

Widowhood Rituals among the Luo of Alego– Usonga, Kenya: Implications for Grief Management

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Abstract: *Death in the African context does not dissolve marriages instead the widow continues to be wed to the family. Losing a spouse is a dreadful experience that is followed by unpleasant feelings and necessitates effective coping mechanisms to prevent adverse psychological reactions. This study examined the widowhood rituals practiced by widows in Alego-Usonga Sub county, their benefits and coping strategies and implications for grief management. The study utilized a sequential mixed methods approach in which qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted for exploratory purposes followed by quantitative interviews. A total of 7 custodians of indigenous knowledge and 28 widows participated in the study. Twelve rituals were identified to have been observed prior to, during and after burial. Coping strategies identified included grieving in stages and maintaining bonds after death. African psychotherapists can leverage on the strengths of rituals that promote healing in bereavement.*

KeyWords: *Widows, Widowhood, Luo, Rituals, Coping strategies*

I. INTRODUCTION

The death of a spouse is a devastating tragedy, characterized by painful feelings of sadness that might result in negative psychological consequences. The Loomba Foundation (2015) estimates that there are 259 million widows worldwide, with Africa accounting for 8.6% and Kenya for 0.6%. Although the term "widowhood" refers to both men and women who have lost a spouse, it is most commonly used to describe a woman who has lost her husband. Azeez et al. (2023) claim that widowhood has a major effect on women's general well-being, future security, and social standing in rural India. Widows must put up with restrictions on their ability to travel, dress, and attend social events for almost a year. When a spouse dies, most African civilizations view the widow as still being married to the family, hence the marriage continues. Studies in Nigeria (Amoo et al., 2022; Ajayi et al., 2019; Iloka, 2022), Cameroon (Pemunta&Alubafi, 2016), and Ghana (Ba-an et al., 2022), among others, show that widows are likely to go through a variety of rites following the loss of their husband. In Kenya, among the Ababukusu, the most common rites performed by widows included mourning, singing, and returning to her maternal home to announce her husband's death, among other things (Wekesa, 2021). Widows in Kenya are referred to as "*chi liel*," or "wife of a grave," by the Luo culture. When someone is introduced as a widow, stereotypes of a weaker woman than married or single women, incapable of supporting herself, and in need of sympathy and defense from others since she hasn't followed funeral customs come to mind. The increased stress that widowhood brings with it can be harmful to the widow's mental well-being.

Every community has its own set of rituals, traditions, and beliefs that help people deal with sorrow and develop adaptive coping strategies. In a longitudinal study on grief rituals in the Netherlands, Mitima-Verloop et al. (2021) discovered that 51.9% planned a memorial ceremony with relatives or shared recollections

about the deceased with others. The majority of participants (85.3%) performed individual rituals (such as visiting a burial site or lighting a candle), whereas 34.7% participated in at least one activity to seek (professional) support to cope with the loss, such as individual grief counselling. Surprisingly, professional counselling was deemed less useful than sharing stories about the deceased with others. Ritual participation is frequently linked to a number of mental advantages in Africa, including defense against diseases specific to a certain culture's grief. Makgahlela et al. (2019), for example, discovered that ritual performance, such as ancestor worship and cleansing, promotes recovery by preventing grieving from becoming incapacitating. Akinyi (2023) discovered a strong inverse link between widowhood and mental health. To help individuals deal with the difficulties of widowhood, the study suggested that they join community support groups or seek counselling.

African psychotherapists, on the other hand, have abandoned indigenous methods of dealing with sorrow caused by mourning in favour of western ideas and procedures in which they are trained to deal with grief-related issues. Popular intervention approaches, such as Kübler-Ross' 5-stage model, suggest that normal mourning is linear and that one must progress through these stages. However, many Africans may struggle to fit into this model because their cultural experiences are imprinted in particular routines that cannot be ignored. Gichinga (2007) claims that after that, clients take on a chameleon-like behaviour in which they see a therapist but covertly return to the conventional core interventions that they find more comfortable. For instance, at a time of mourning, a therapist might be required, accessible, and even involved, but the pertinent cultural customs are still observed. The ceremonial behaviours that bind us together beyond death are necessary because of our connectedness to our cultures, even in the face of modernization, globalization, and religious dogma.

