counted. They were also grateful to the Synod for the support they gave to host the workshop and actual presence during the workshop. ‘The Facilitator Prof Maake Masango and his wife Pauline were awesome. They helped us to find ourselves and begin the process of healing’. She thanked them for humbling themselves and sparing their time to come and be with them in this workshop. She said, “From now we no longer want to be identified or called by this ugly name of “Widow” call us “Women of Hope”. We are not the same, we have to move on, and we can see light in our future, we are God’s children. We will not want other widows to come to experience what we went through, we will support them”.

The workshop then closed with communion. This brought us closer; to celebrate our togetherness in the body of Christ.

The next section will help us to look at how this workshop helped women to begin to heal.

6.10 Healing

The process above was done to help widows open up and understand who they were so that healing could start taking place in their lives. From these experiences, some issues were stuck in the lives of the widows before they could start healing. These negative issues have to be analysed so that healing will be understood.

After going through a rough period of loss, many things happen within a short period. People react differently to the loss of their loved one. In whatever situation, one finds herself in, there has to be a time when one has to begin to accept the situation one is in. The longer you hold on to pain, the longer it will take to heal. At that point, of acceptance that it happened, thus the same time healing will begin. Healing is not a once and for all situation, it is a process. In some, the process is slow depending on what they are going through; to others it can be fast. This is expected to happen even with the loss of a husband, healing will have to happen eventually.

When death occurs, there are many things that a person has to sort out. Because death is not easy and not expected, many problems emerge, and these can be sorted out depending on the help that we get as widows. Every person has problems, as Pandovani puts it; “What’s the difference among us when it comes to problems? Simply, some people are troubled and overwhelmed by their problem while others cope and manage them...Because we all have problems; we all have anxiety, depression, and frustration. But are we handling and in control of them at least most of the time, or are they controlling us most of the time?” (1987:19). Widowhood is a problem that has to be dealt with so that widows are able to heal and move on with life. As Christians, we are always assured of God’s presence within us. Exodus 15:26b *for I am the Lord, who heals you (NIV)*. We trust that God

will help us to heal and move on with life. Some of the problems widows' encounter, as a reaction to their loss or because of how they are being treated are as follows.

Kubler-Ross talks about the stages of grief. That a person may go through different stages in grieving. She identifies five stages which are; Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance (1969). In this case, grieving will be explained so that it connects to the experiences of widowhood. Loneliness, which results from the problem one is facing, will be discussed also.

6.10.1 Grief

When people lose someone they love, they grieve over this person. Kubler-Ross further says that; "When someone you love dies, you have a feeling of numbness; a yearning; and a protest. You have lost part of yourself; you feel disorganized; and you do much crying" (1986:100). In death, people grieve because of the fact that they will not see the loved one again. This separation is very painful, thus why people grieve. Collins adds to say; "When death separates us from someone we love there is time when we think no one has suffered as we have" (2007:466). There are those that will not accept. To them, it is like a nightmare, 'what I am hearing is not true; when I wake up in the morning I will be able to see him'. Kubler-Ross continues to say that; "When death strikes it is a terrible blow and the pain is tremendous" (1986:101). This experience may lead a person into denial.

Denial is part of grieving and heading towards healing. This is what might be in the mind of the widow. One widow in chapter five asked the family to take her to the mortuary in order to see the husband, because she could not believe what they were telling her. The feeling that it cannot be him, coupled with many questions is what goes through the mind of the widow. Denial is a difficult state in the process of grieving, because even the people around you may not know and understand what is

going on in your mind. Grief may bring in many thoughts, and the mind of the one experiencing loss is busy trying to make sense of what is happening.

Collins further says; “Experiencing and expressing the emotions and deep thoughts that are associated with loss. This includes reliving special moments from the past, recalling warm memories, and expressing sadness, loneliness, acute sorrow and sometimes anger which may be directed at the deceased person, at somebody else or at God” (Ibid:468). The loss of a husband will make the widow go through a number of adjustments and this may not be easy in many ways. The memory that the person they used to live with is no longer there is what will make the widow to continue grieving if no assistance is given. Widows need assistance to help them go through grief and begin the journey of healing. In some cases affecting the widows in Malawi, the grieving will take longer because of what they have to go through pertaining to, in-laws and cultural practices, apart from the loss of a husband. The situation may lead the person to anger.

6.10.2 Anger

Anger is a state one finds herself in because of what has happened. The widow may be angry with the deceased husband or angry with God. Why has God allowed this to happen? Collins say; “Anger is an emotional state experienced by everyone, but difficult to define. It occurs in varying forms and degrees of intensity- from mild annoyance or feelings of aggravation to violent rage...It can be of short duration, coming and going quickly, or it may persist for decades in form of bitterness, resentment, or hatred” (:159). Some widows have gone through such situations, and if not assisted, healing will be delayed and the reaction to the death of the husband will take longer leaving her without support. Pandovani continues to say that; “A constantly angry person is controlled by many unresolved conflicts from the past, or even the present. They are constantly angry about many unresolved aspects of their lives. If we do not deal with the anger that we feel, our relationship could lead to

resentment, bitterness and hostility” (1987:42). From the stories above, widows are full of anger because of the manner in which they were treated by being reduced to nothing by the in-laws and cultural practices. The injustice that they may go through during the grieving period can make them to be bitter.

Anger is a reaction to the tragedy that has happened. It is normal to feel angry, and Fleet further adds to say; “Even the most spiritual among us will have more than a few moments of anger, along with a whole bunch of unanswered questions; the first of which is usually, “why me?” However, the bigger tragedy would be to stay angry or in perpetual mourning or in a state that prevents you from moving forward into a life of abundance and happiness- the life that you have not only earned, but richly deserve as well” (2012:47). This life of abundance can happen if a person is accompanied in her grieving journey. In Malawi, the church could be the only place that could offer such help. Such a situation then, is a call for pastoral care, to help such a widow to begin to find herself and begin to heal in order to move forward.

The next stage towards healing is loneliness:

6.10.3 Loneliness

The widow finds herself through being in situations that may lead to many problems in this dilemma. Anger could make a person withdraw from the people and choose to be alone. Loneliness is a sign that there is a problem. Sometimes loneliness may come because of stigma and discrimination. From the stories narrated, some widows have been isolated from the community because they have not adhered to some of the rituals prescribed by the in-laws. Collins explains that; “Loneliness is a painful inner emptiness that everybody experiences at a time. It may last for a short time or persist throughout life...It occurs frequently in single adults living alone, elderly people who have lost a spouse, parents without partners” (2007:195). From the experiences of some of the widows, they became lonely, when all property was taken away, when they had no home to go to, when relatives excluded them

because of certain rituals and when they were seen as a treat to other people's marriages. If such a situation persists, it can lead to depression.

6.10.4 Depression

Depression is a psychological problem that disrupts life. There are many causes of this problem. Loss of a loved one could cause depression if the person has withdrawn herself from people. If not attended to this may lead to serious health problems, Padovani explains that; "One of the fundamental and most common causes for depression is repression. Repression takes place when we bury painful and negative feelings- memories, fears, etc.-inside ourselves, resulting in our holding in all types of confused, distorted and distressing thoughts and feelings. If these are not dealt with but allowed to fester, they cause a build-up of tremendous tension and inner conflict, which adversely affect our peace of mind and pull us down into depression. Frequently people try to forget unpleasant and unwanted feelings and thoughts or push them aside, but they won't go away until they are faced" (1987:71). Some widows find themselves in this difficult situation. In the village where there are no facilities and where even the minister stays far away, the widow may find herself in a serious problem because she was not helped to face the situation. At times, they need someone to journey with them.