Klass, Silverman, and Nickman's (Worden, 2018) Continuing bonds theory proposes that after death, relationships with the deceased do not have to be dissolved, and that there may be a beneficial role for preserving continuing bonds with the departed. This method contends that death ends a life, not a relationship, thus the bereaved can maintain contact with their loved ones who have died and develop a long-term relationship for as long as it makes sense. This can take the shape of souvenirs, conversing with loved ones, seeking guidance, dreaming about them, hearing their voice, and believing that they are looking over them. According to Foster et al. (2012), 98% of participants in Ecuador stated that they had made intentional connections with the deceased through keeping personal items or photographs, speaking with or praying to them, and taking part in activities the deceased enjoyed while they were still living. Many African civilizations that honour their ancestors find resonance in this viewpoint. For instance, the Zulu people have always acknowledged and respected their ancestors as being essential to their recovery. Even though they are not healers, ancestors' stronger bond with the creator has a therapeutic effect (Thwala& Edwards, 2021).

This suggests that many grieving people maintain pretty normal relationships with the deceased as a typical aspect of their grieving process. It works as a dynamic process of relationship building and adaptation. Thus, ongoing relationships may act as grief-specific coping strategies, giving the bereaved a connection to their loved one and easing the pain associated with the loss (Root and Exline, 2014). The purpose of this study was to determine the function of rituals performed by widows after the death of a spouse, as well as the perceived benefits of widowhood rites among the Luo of Alego-Usonga. It also examined widows' coping mechanisms and the impact of rituals on grief management.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A sequential mixed methods approach in which qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted for exploratory purposes followed by quantitative interviews in Alego-Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The population targeted were 7 custodians of indigenous knowledge (2 females and 5 males) aged between 52 to 81 years. The two female participants aged 70 (participant 3) and 69 years (participant 5) had lived experiences as widows and underwent these rituals. The male participants (1, 72 years; 2, 79 years; 6, 76 years; 7, 81 years) are opinion leaders in the community while participant 4, 52 years is a primary school teacher, pastor and community leader. In addition, 28 widows aged between 31 and 60 years old participated in quantitative interviews. The sampling technique used was purposive in nature. The instruments for data collection were

semi-structured interview guide and a questionnaire. The interview guide was used to seek information on the widowhood rituals, what they were, why they were done and how widows coped with the death of a husband. Open and closed ended questions were used in the questionnaire to establish those rituals the respondents had participated in and those no longer useful in grief management. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inductive thematic analysis for qualitative interviews. Reliability and validity of the instruments was carried out to ascertain the degree to which test components measured the features for which they were designed.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows most of the respondents (92.9%) were aged 41 years and above. The level of education ranged from no formal education 17.9% to secondary not completed 21.4%; 7.1% had completed secondary school while 7.1% had above secondary education. Most respondents belonged to the African Independent Churches 57.1%; 25% were Anglicans and 14.3% were Catholics. Most respondents were peasant farmers at 60.7%; 17.9% had no source of income; 14.3% were self-employed; and 7.1% were in employment. Most of the respondents had been widowed for more than 10 years (85.7%); while 10.7% had been widowed for less than 5 years.

Table 1: Demographic information

Age	N	%
31-40 years	2	7.1
41-50 years	4	14.3
51-60 years	11	39.3
Above 60 years	11	39.3
Total	28	100
Highest Level of education	N	%
No formal education	5	17.9
Upper Primary 4-8	13	46.4
Secondary not completed	6	21.4
Secondary completed	2	7.1
Above secondary	2	7.1
Total	28	100
Religious denomination	N	%
Anglican	7	25.0
Catholic	4	14.3
Seventh Day Adventist	1	3.6
African Independent Churches	16	57.1
Total	28	100
Main Source of income	N	%
None	5	17.9
Business/self employed	4	14.3
Salaried employment	2	7.1
Peasant farmer	17	60.7
Total	28	100
No. of years widowed	N	%
Less than 5 years	3	10.7
6-10 years	1	3.6
11-20 years	13	46.4
21-30 years	8	28.6
Above 31 years	3	10.7
Total	28	100

Widowhood Rituals among the Luo and their Significance

Table 2 lists the customs that widows and the community as a whole after a husband's death. The purpose of these customs was to shield the widow from misfortune and bad luck. Wearing the spouse's clothing and *kode* (identifiers for a bereaved person), isolating oneself from others, limiting one's movement, or using *manyasi* (cleaning herbs) to ward off and neutralize death-related bad luck were among the customs. Widow cleansing and inheritance were also widespread. These procedures align with those noted in the scientific literature. In a research conducted among widows in Rajasthan, India, for example, Azeez et al. (2023) discovered "entangling customs," which they defined as dehumanizing treatment, such as lifetime prohibitions on wearing new clothes and cosmetics. Similarly, widowhood attire, sitting arrangements, social isolation, and limitations on movement and activity were also noted by Mabunda & Ross (2022) in their study of widows from an urban slum in South Africa. In the current study, widow respondents reported having taken part in various activities such as *teroyuak* (taking the cry) 57.1%, *liedo* (shaving) 53.6%, *lako* (widow inheritance) 46.4%, *budho* (vigil) 92.9%, and *romo e liel/sawo/rapar* (meeting in the grave) 71.4%. Particularly in rural areas, it is thought that these customs and procedures strengthened interpersonal bonds and assisted in spirit healing. But several of the rites were discovered to be unhygienic and to predispose widows to illnesses like HIV/AIDS. Take *chodookola*, for example (cleansing). Sexual activity in inheritance relationships fulfils a number of purposes, according to Agot et al. (2010). These include ritual sexual cleansing to help the widow become purified and reintegrated into the community, bearing sons to help the husband's family continue to support the widow, providing young widows with sexual companionship, and other rituals to commemorate special occasions in the community. If this is not done, it is said that disaster will eventually befall the children, co-wives, and even the grandchildren. In a similar vein, nearly all of the widows in Ndisika & Abiola's (2022) study of 15 widows in Edo State, Nigeria, disliked the widow inheritance norms, which are now more like family demands than cultural ones. Citing women's fundamental human rights, they made insinuations that it was a bad practice altogether and that it shouldn't be supported or carried out in the twenty-first century.

Table 2: Widowhood Rituals and their Significance

Ritual type	Description	Significance
<i>Teroyuak</i> (Taking the cry)	A wailing ritual done by <i>mikaye</i> (first wife) to announce the death of the home owner. She takes the wail from her house to the gate and back. She then removes her clothes and wears the husbands and the same will be done by co-wives if it was a polygamous home.	It marks the beginning of the mourning period.
<i>Budho</i> (vigil)	A ritual performed by close relatives of the deceased throughout several nights until the burial day. As new mourners arrive the widow gets to explain over and over what transpired to result in the death of the husband.	It is considered a cathartic process of dealing with emotional pain brought by death.
<i>Terotipo</i> (Taking the shadow)	A ritual performed by a widow to inform her natal home that she has lost her husband. She carries with her <i>manyasi</i> (cleansing herbs) which she sprinkles when she meets people on the way to ward off bad luck brought by death to others. On her return journey, her relatives should give a chicken to bring back to her home.	It meant that relatives from the natal home can attend the burial and the chicken signified continuity in reproduction for crops, livestock and herself.
<i>Kode/ Okola</i> (dirt brought by death)	A string made from strips of goat hide and tied around the waist, wrist or neck of a	It symbolized the sorrow the widow had; it was also used to