After going through different stages of mourning, and when the widows are helped through, the journey to healing can begin. The purpose of the workshop that was held was to help widows begin this process of healing. Fleet suggests that; "The sooner you quit fighting the grief or worse, trying to avoid the grief altogether, the sooner you will start to move through the most painful part of the healing journey and you will hit those calmer waters. You'll soon come to find out that the better days will outnumber the rough days, slowly and surely" (2012:52). This process is important to help widows, who were made vulnerable, to develop their self-esteem once again. To begin to understand themselves; to be able to remember the past experiences,

and be able to forgive oneself or those that wronged you, so that change can begin. The emphasis here is that it is a process. A widow is not expected to get back to normal overnight nor is she expected to grieve forever. Fleet strongly emphasizes that; “The process of feeling better or feeling joyful or feeling like anything other than heavy with sorrow is not an overnight process. You will not wake up tomorrow morning or return to work on that first day back feeling magically healed. I have always used the word “process” because that’s *exactly* what it is. I use the words “healing *journey*” because that’s *exactly* what it is. You will first make a choice to heal and your recovery will take place slowly, surely, and over a period of weeks and months. Over time, you will begin to notice welcome changes- you aren’t crying quite as much; you are enjoying activities more; in fact, you’ll find that you want to be involved in activities” (Ibid:65).

Ministers should know this process and be able to help accordingly. The fact that they come for the funeral and bury the deceased husband does not mean that they have at the same time touched the life of the mourning widow. A proper counselling process has to be organised that will help the widows see God coming to them at their greatest time of need and help to begin the process of healing.

Having developed her self-esteem back, wholeness will be restored. This means that, when widows are helped to rediscover themselves in the process of healing, they will be transformed to a new strong person who will not allow anyone to step in their way. The process of change will lead to acceptance that life has to go on. The following are the different stages that helped the widows that were interviewed to begin the process of healing;

6.11 Story Telling

The research used story telling as a method to allow widows to open up and narrate their stories of widowhood. The widows that were interviewed accepted the need to tell their experiences of widowhood. This very decision to accept and open up, helped them to share what was locked in their hearts, in their inner self for a long time. It was like they had never had an opportunity to talk about such experiences. Because of this opportunity, the burden that they were carrying was relieved from them. It was not easy, very emotional, but the process had begun. Some of the stories of their suffering were horrible. It was difficult to understand that widows had to go through so much pain, and that this was happening in communities where members of the church were present. Ackermann says that; “Stories such as these need to be heard in the community of faith. Churches can offer a supportive and empathetic environment for story telling in search for meaning” (2003:42).

Telling these stories was not easy; it took trust from the person they were narrating to. At the same time, there was the feeling of worthiness that someone could listen to their stories. Phiri et al agrees with this and says; “The telling of her story becomes a powerful medium through which her self-definition has been sought” (2002:11). This process in itself is liberating, the baggage that was bothering you is made lighter. Widows have so many stories to share, the experiences they went through and they hold on to faith. “As women relate their own experiences, the church in Africa will be forced to listen to a people who have until now been denied a voice” (Oduyoye, 1992:5). This opportunity to narrate their past helps them to begin the process of healing. This was evident when we saw some coming back with more information on the story that they had given previously. Healing started taking place at that workshop. Some of the widows had never shared their stories; they had kept them bottled up for years.

6.12 Listening to one another

For a long time you keep so much pain to yourself, you have no one to share the difficult questions you have. Those questions that keep on running in your mind without answers. Questions like, why did it happen to me? Why are the in-laws treating me like this? Why this ritual? Why our property? What will I do with the children who are so young? These and many other endless questions will be in the mind of the widow. Listening to one another's story was very powerful. Widows were able to analyse their own situation and see it better than the other widow's stories. The challenges encountered by the widows were enormous, some of which were life threatening. The process was so empowering that every widow wanted to speak before the other. It helped them to see their own situation differently, that it was better than the situation that other widows had to go through. The process of transformation had started in the lives of these widows.

This helped them to look at things differently and appreciate where they had come from so far. One widow felt relieved that what she thought was too a big burden to her was not compared to what others experienced. When they shared their stories, she realised she was not alone. Phiri et al adds to say; "We begin to see our past in a new light and this consequently makes us read the present differently. Story telling shapes and reshapes our identity" (2002:6). This sharing also made them to feel that they were not alone. Bringing them together to share experiences started the process of healing. The environment made them to appreciate one another. Those that were older in age were able to learn from those that were young in age. Those that were widowed for a longer period were able to give strength to those that were beginning the journey. The younger widows saw it from the older widow's perspective that it was possible to transform after going through the storms of pain, they could see light at the end of the tunnel. It was as, if she was able to go through that, I can also do it. Because of the interaction, they had during the workshop and outside on free time, they were able to learn more from each other and exchange

communication numbers. They taught each other choir songs. They were even able to change some of the songs to fit their situation and sing them with joy and happiness. Each day was different and women were more open and cheerful.

The process helped them to understand the different cultural practices that abuse widows and make them live a miserable life. This made them to openly disregard the negative elements of some of the rituals that are imposed on widows. They discussed how they could avoid such and get to know their enemies. They also strategized as to how one could help others.

6.13 Presence of the Church

The church is a powerful instrument that can heal people, because it represents Christ amongst her people. Whenever the church avails herself closer to the needs of the people, they see God working on the side. When the leadership of the church came in full force and in their regalia at the opening service, women felt that they were in the presence of God. Listening to the stories of the widows, they all lamented on the absence of the church in their journey of grieving. The experience of the absent church made some of the widows to think that they did not belong. Now that they were widows, they did not have the same status as before; in other words, the church had nothing to do with them. This kind of thinking changed with the presence of the church at the workshop. It made the women feel counted in the life and work of the church.

The presence of the church affirmed the women and confirmed that they were not alone in their struggles. This assurance was significant with the presence of the Synod vice Moderator and other ministers throughout the workshop. Widows were not just ordinary people, but emphasised that they were members of the body of

Christ, which is the church. This affirmation was also confirmed through the hosting of the workshop within a short notice of the request.

During the workshop, widows were able to interact with the leaders that were present. This interaction opened up the barriers that existed and gave the widows a chance to narrate their stories in the presence of the church. This helped the church to understand the difficult experiences widows go through in the absence of the church. Kanyoro comments that it is Important for the church to listen to the stories of women; “By women telling their day-to-day stories, the Church will be forced to listen to their day-to-day struggles” (2002:23). Sitting and listen to the women tell their stories, helped the women in their healing process that there was finally someone of authority listening to their cries. The openness between the leaders and the widows helped the flow of the discussions to get to a concrete decision. Some of the weaknesses of the church in some areas of the Synod were aired out which helped the leaders to understand.

Widows were encouraged and wished this had happened earlier in their journey of widowhood. Kapuma comments that; “It is the church’s responsibility to liberate women from unjust experiences they go through in the community. The church is a critically important agent in achieving a society in which women’s equality and dignity is recognised. If the dignity and importance of women in general is not recognised, the plight of widows cannot be addressed. The church has to identify and side with women, not only in order to improve the situation of widows, but because it is their Christian duty to be in solidarity with those who are in pain” (2012:69).

The clergy were able to accept their lack of counselling skills in supporting the widows. They felt that much had to be done to help widows in their journey of grieving which included some of the negative rituals that women have to go through. The commitment of the African Women is to engage others to help bring in transformation among women who have gone through oppression and exploitation.