	widow in mourning. It is worn until the cleansing ceremony.	force the widow to abstain from any sexual activity until a cleansing ceremony was done.
<i>Turosiro dhoot</i> (breaking the door stick)	<i>mar teroyuak</i> . A ritual done by the widow soon after with the help of a brother-in-law breaks one pillar in the door and runs with it to the gate.	This signifies loss of power of the deceased over the widow's household. The door was thereafter left unlatched until the end of the mourning period.
<i>Layo e okonddhoot</i> (Urinating on the broken pillar)	A ritual performed at the gate by the widow and an in-law to signify the owner of the home is dead. The widow urinates on the broken pillar and witnessed by the brother-in-law.	Indicates the owner of the house no longer has power over it.
<i>Liedo</i> (shaving)	A ritual performed on the widow by the inheritor as part of the cleansing ceremony. It was performed four days after the burial and on the day following the sexual cleansing ritual by an inheritor at the end of mourning period.	The widow's head is shaved clean to signify final disengagement with the deceased and the start of a new life with a companion - the brother-in-law.
<i>Romo e liel/Sawo/ Rapar</i> (meeting in the grave)	A ritual performed by the community after one year to mark the end of the mourning period. It is marked by feasting on a lot of food and traditional dances (<i>ohangla, nyatiti, dudu</i>).	This ritual signified the point at which widow inheritance was done to prepare the widow's return to normal community activities.
<i>Lako</i> (widow inheritance)	A ritual in which the widow is taken by a brother-in-law. The inheritor takes up the roles and responsibilities of the deceased's 'home' including towards his wife (wives) and children and assumes the care of the deceased's 'home' (<i>dala</i>).	The ritual was meant to free the widow to enable her reintegration into the larger community.
<i>Ng'awokoti</i> (hanging a coat)	An inheritance practice performed for postmenopausal widows where no sexual intercourse is obligatory.	Symbolized the end of mourning period. The male relative who hangs his coat assumes responsibility for social, economic and emotional support. It paves way for the family to partake other community rites of passage.
<i>Chodookola</i> (cleansing)	A sexual ritual performed between the widow and the cleanser or inheritor. It is aimed at protecting the widow and her family from experiencing adverse consequences (<i>chira</i>).	This ritual signified the transition into a new life that allowed the widow to return into community life without causing harm to others.
<i>Akumba</i> (small temporary hut)	A symbolic house made of reeds and mud constructed by an inheritor and the widow. Within this structure, the widow will cook a chicken to be eaten by the inheritor only. She will also cook a separate meal for her	The purpose of the ritual is to symbolize the widow no longer has <i>okola</i> and the brother-in-law has taken responsibility for the widow's family to provide

children and serve it outside the *akumba*. companionship, social, economic
The structure will be destroyed after three and emotional support.
days and the inheritor can return to his
home.

Perceived Benefits of Widowhood Rituals Among the Luo of Alego-Usonga

According to Nyarwath (2012), support for the bereaved family's return to normalcy is necessary since grief rituals are founded on the core ideals of love and respect for one's own kin. From a cultural standpoint, the following advantages were noted:

Kinship. Inheritance by a brother-in-law in which a designated male relative takes additional responsibility to ensure prosperity of his brother's household is a long-term relationship. The elders set the criteria for the person who takes this responsibility. He should have his own home, wife/wives and children, produces his own food and own a granary not shared with his wives. He should be born free of *gath*(encumbrances). For example, men named Ochola (born by inheritor), Okello (born after twins), Okumu (born facing downwards), Odongo and Opiyo (twins) should not take up this role. Participant 4 (male, 52 years) explains, "*widow inheritance meant that even though the husband is dead there was the widow who had someone to give company and share ideas with*". Nyarwath (2012) affirms this position: marriage is an everlasting contract whose purpose and function extend beyond the physical death. *Lako*(widow inheritance) is therefore an attempt to cope with the death and its adverse socioeconomic and psychological complications. Participant 2 (male, 79 years) also asserts that the "*inheritor was never going after the deceased property but to care, protect and ensure prosperity of the deceased children*". However, other studies have a contrary viewpoint. For example, Wekesa (2021) found that widows were subjected to discrimination on inheritance rights and suffered isolation and psychological torture in the context of ritual cleansing. Whereas this may have been the intended practice, some men have entered the levirate unions with the sole purpose of plundering the wealth of the immediate family of the deceased resulting in untold suffering for the bereaved.

Lineage protected. Children born from the levirate union are considered the children of the deceased. As participant 4 (male, 52 years) explained: "*widow inheritance isn't only about sex but about responsibility for the deceased home not by strangers but by family/clan member to ensure continuity in siring blood-related children and which would make children have a sense of belonging to family/clan*". This cultural practice was intentional about ensuring that the lineage of a once married man continued beyond the grave.