In this case, the church was engaged in understanding the plight of widows so that they could begin to address the issues raised. The dialogue between the church leaders and the women showed commitment, which made the widows to feel more accepted in the church. The discussion also made those that came from the institution of training ministers to take it upon themselves to include such issues in the curriculum.

The Synod of Blantyre has a full time women's desk, which was challenged to take the issues of widowhood seriously. That is, to embrace all women in the church, and help them to support each other in times of need. To empower even those that were not widowed so that they were able to act with knowledge when death comes. The desk was also asked to create programmes that could assist widows in the Synod in many areas of their need. The presence of the Desk Programme Coordinator and some of the Coordinators who are in Presbyteries would help to promote such issues.

6.14 Letter to the Husband

In many cases, death comes suddenly and leaves the loved ones in shock. In the case of a widow, she may have a volume of words that she would have loved to tell her deceased husband before it happened. This opportunity is not there and the widow lives with so much she was not able to tell her husband. Most of these widows had never talked about their deceased husband to anyone. It is believed that you don't talk about the dead, which makes the widow to have so much stuff in her chest. Fleet encourages widows and says that; "Please do not be afraid to talk about your husband. You may be the one that needs to put others at ease, because people think that they will upset you by bringing up the subject of your husband...If you want to talk about him, go ahead and talk about him" (2012:54).

The facilitator asked the widows to write letters to their husbands. To express to them what they wanted to say if they were alive or if they had to come back. This sounded like a joke at the beginning, but widows were helped to release that which was in their hearts. Rowland explains that; “Memories may be painful, but they also keep the relationship alive and promote the sense of connectedness” (2016:21). Expressing these memories can be therapeutic. The women were helped to write down these memories, by writing what they wanted their husbands to know.

Widows wrote letters and in these letters the following were noticed;

- . **Age**; those that were young explained how their relationship was short lived and how they wished they could come back even for a short period for them to express their love. The trauma of beginning a new life without the husband was present during this time of writing
- . **Abuse**; Some of them explained how the in-laws mistreated them, how all the property was taken away from them; that they had to start all over again in a hard way.
- . **Current news**; Widows were able to share what was happening with them. The developments in their families and what happened to the children. Some happily told the husband the number of grandchildren they had.
- . **Affection**; All the widows expressed that they were fortunate to have married the king of a husband he was, and appreciated the love and care that was there, and that they missed them greatly.

This exercise of letter writing to the husband excited the widows so much that when they went into groups to share, they had so much. They believed that what they wrote the husbands would get the message. This was one way of releasing the pain that was in them for a long period and now it was released. This was the beginning of the journey to healing. Some of these letters are attached to appendix A.

6.15 Liturgy

The liturgy of the workshop was designed to help the widows draw to the presence of God. As indicated earlier, the candle, which went on throughout the workshop, helped the widows to know that they were surrounded by the cloud of saints. During the closing service, they said a prayer of commitment. (See Appendix B).

This commitment was an affirmation of faith and trust in God. That they were able to see the love of God. This helped them to put their trust in God in whatever was happening in their life. All journeys must begin to move forward.

6.16 Transformation

The process of the workshop helped the women to rediscover their old selves, which were lost because of the loss of a loved one. This helped them to analyse their own situation and that of their friends and they found that their situation was better. Just the feeling that their situation was better, made them to begin to move on positively. They were able to name their enemies that made them not to feel an accepted member in the community. They saw that they could change their own situation and move forward with their life and the responsibilities that they had.

Dube explains that; "Transformation is a term that incorporates the will to change something. Transformation is not reformation, which maintains the basic structure. To transform is an attempt to inaugurate *metanoia*, a complete changing of the current situation" (2001:9). This is what is needed to happen in the life of the widows, for change to begin. Reaching the climax those things had started changing and accepting the situation; the widows said that they did not want to be called by

the ugly name of “widow”, which carried a lot of negativity, but to be called “Women of Hope”. Just like the Samaritan woman who went back to the village to tell people that she had found a Messiah, the women of hope are ready to go and help other widows and that those to come should not experience what they went through. Women accepted to move on with life, to accept that they are widows in a positive way and move forward. Writing letters to their husbands with different messages in them clearly indicated that the women were not the same. Change had started which will lead to transformation of their lives. To once again live a happy and positive life.

Preliminary Conclusion

The chapter reflected on the problems that widows go through in order to come up with healing that could help widows. This was done by working and letting participants participate in all that was happening. It was their workshop, and the facilitation was there to guide them to find themselves so that they could begin to heal.

The researcher was able to hear from the widows themselves the kind of cultural rituals that they went through which were hazardous to life and degraded the dignity of women. The interaction between the widows and the church leadership helped so much because they were able to open up and speak about what the problems were and what they expected from the church. The leadership on the other hand, listened to the stories narrated. Those widows are human beings that needed to be protected to preserve their human dignity. Leaders accepted that there had been little attention paid to caring for widows in the church. That people needed to be trained and empowered to help ministers in caring for widows.

Through this process healing started in some of the participants. They may not be on the same level but the journey of healing had begun. It is a process and the women were helped with tools that could help them along their journey. Widows may have different memories of their loss, but healing would begin with the

willingness to let healing start. The trust in God would help in the process of healing knowing that the God we trust is a healer.

The next chapter will draw into conclusion the findings of this research, and give recommendations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will conclude the research conducted on Widowhood within the Malawi context: A Pastoral Care model. The chapter will present an overview of how the research was conducted, the findings, recommendations, further research areas and conclusion.

7.2 An Overview of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of the church in caring for widows. The assumption was that many widows suffered in silence without being cared for pastorally. This assumption was proven correct because of the many issues that widows raised in the research that are addressed in the findings of this research and the recommendations. Women suffer after the death of a husband. A woman's name is tied to her marriage and once the husband dies, she does not belong and can be treated anyhow.

7.2.1 Objectives

The objectives of the research were to give widows an opportunity to narrate their widowhood experiences and understand how the church was able to pastorally care for them. Through their experiences, the research would come up with a pastoral

care model that could be used by the church to care for widows. At the same time, it was important to make the church understand its role of pastoral counselling, to those that are going through difficult times like death.

Widows were able to openly express themselves and narrate the experiences they went through. This opportunity empowered them to be able to speak of their ugly experiences a thing they could not do before. Because of the fact that the research managed to bring the church leaders and women together, the church was able to understand the plight of widows from first-hand information. The church leaders as prophetic voices were able to dialogue with the widows to help them to begin with the healing process.

7.2.2 Participants

The assumption at the beginning of the research was to interview two groups of widows from urban and semi-rural areas with twelve participants in each group. However, the researcher was overwhelmed when one group ended up with seventeen participants. What happened was that some participants invited friends who were widows to join. The same happened with the case study interviews. The researcher prepared to interview one participant, but then the participant came with a friend who was also a widow and went through the same ritual of sexual cleansing. This was a blessing to the researcher because these two widows brought different challenges of their experiences, which enriched the research.

Lastly, two participants who were not listed in the methodology were interviewed. The fact that they work with women's groups in their Presbyteries and are widows helped the process. A large group of widows that was interviewed brought in different insights to the research, which were very helpful. Through the participants the research was able to establish the problems that widows go through in their journey of grieving. The selection of widows from different backgrounds was helpful

because more data information was collected which widened the understanding of the pain and challenges they go through.

7.2.3 Method

The research used a qualitative method in order to collect data. Narrative interviews were used so that widows could speak out their experiences. The method helped widows to open up and to be able to empty the heavy lump of a burden they were holding for a long time. Phiri et al explains that telling such stories is not easy and many of these stories are painful but at the end healing, may begin (2002). Through this method, widows were able to open up even in the presence of others, this process was therapeutic. Through sharing and co-participating with other widows, they were able to realise that which was bothering them for a long time; and begin to see ways of moving on.

7.2.4 Summary

Chapter one was the introduction of the research, it set the aims and objectives of the research. Chapter two laid the foundation to help understand widowhood from different sources. The literature that was reviewed helped to give a clear picture of widowhood challenges and the role that the church could play. The pain and challenges faced by widows were highlighted. Different resources hence articulated violation of widow's rights, the need for pastoral care. Majority of the sources were able to spell out and condemn some of the negative treatment and rituals. The source that justified the negative treatment done to widows was challenged in that it is against women's rights and lacked the understanding of the pain widows go through which rituals are imposed on them.

Chapter three explained the methodology that was used in this research. The African women Theologians theory of storytelling was used to help widows narrate and unpack their stories of pain. The qualitative method helped the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by widows. The method helped widows to open up and narrate their stories, which were painful.

The assumption was that the widows would tell their stories and provide the required data for the project. This assumption was proved wrong, because in the narration of these stories, emotions were very high. Widows remembered what they went through which was very painful. This situation moved the researcher to do something for these widows. To change from researching after collecting all data to the role of care giving; a workshop was organized to bring all widows that were interviewed together to help them begin the journey of healing. The workshop was also able to test the kind of pastoral care widows would want the church to provide them with.

Chapter four highlighted the situation of widowhood in Malawi. It brought to light the different cultural practices that widows had to go through. Some widows had to go through a number of rituals in order for them to be accepted as members of the family and community. The voice of the widow was silenced; they were not allowed to make any decisions towards the arrangements of their deceased husband's funeral and property thereafter. There were people who enforce the cultural practice and there were those that benefitted. The perpetrators were mainly male relatives who took advantage of the vulnerability of the widow. Most of the widows were ignorant of the law, which could have helped them in a time like this. The church, which is expected to be caring, is seen to be at a far distance, making it difficult for the widows to get help. For this reason, the church was challenged to wake up from her sleep, to pastorally care for widows and bring new hope in their lives.

Chapter five gave us the primary sources. The voice of the widows was heard through the interviews that were held. The stories collected are unique because they were coming from the widows themselves. Widows were able to explain that after burial of their deceased husband, things changed, life was not the same. Negative things were imposed on them, and many times, they were made to suffer in silence because they had no one to share with and or were afraid of the in-laws.

Through the different stories that were narrated, the challenges and pain were easily noticed and the gaps for pastoral care could easily be listed for the church to care for them.

Chapter six, explained how the workshop was conducted for healing to begin. Through the narration of stories by the widows, memories were brought back and became emotional. It was not easy to speak out, but they had trust that it was for a good cause. The author was overwhelmed with the different stories that were shared and was moved to change her position of collecting data, to that of care giving.

A workshop retreat was organized for all the widows that were interviewed to help them to begin to heal and put behind their experiences so that they could move on with life. The workshop helped them to realise that they were valued and that the church was wrong not to care for them. The process in the workshop helped the widows to begin to look at themselves differently and move on. Experiences of other widows helped them to stop being negative about themselves. Healing started.

7.3 Research Findings

The research was able to confirm the assumption that widows go through difficult and dangerous situations. When a husband died, a woman was expected to go through a number of rituals without questioning them. Some of the rituals that she had to go through are dangerous and hazardous to life. She was expected to do things that would take away her dignity and self-esteem.

A woman was recognised when the husband was alive; when he died all the respect and dignity, she had in that family is taken away. She is called names, *umfwile* or *Namfedwa* (meaning someone who has lost a husband) you are the widow. This negative name haunts her wherever she goes. She is oppressed and exploited by the very people who are supposed to protect her. The death cuts off the relationship that existed. Most of the treatment she receives is under the pretext of culture. Once she becomes a widow, her whole status changes. From the family to the community she is not respected anymore. Sometimes she is seen as the source of the death of the husband. This loss of respect is also in the church. She had respect when the husband lived after that, she was nothing. Such treatment would make other widows to stop going to church.

7.3.1 Cultural Practices

Culture plays a big role in the treatment given to a widow. The culture of a particular clan is applied to the widow in order to formalise death rituals. Culture is not static, it changes with time. Why is it that the cultural practices are seen to be important when they have to be imposed on the widow? Because it is done at the pretext of culture, the widow is made vulnerable so much, so that she cannot argue. Below are some of the practices that make a widow a victim.

7.3.1.1 Patriarchy

In both the patrilineal and matrilineal culture, the man is the head who controls the welfare of the family. “Like many African societies, Malawian society for the most part believes that the man is the head of the family and as such women are expected to be submissive and to tolerate whatever is done to them. Men are regarded as strong and women weak” (Kapuma, 2015:255). Traditional practices are done in favour of the man. During the time of mourning, they control everything, that is, funds that have been contributed for the funeral, the kind of funeral, how the widow should be inherited, and how the property should be shared.

It was observed that many widows had suffered because of the influence of the patriarchal tradition. Male members of the deceased family can do anything to show their power. There is the story of a widow who had to give in for sex in order for her to have money from the business that she established with her late husband. As a woman, she had to listen to all the dictates of her in-laws. Sometimes men will use women to have their demands realised.

7.3.1.2 Rituals

The research found that there were a number of rituals that widows had to go through depending on where they came from. Some of the rituals would just be a ceremonial function for the family to move on. This could be sweeping the whole compound and burning all the rubbish that was used during the funeral. More to this, the research found that women in some parts of the country went through hazardous rituals in order to finalize the mourning rituals. The following were some of the practices that stripped the women of their dignity;

. Shaving all the hair of the widow including pubic hair in the presence of in-laws at a cross road whilst she was completely naked. This was done to prepare her for inheritance

. The family of the deceased asked a brother or close relative to sexually cleanse her soon after burial. This was done in the name of inheritance, but sexual union was attached to the inheritance. The people asked to do this were married men with families.

. There was the sexual cleansing, which was expected to be done after 40 days of the mourning period. If there was no brother to do this, a man was hired to cleanse the widow from death calamities. The hired man was a married person, and decided how many times he wanted to go and do the cleansing. Taking advantage of the poor widow, other cleansers could become brutal and come up to five times. This could have resulted in unwanted pregnancy.

. The ritual is a community ceremony, and the chief has to abstain from sexual relationship with his wife until the cleanser has finished his duty. This means that there is no privacy in what is happening with the widow and the whole community is aware. Through this act the widow is discriminated against and stigmatised which makes her life a lonely life.

. If the widow was sent back to her people, her people would also look for a cleanser to cleanse her; she was seen as bringing death to the family.

. If there is pregnancy, when the child is born, the widow is supposed to wean the child; that was to have sexual intercourse to remove death threats to happen to the child.

. Some widows had contracted HIV through the sexual cleansing making them double victims and more vulnerable.

Most of these women were forced into it without their consent. The forces to go through this ritual might not be only from her late husband's family, her own family would also force her to do it. Otherwise, she was an outcast and could be thrown out of the village.