Protection of the lives of the children and their progeny from chira. *Chira* is the fear of misfortune brought by death. According to participant 7 (male, 81 years), "*If a widow is not inherited, she could harm many people because the sons will die and those the widow will have a meal together too will die*". The fear of death and strong belief in harm caused by it makes the widow to pay the sacrifice by observing the rituals. As explained by participant 6 (male, 76 years) "*during the time of kode (dirt brought by death), our mother never prepared a meal for us because we already had wives who would cook for us. She would cook alone at her house until she would be taken by one of her brothers-in-law for widow inheritance and shave her was when she was clean.*" The widow would not want to be responsible for any calamity linked to *chira*. According to Nyarwath (2012), the family has a moral obligation to make sure that the widow chooses a guardian from within the family; otherwise, the absence of care renders the entire institution of *lako* useless, and no other rite associated to it may be sanctioned by a taboo injunction.

Rituals Perceived Not Beneficial

Over time some of the rituals have been found to be retrogressive. Two respondents were widows who underwent these widowhood rituals. From their perspective, Christianity and modernization has contributed to non-compliance to some practices. Participant 5 (female, 69 years) lamented:

"I tell you today civilization and faith has interfered because faith used to be observed even in the past but still, they adhered to and observed the widowhood rituals to enable children lead a better life as opposed to

today that people are too much into faith beliefs till they cannot conform the traditional widowhood rituals. They refer to them as *gikpiny ok atim* (issues of the world I cannot do).”

All respondents indicated that some rituals were demeaning to widows and were no longer practiced. This included wearing the husband's clothes during the mourning period, breaking the door stick, urinating on the broken pillar, shaving and cleansing. They observed that there are many variations in the rituals that have tarnished the original intention. For example, shaving done in the barber shops or just a little hair shaved at the back of the head. The widows selecting an inheritor who is not a brother-in-law (*jakowiny*) and ignored the selection criteria provided by the practice. The selection criteria included a brother-in-law who had his own home and willing to take additional responsibility to preserve his deceased brother's family line. The widows can dispense with *jakowiny* at any time once the ritual at hand has been accomplished and select another when need arises again. Participant 6 explains:

“After *nindo e liel* (sleeping in the grave) together with in-laws, it would take between two weeks to a month for the widow to be taken by her brother-in-law for widow inheritance for her to accomplish all the widowhood rituals which doesn't happen today. Today a widow would meet a random person and take him for widow inheritance.”

In addition, some rituals were found to be outdated. Respondents from the quantitative interviews had gave reasons for outdated practices. For instance, *teroyuak* (60.7%) due to advancement in technology and family could quickly be informed about a death through the phone. *Terotipo* (71.4%) did not make sense; *liedo*(57.1%) could be done in salons if necessary and the widows could choose if they wanted to; *kode/okola* (53.6%) and *chodookola* (50%) were considered unsanitary and could spread diseases including HIV/AIDs. *Turosiro mar dhoot* (60.7%), *akumba* (35.7%), and *rapar* (14.3%) were considered unnecessary expenses. Interestingly, respondents were unaware of certain rituals including *layo e okonddhoot* (46.4%); *ng'awokoti* (32.1%); and *turosiro mar dhoot* (14.3%). On the other hand, a small proportion considered *teroyuak* (17.9%); *budho*(25%); *liedo* (14.3%); *terotipo*, *lako*, *akumba* (7.1%); *kode* (3.6%); *rapar*(3.6%) as part of culture distinct of the community and should continue to be practiced. In addition, some practices were considered aligned to religious beliefs of the African Independent Churches and should continue including *rapar*(39.3%); *lako* (14.3%); *chodookola*, *terotipo*, *kode/okola* (10.7%); *akumba*(7.1%); and *budho* (3.6%). Besides, *budho* and *rapar* were seen as ways of condoling with the bereaved family and support to have closure. These findings resonate with other studies e.g. Ndisika&Abiola (2022); Azeez et al. (2023) that found widows were subjected to dehumanizing practices that violated their rights of freedom of choice and a call to strengthen social and legislative measures to protect widows.