7.3.2 In-laws

Throughout in the research there was a mention of in-laws involvement in the difficult life of widows. In-laws created many unnecessary problems for the widows so that they lived a miserable life. Immediately after the death announcement, the widow was not regarded as someone who could make decisions with the in-laws to give the deceased husband a befitting send off. Many widows explained that their husbands were buried at places against their choice. The in-laws would not respect the decision made by the deceased regarding his place of burial. Such a situation would make the widow feel guilty as if she had not followed the husband's wishes. During the funeral, some widows were made to do certain things to show that they're mourning, that their 'lord' has gone. This would mean crying whilst kneeling in some instances and in others crying out loudly so that they were noticed as widows.

Negative rituals may be imposed on the widow. If she refused, she would be accused of causing the death of the husband. In some families, they would want to inherit her against her will, and if she refused, she was sent home empty without her children. She did not just lose a husband; she also lost everything she had because of the behaviour of the in-laws.

In the event that the widow had to remarry, she was not given the choice of a husband. It had to be from her late husband's relations. If she decided to have her choice, the in-laws and all property taken away disowned her. Widows would chose to stay unmarried in order to protect the property and children in some cases.

7.3.3 Dispossession

Many widows were dispossessed of their property and left with nothing. The in-laws would pretend to help when actually they ended up owning the property, which was

sold very cheap, and the money used by the in-laws without sharing some with the widow and children. This kind of behaviour has left many widows poor and living in poverty. They have nothing to support them and to assist them with the upkeep of the children. Some widows were sent back home where there was no house, to begin to share with parents or relatives which was not easy. The property taken by the in-laws would include; money, house, business, appliances and sometimes land. This left the poor widow with nothing to start from.

7.3.4 Pain/Stigma/Loneliness

Many widows live in pain after losing their husband through death. The pain that they have lost a companion stays with them for a long time. The pain may not only be because of the loss, it is accompanied by the negative treatment they get during and after burial. The pain accumulates if the widow is dispossessed of everything. The pain on how she should pick up the pieces and begin a new life, how she would help her children have the basics of life including quality education. Whilst struggling with many issues, she is looked at negatively. She is the widow, she has no husband. Friends would run away from her saying that they did not know how to communicate with her. The rituals that she may be asked to perform may discriminate her against her own rights. She was Isolated and lived a lonely life. If she tried to associate herself with other people, the same would gossip behind her back that she was not mourning her husband enough. Many widows were in pain because of how they were treated and handled during the grieving period. Because of this, healing could take long or in other cases, it would not even start. Widows need someone they trust to talk to and to be able to share her fears. A caring church would be able to achieve this and give the widow the support that was required.

7.3.5 Women

Women have been seen to be in the forefront of the miserable life that widows go through. Widows were able to express their disappointment with fellow women. In the family, they were the ones that made sure that all rituals were followed and done accordingly. They were the ones that would remind the big mama's the custodian of that particular tradition that other things had to be done. They were the ones that would gossip that she was the one that killed the husband if the widow refused to do the required rituals.

They are the ones that would bring false information to the in-laws about her behaviour. Women go far to the point of accusing the widow that she was seeing their husbands. Instead of being in solidarity with the widow who needed their support; they distance themselves from her so that she was isolated and left alone. Women forgot that what the widow was going through at that time might happen to her and suffer even more.

Both women in the community and women in the church behaved the same. Those in the church had forgotten their duties and objectives they have in the women's guild. Women may have been doing all this out of ignorance, if the church had taken its full responsibility of educating both men and women in the church; women would be empowered and would be able to support one another. Women have contributed to the violence that widows go through and told them that culture defined what had to be done.

7.3.6 Gender Based Violence

The research found that there were many incidences of violence that widows went through in the name of culture and no one talked about it. The kind of violence they

went through was against human rights. To be asked to go through dangerous sexual rituals was an element of abuse. Widows on the other hand had found themselves victims of such violence with no one to stand up for them. For example, a widow was asked to crawl from the house to the grave on the funeral day to show the people that she was heartbroken because of the husband's death. If it was the other way that the wife had died, would the family ask the husband (widower) to crawl to the grave? Throughout the grieving period, the widow was expected to live a certain way of life which was not conducive to her health. When the husband died she was not worthy of being called a person. The in-laws could do anything to her. Too much was expected of her to do and little or nothing was given to her in return. The violent acts included issues of inheritance, property grabbing and decision-making. This left the widow with nothing except children that she had to look after.

7.3.7 Ignorance of the Law/Human Rights

Widows found themselves in difficult situations because they did not know what the law of the land said about them. When the laws are violated, human rights are also violated. There are several international legal laws that Malawi is part of. Malawi ratified The Women's Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. Malawi has also signed other laws that protect women. "At the regional level, Malawi is a party to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights which emphasise that men and women have human rights that must be protected by the state" (White et al, 2002:33). Malawi has also signed the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. Not all these laws are known to most of the women in Malawi and even if they knew, it would take a strong person to fight for her rights. In the constitution of the Republic of Malawi, law protects women. Women are recognised by the constitution as having equal rights with men. This is the area the Church should have seriously taken to educate and empower members of the Christian community to be aware of. To deliberately empower women, so that when such times come, they are knowledgeable. This ignorance affects children at the end of the day.

7.3.8 Children

Children are forgotten when death occurs that they have emotions that have to be dealt with. Family member's side-line children to make decisions on what has to be done for their father. Different stages of childhood have to be treated differently so that they are able to cope with the loss. Children are able to see all the negative treatments done to their mother, which may affect them emotionally. They are left to heal on their own without pastorally caring for them.

The mother has a double responsibility to deal with, that is, her own emotions and that of children. Many times the emotions of the children are neglected. Children have suffered depression at an early age because of the loss of the father, which changed their whole future. Now that they are orphans, they also carry with them the negative name, which makes them to struggle in life. If all property is taken away from the family and expected to relocate to the village with nothing, what will become of those children? "Widowhood affects the children of widows in different ways and theology should acknowledge the importance of assisting fatherless children as well" (Baloyi, 2016:212). It is a big challenge to the church that these have to be cared for. Scriptures are open to say that the church has the responsibility to care for orphans and widows. Lack of such support has resulted in children becoming rebellious, resentful, and angry and not progressing in school. Sometimes the treatment done to their mother may make them think that it is the norm, thus how women are supposed to be treated and will carry this with them when they grow.

7.3.9 Absence of the Church.

The church is supposed to give the required support to the widows to help them though the emotional challenges they face. The research found out that the church

was absent in the life of a widow. Almost all the widows spoke that the church was not there for them. The church members may be within reach, but their presence was not felt in the life of a grieving widow. Masango emphasised the importance of a pastoral church and says; “Broken relationships lead to alienation, which has to be healed in the process of restoring wholeness. It is important to note that in times of deep crisis and suffering, individual’s greatest need is for the presence of God’s people who care about and understand that individual” (2005:920).

. Many times the church will come to conduct the funeral service. They will do everything that is required of them up to the grave. Then after burial, the church leadership will announce that the church service ends there. Meaning that whatever follows thereafter is not part of the church. This gives the family an opportunity to reinforce negative rituals or dispossess the widow. In agreement to this Baloyi says; “Theology and the church must seek ways of protecting the rights and dignity of women in society. The truth is that many churches end their support when the deceased is buried, which leaves room for his family to humiliate his widow” (2016:210).

. After burial, there could be a follow up of elders and members of that area visiting the widow. This may be done as a tradition of visiting the bereaved family but may lack the understanding of what is happening to the widow and the skill to pastorally care. Very few would have the minister coming to follow up on what was happening and how she was coping. This is the time she could be asked if she had any fears.

. The role of some elders may be questioned at this critical time. They may visit the widow with an intention to take advantage of her. A widow narrated that; her own brother in-law was session clerk at the time of the death of her husband. He came to her house asking her if he could inherit her to replace his brother and support her and the children. The session clerk who is trusted by the church and has his own family, wanting to do this? In some cases, ministers themselves have also taken advantage of the widow, pretending to come for counselling but taking advantage of her vulnerability.

.The research found that the Women's guild, which is the strongest arm of the church, is hypocritical. They attend the funeral services in numbers wearing their uniforms; however, they take a long period to support the widow through visits and prayers. If the widow is not a member of the guild, they may not even go to visit her. This raises a big challenge to the objectives they follow, which summons them to attract other women to join the guild. How can the widow be attracted to join the guild, if they did not support her at a critical time that she needed them for care?

. Some widows expressed that in some cases, the minister's wife was the problem. She may not be comfortable to see the minister, her husband, visiting the widow many times. If possible, she should accompany him. In a practical sense, this may not be possible. As a result, the widow becomes the victim.

. The church organises different programmes for different groups of people in the church like youth, women, Sunday school, married couples, elders and so on. No church has ever organised a programme for widows. At this time, they don't belong or they may fit if they are a member of the women's group.

. Widows expressed that in as much as the church is absent, the church does not stop coming to them for membership contribution and other fundraising events. It makes widows feel that their contributions are seen more important than their own life and spirituality.

. Where the widow has gone for the sexual cleansing ritual, and becomes pregnant, the church goes ahead to discipline that widow from membership, because she is pregnant outside wedlock. The church does not take time to seriously look at the cultural practice and see how women could be helped. Where the church has tried to put up policies that could be followed, transfers of ministers have affected the

implementation of such policies. It was also found that others were using what they call 'modification' of widowhood cleansing, which allows the family to choose a couple to do the cleansing for them.

. Cultural practices are stronger and more powerful than the teaching of the Christian church.

7.3.10 International Widows day

The research found that there is an established international day for widows on June 23, which was established by the United Nations. It says; "International Widows Day is a global awareness day that takes place annually on 23rd June. The United Nations launched the day in 2010 to raise awareness of the violation of human rights that widows suffer in many countries following the death of their spouses. In many countries with traditional societies, women find themselves left in poverty when their husband dies... denied of inheritance and land rights, evicted from their homes, ostracised and abused. Children also find themselves affected, withdrawn from school and more vulnerable to abuse especially in the case of girls" (www.un.org).

The above findings show that the church has been absent to pastorally care for widows who are part of the church and the body of Christ. Having observed this the research recommends the following to the CCAP Blantyre Synod. These recommendations came from the participants to the widows retreat workshop, which included widows and church leaders who were both men and women.

7.4 Recommendations

Following a Successful workshop, Retreat for Widows held at Grace Bandawe, under the Theme “The Church Caring for Widows”, convened because of a research, which was done, participants made the following resolutions as the message to the church so that the church should do something about the care of the widows:

- . The church has the responsibility to follow up on its bereaved members including widows in the healing process. The journey should not end at the grave, because most negative things happen to the widows after the church has handed over responsibility to family/tradition.

- . The church should be at the forefront to discourage negative cultural practices that are harmful to the widows. The church should engage traditional leaders to understand that these harmful practices are dangerous to women and must be stopped. That the church should work with the Government to put up measures that can help to dethrone chiefs who happen to be perpetrators of such practices or even to arrest them.

- . A policy to this effect should be put into effect so that each minister serving in the areas that practice harmful cultural rituals is able to use it.

- . The church should identify older widows at each congregation to accompany the new widows for some time after the demise of their husbands in order to strengthen them as well as helping them in the healing process. These older widows should be trained to understand their role of journeying with the widow.

- . The Women’s Guild should be encouraged to visit non-member widows also; they should not only concentrate on their fellow members. They should also be encouraged to have specialised people who can come and speak to them about the laws of Malawi so that they understand them.

- .The church should teach and encourage both male and female members about death and dying and the importance of writing a will to avoid property grabbing

whenever they happen to die. They should also be helped to understand the law of the land

.The church should sensitise and empower women, so that they are prepared in the event of such. The congregations should have teachings on death and dying.

.The church should also consider Widows seminars or retreats in order to meet the needs of widows as members of the congregation apart from arranging marriage seminars all the time.

. Ministers' widows should be considered as some who can assist in many ways as they also have gifts of the Holy Spirit and experience, which can be beneficial to the Church of God.

. Churches should have sermons that are aimed at addressing issues affecting widows so that the congregation members are able to understand the issues affecting widowhood.

. Just like women, widows who after widowhood cleansing are disciplined by the church, members of the church who dispossess widow's property should be disciplined as it is against the teaching of the church.

The women's Desk of the Synod is the right office to begin to look at issues affecting widows and should do the following;

. The desk Director should facilitate having a steering committee of Widows to work together with the Synod's Women's Desk.

.To come up with the number of Widows and Men who are passionate about the cause who will represent respective Presbyteries and work with the steering committee.

. The church to continue addressing the issue of widowhood at different forums as a way of educating and empowering women.

. Zomba Theological College is at the forefront being the initiator of the research and the following is recommended to them;

- . Zomba Theological College to develop a curriculum that can address issues that affect both widows and widowers and on death and dying so that the next generation of Ministers should be equipped with skills that can help them to give holistic pastoral care.
- . Ministerial students should be helped to understand the law of the land and how it operates. This should include human rights issues. This will empower future ministers to be able to educate their congregants.
- . Zomba Theological College to have a thorough research conducted on widowhood so that similar data like that of widows is kept.
- . The church to take advantage of the International Widows Day 23rd June to raise awareness on issues affecting widows and to encourage the Women's desk of the Synod to carry out the programmes. "On this International Widows' Day, let us remember that widows are heroes, working hard to keep families, communities and society together following the loss of their spouses. As societies we owe it to the widows of the world to give them the respect, visibility and unique support they need" (Mlambo-Ngcuka, Friday June 22, 2018).

7.5 Proposed Pastoral care model

The research found that widow's issues have to be taken seriously and treated as priority that women can be counselled pastorally by the church in order to bring change and healing to their lives. The research found that there are two possible pastoral care models that the church can use to care for widows pastorally.

7.5.1 The workshop that was held in Blantyre proved that it was a good platform to listen to the pain and challenges faced by widows and be able to counsel them. Bringing widows together helped them to share experiences. In sharing these experiences and understanding, what was happening in the workshop was clear and that brought about the process of healing that was needed. They were affirmed with

the presence of the church leaders. The Synod can use this model to help widows in the church to come together and share experiences and at the same time gain counselling. These workshops could be done in Presbyteries in order to allow many widows in the given area to attend. They could also use the existing Women's guild groups or a programme of its own.

7.5.2 The other model, which would work in all congregations, is to empower older widows and train them how they would assist fellow widows after losing a husband. The older widows would work hand in hand with minister in that congregation. They would go and support a new widow in her grieving home. The experiences of these older widows would help the new widows; she will be able to have someone with experience close by. She will have someone to talk to and ask questions. If there are challenges such as rituals and or dispossession arrangements, the older widows should report to the minister for immediate action to protect the widow. This model will empower the older widows that they can be used by the church to bring healing to others.

These two pastoral care models can both be used by the Synod that at congregational level widows are attended to immediately. Then occasionally a workshop is organised to bring them together to share experiences and continue with the journey of healing.

7.6 Recommendations for further Research

. The research only dealt with widowhood. Therefore recommends that a thorough research be done on widowers. To examine the experiences and challenges they go through in order for the church to pastorally care for them.

. The research dealt more on the widow even though the loss of a husband also affects the children who have lost a father. There are organizations dealing with orphans, but not all are reached. The voices of the children need to be heard to see how they can pastorally be cared for.

. Inheritance is a big issue in most of the families. A research is needed in this area to see why men refuse to make a will and how the church can pastorally help to educate families on this.

. Patriarchy has influence in the treatment of widows. A through research will be needed to understand the dynamics of patriarchy and how men benefit from the system at the expense of women.

Conclusion

The church has the responsibility to pastorally care for widows to restore their lost dignity. Let the widows find refuge in the church and live a life of hope. Kapuma further comments that; “The church should be providing the counselling and emotional support that widows need, both immediately after the death of a husband but also in the long term. This raises many challenges for the African church. The church should have properly organised counselling available, in which the widow is helped to appraise herself realistically in her new situation. She needs help in acquiring strategies for dealing with grief” (2012:70).

The church is large and growing; the number of ministers may not be enough to adequately care for each widow. Therefore, the leadership of the church should engage laywomen and men with skills of counselling to help widows in the absence of the minister.

For an effective pastoral care for widows, the church leaders should empower and equip widows in the congregations with skills to take the responsibility of caring for new widows. These widows should always work hand in hand with the minister.



Appendix A: Letters



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Dearest Honey,

I still love ^{you} the same way we first met as husband and wife. I miss you so much I miss you greatly. But God is always on my side. Like I told you that should go to the board first, I will not marry again, I have kept that vow and promise. Glory be to God.

Your 5 beautiful children whom you left at a very tender age, the youngest being 3 years, have all since grown up into a woman & men. They too miss you greatly. You now have 8 grand children. The first grandson is now 17 yrs old and the youngest is 3 years. They are 4 girls and 4 boys. They always keep on asking where is our grand dad.

In your last hour I remember you asking me to pray, and I should take care of the children as this was your greatest worry that the burden was heavy on me. But our God is so faithful that he has taken us through thick & thin. All your children have now well educated, working well now taking care of me. Stella is in Boston, USA taking her PhD in Economics just you. Love you always my sweet Darling

Private Bag/Privaatsak/Mokotla wa Poso X20, Hatfield 0028, South Africa/Suid-Afrika/Afrika Borwa



Translated from Chichewa

My dearest husband

I miss your love everyday my husband. Every day I find myself crying when I think of you. When you were alive, we were able to do things together. This time I am struggling to look after the children and grandchildren.

The pregnancy you left me with gave me a baby girl named miwatida but she died in 2014. I am not at peace with the children because I am failing to provide for them. You left me with a huge burden I cannot forget this in my life.

After your death, the family forced me to take a cleanser. He left me with another child. I have problems with this child who is now in Std 8. We are not eating the same way we used to when you were still living.

May your soul rest in peace when God calls me we shall meet



21/03/2018



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Wokondeka bambo a Bamusi,

Odikusowa Chikonai chano amunanga, Tsiku
nai tsiku ndimangokhalira kulira, mmene mona
moyo chilichonse hmagwilira limodzi, Pakali
pano naidkuzunzika nawo ana nai adzukulo.

Ana amene wasiya mwana wano muatida
amene anamwaliranso 2014 ali pamavuta
naidkuzunzika nawo pakali pano, Kumwalira
kwa Inu mwanasisiyira chiphinda chachiki
chimene sindidzaiwala mpaka imfa yanga.

Pamene Anthu ana ndipezera fisi mpaka
kundiowera nyumba mpaka kundisiyira
mwana amene naidkuzunzika naye pano
ali std 8. Odikodya mavuta kusiyana nai
mmene ndimadyera tili limodzi.

Mzimu wano Outse ndi mtendere.
Ambuye akanaitana nanenso tidzomane

Wadatha Ine mkazi wano,



Dear Bill

I still love you and I miss you so much. I have never been to 21 grill since you departed. I wanted to say I am sorry for all wrongs I did to you knowing and unknowingly. I was worried and cried for your children, because I could not educate them from my pocket. You must be glad and thank God they are all educated by the Grace of God. I had to (ku Chona). for that

Now hear this your brothers were not very friendly and I forgave them long time ago. I pray they will receive Christ before they join you. I also pray that I remain in Christ till we meet again. Enala still says "my dad is alive." kkkkk She also says "no man can come here." Enala is getting married this year. Your brother Chitupula is very bitter with himself, I think you can guess.

I love and miss you. Some times I get very lonely,

Missing you, Love Lesley



Dear my husband

I am your wife writing this letter to you. You were a loving husband to me and I wanted to tell you that you are leaving a gap between me and your brothers and sisters. You were bringing us together as one family. What I wanted to say before you go to heaven is that tell your brothers and sisters that we should unite no matter what comes. Today they don't come to visit me and my children forgetting that we were caring your mother as she is very old. This behaviour of your brothers is frightening me continue care for your old mother who is also a widow as I am now. I still remember how she cared me as her own daughter not in-law.

It was my hope that if you could still be alive you could see how your sons and a daughter ~~are~~ are doing now. You taught them good behaviour and have taken your responsibility to care for me.

Your beloved wife. ✨



Beloved

I don't know where to start from. It has been a long time since we last spoke and saw each other. Life has not been the same without you around. There has been a lot of up and downs but I have seen God's hand through this journey.

I have cried, worried, wished for you to come back and now I have accepted that you are gone. You left unexpectedly and untiroxy, I wished I knew that Saturday that we will never see each other again but God had and has different plans from ours. I have struggled with coming to terms with God's plan but now I see and believe that his plans are good and are not to harm us.

I have grown in the Lord. I believe God more now after having gone through this and seeing how He has held my hand. I wouldn't have made it this far without God and I want you to know that though you are no longer here with me, you will always be a part of my life and I cherish the times and memories I have of you. My life story is that of Grace, I was favoured to have you and I know for sure that God's favour will see me through.

I miss you everyday and am certain we will meet again.
Love always.

Appendix B: Liturgy for Malawi

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

PRAYERS FOR ABUSED PEOPLE

PROF M J MASANGO

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIAⁱ

LEADER: Hidden and mysterious God, we seek you in darkness and unknowing, and you come to us with tender love. Today we pray for:

- Women who suffer because what should be uncovered is covered up
- Women who have been humiliated, harassed and stigmatised and dare not tell
- Women who have been beaten, tortured, threatened, and cannot tell their stories.

CORUS:

MEN: Forgive us, and your church, our complicity in silence and concealment. Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. And we give thanks for the witness of women, most of them unnamed and unsung, who have refused to be shamed or silenced, who have stood up and stood out for justice and truth.

Blessed are you, gracious God who has created women in your image.

CORUS:

WOMAN CLERGY: Beloved God, in desire and intimacy you come to us and know us as a lover.

Today we pray for:

- Women whose bodies have been violated by rape and degradation
- Women whose bodies are bought and sold as commodities
- Women whose cultures reflect them as inferior, as stereotypes, as less valuable than men

ALL: Forgive us, and your church, our failure to proclaim the true personhood of all people,

Regardless of race, gender or sexuality.

LEADER: Lord in your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

CHORUS:

MALE CLERGY: And we give thanks, for the persistence of those who struggle for equal rights for women, for an end to sexual violence, trafficking and discrimination, and for the power of human dignity. Blessed are you, gracious God, who has created women in your image.

YOUNG LADY: God of power and presence, midwife of our lives, you encourage and calm us into creativity.

MODERATOR OF SYNOD

Today we pray for the following people:

- Women who must give birth in dangerous or squalid conditions
- Women who are in anguish because they do not have the resources to care for their children adequately
- Women whose livelihoods are threatened by climate change.

CORUS:

ALL: Forgive us, and your church, our failure to overcome poverty, and to resist the assault on the poor

LEADER: Lord in your mercy,

ALL: hear our prayer.

YOUNG MAN: And we give thanks, for women across the world, whose leadership, resilience and resourcefulness, in raising families, resisting despair, embracing new livelihoods, is transforming their communities to challenge poverty.

ALL: Blessed are you, gracious God, who has created women in your image.

CORUS:

Widow: Wounded God, you took defenceless flesh and died on a cross. Today we pray for:

- Women who are casualties of war and the arms trade
- Women who mourn the violent deaths of loved ones
- Women whose potential dies a little more every day.

LEADER: Forgive us, and your church, our failure to confront the forces of death.

PROF: LORD HAVE MERCY

ALL: HEAR OUR PRAYERS

CHAPLAIN; and we give thanks, for women who have confronted warring powers, challenged violence, and whose lives, directed by necessity, are moved by compassion. We also prayer for widow and widowers, who are journeying in

loneliness, isolated by us in the community. Blessed are you, gracious God, who has created women in your image, and in whose name we pray.

Amen.

COMMITMENT

LEADER: WHERE IS JUSTICE GOD?

WOMEN: Oh, my heart's heart, in love and anger I will turn to you, for my soul cries out,

ALL: WHERE IS JUSTICE,

MAN: when will the balance be redressed, for the fearful dreams of children who sleep with knives,

for the beaten women and the shamed and helpless men?'

ALL: WHERE IS JUSTICE

YOUTH: For the agony of hunger is not to be set, against the insatiable appetites of jaded palates.

In the villages and camps, the children lie bleeding, and great wounds gape in their throats and sides. In the city, there is no safety for them; as the leaves blow through the night streets, they are swept away; they disappear without trace as if they had never been.

ALL: WHERE IS JUSTICE?

An affirmation of faith

We believe in the goodness and value of women, in our strength and health,

In our capacity to cry,

In our capacity to sustain each other instead of being rivals.

In our capacity to respond to the demands of children and carry the weight of daily life,

In our openness and desire to continue working,

In our spiritual and earthly being, full of life – birth, death and resurrection.

We affirm the history of women as the history of humanity.

We are gatherers of fruits, peasants, farmers, sewers, workers,

mothers, scientists, doctors, homemakers and economists.

We give our life; we are hidden workers, without wages at home and breadwinners in society.

We recognise this diversity and versatility.

We rejoice in our intuition and our thinking.

We confess our faults and fragility, because we have accepted violence and injustice

In relationships between men and women.

We expect a future of faith and hope, working for the day to come in which we and all our sisters will no longer have to adapt to a stereotype because we will be free to express ourselves as we are and we will be free to share in all the benefits of human life and work.

We hope for a time of peace, when violence will disappear and men and women can love and be loved, and the work and riches of our world can be justly shared.

WE THANK YOU GOD FOR CREATING US MALE AND FEMALE IN THE WORLD

AMEN

Appendix C: Consent Letter

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Studente nommer/Student number: **16326572**

Van/Surname: **KAPUMA**

Nooiensvan/Maiden name: **SULUMBA**

Titel / Title: **REV**

Voorname / First names: **GERTRUDE AOPESYAGA**

Geboortedatum / Date of birth: **28TH APRIL 1957**

ID nommer / ID number: **MA107392**

Burgerskap / Citizenship: **MALAWIAN**

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to understand why widows go through negative experiences with no one to lean to for support. To hear from the widows themselves the pain and challenges they went through as they narrate their stories and if there was any pastoral care offered. To further find out what mechanisms or systems of pastoral care are there in the Church to help and assist widows in their experience of pain as well as healing. To come up with a pastoral care model that can address the issues widows face.

Procedures to be followed

The researcher is planning to have a group of widows drawn from the congregation in the Blantyre City Presbytery of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) Synod of Blantyre to source information. A Qualitative method will be used to gather this information. This will be through storytelling to allow participants tell their stories without interference.

Risks and discomforts

The Research will not involve the women to be at any risk in any way. The participants will be expected to share their experiences in the group in order to supply information to the researcher. The information will be treated with utmost confidentiality and therefore there will be no risk involved.

Benefits

This is a voluntary exercise; there will be no gain, either in cash or in kind. The only benefit will be that the participants will be able to share experiences knowledge and empower one another in the process.

Rights of Participants

The research will make sure that the rights of participants are respected throughout the process. It will be voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time if they feel so without any negative consequences. The researcher will explain the process at the beginning of every meeting so that participants are reminded of their rights.

Confidentiality

The researcher will make sure that the whole exercise and process is done confidentially. The identities of participants will be protected. The researcher and the University of Pretoria will access the information collected during this research.

Declaration

In order to ensure that all participants of the interviews have agreed to participate, the researcher will prepare a form of declaration in this way

Having received detailed explanation by the research on the aims and objectives of this research,

I..... willing to participate in this group of widows.

Signature:

Date:

Researcher: Rev Gertrude Aopesyaga Kapuma

Signature:

Date:

Appendix D: Research Questions

PhD in Practical Theology

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

These questions are formulated as a guide to the group discussion. There will be other questions coming in depending to individual narration of their story.

The process will follow in this way; (see below)

- Who you are and your age
 - When did you get married?
 - For how long did the marriage last?
 - How many children were born?
 - How long ago did your husband die?
1. What was the cause of the death?
 2. Could you share the situation at the time of his death? Who was supportive at that time?
 3. Are you able to share about the memories of that day? How was the funeral arranged?
 4. Did you undergo certain rituals after his death?
 5. What role did your in-laws play in the whole process of mourning?
 6. How were you helped to go through your grief by:
 - a. Friends
 - b. Family
 - c. Church Leadership and members, share your experience with them
 7. Have you been able to bring closure?
 8. What could you have loved to see happening to help you go through your grief?
 9. In what way were you helped in order to deal with your grief?
 10. Where are you now in your life?

Interview with the CCAP Synod Leadership

- Q1. Do you know of rituals that widows undergo?
- Q 2. As a leader, can you share how the Church support widows through grief?
- Q 3. What is the current Church reaction if any to the rituals and general treat of the widows?
- Q 4. Do you have any pastoral guidelines in order to help ministers counsel widows?
- Q 5. Do congregations in the synod organize workshops for widows just like they do for married couples?
- Q 6. Do clergy counsel widows? If so, what challenges do pastors face in Counselling widows?
- Q 7. What is the stand of the Synod with regard to widowhood cleansing and Property grabbing?
- Q 8. What can the CCAP Blantyre Synod do in order to make a difference in the life of a widow?
- Q 9. How can the Church be seen as caring and nurturing in order to bring healing, acceptance and support?

Interview with the Women's Department Leadership

- Q1. Is widowhood an issue amongst the women in the guild?
- Q 2. Women are said to be the custodian of culture, how do you enforce this positively?
- Q 3. Do minister's wives see the widow as a threat in the group?
- Q 4. How do you accommodate widows in your programmes?
- Q 5. How do you support widows within the organization?
- Q 6. How can we make women aware of the issue of widowhood, so that they may be ready when that time arrive?
- Q 7. How can we stop women and men abuse widows?

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