Widows Coping Strategies Following the Death of a Spouse

The specific cultural beliefs, values, expectations, ceremonies and rituals of a community give meaning to the loss in different ways. Widows undergo a wide range of rituals and therefore it seems it is expected individuals get over loss over a period of time. Some of the coping strategies from this study identified included:

Grieving in stages. The widowhood rituals were performed in stages from the time the spouse dies *teroyuak* (taking the cry) to the time the widow returns to normal community life after *lako* (inheritance). For example, the loud wailing to announce the death allows for expression of pain and deep grief by bitterly crying and singing their own lamentations. Reliving the events of the death to the mourners as they arrived at the home may be interpreted as a form of catharsis for the widows. Some mourners may suspect that the widow could have contributed to the death especially for a younger man. This has been witnessed in Asian and African cultures as recorded in Azeez et al. (2022) India; Iloka, (2022) Nigeria; and Pemunta&Alubafi, (2016) Cameroon where widows undergo dehumanizing rituals to prove they did not kill the spouse. Sadly, Surkan et al. (2015) found that Nepali widows coped through concealment of their widowhood status to shield themselves and their children from societal stigma and secretly manage their bereavement.

Maintaining bonds after death. The widow remains married to the husband beyond the grave hence the understanding that the deceased will continue to impact their lives for a while. For example, the understanding that the inheritance relationship with the brother in-law is long term but not a marriage such that the widow and

her children live in the deceased home. Children born in the levirate union also retain the identity of the deceased but they can also inherit land from their biological father. According to Klass, Silverman and Nickman (Worden, 2018), maintaining connections with the deceased does not necessarily make it maladaptive and should not be construed as prolonged grief. In the current study, *lako* (inheritance) marks the end of cultural obligation to continue mourning. However, the status of the woman remains '*chi liel*' (wife of the grave) and this did not seem to bother the female respondents in the study. A contrary experience for 10 rural South Africa widows gives a different perspective. The widows were perceived as a social burden, experience loneliness, humiliation and discrimination which would not promote healing (Motsoeneng&Modise, 2020). In such situations the cultural practices negate any benefits that might have been the reason for the rituals in the first place resulting in psychological distress.

Implications of Rituals to Grief Management

Widowhood rituals among the Luo of Alego-Usonga are carried out over a long period of time and preferably for a year. These practices commenced right from the time the man took the last breath. First upon the death of an elderly man, if the death occurred during morning hours people were not supposed to wail or announce his death. The body would be kept till evening hours when the *mikayi* (first wife) would announce the death. The rituals are meant to appease the spirit of the dead husband, protect the children and members of the community from contamination of *chira* and the widow as the duty bearer to fulfil these obligations.

In most African societies, death defiles the widow and leaves her vulnerable, impure and in danger of polluting her children, community members and even livelihoods. In the current study, the widow had to carry *manyasi* (cleansing herbs) in *terotipo* (taking the shadow) to sprinkle along the way to ward off bad luck when she meets people or livestock on the way or if she is to enter anyone's home (which was also restricted). This would be considered therapeutic for her when she feels she has not defiled someone with death. Makgahlela et al. (2019) had similar findings among the Northern Sotho African community in which the bereaved are considered unclean and susceptible to contamination hence required social identifiers to help people avoid them. Traditional herbs administered by bathing, steaming, smoking, incision is used in cleansing to heal the bereaved from possible illnesses.

The findings highlight that *kode/okola* (dirt brought by death) is a period of abstinence and isolation for the widow that lasts up to twelve months when *nindo e liel* (sleeping in the grave) is done. It can be construed as a period of quiet reflection and healing for the widow. However, the attendant isolation can also contribute to further negative emotions that can lead to further psychological distress as observed by Akinyi (2023). The cleansing ceremony preceding widow inheritance can also be a cause for distress for widows not willing to undergo this ritual. One participant alluded that conflict over property where there is no written will occurs when widows refuse to participate in the rituals.

There have also been variations observed that are perceived to be harmful and the root cause of HIV/AIDS spread. The concept of *jakowiny* (commercial inheritors) who are not relatives and engage in multiple inheritance. "You find one has taken a stranger for widow inheritance at a fee and then forcefully evict them which was considered a taboo because the provocation could lead insanity like the stranger exposing his manhood to children therefore leading to home destruction."

Shaving of hair was considered as core to the healing process since it provides an avenue for disengagement from the old marriage with the deceased into the new one with a brother-in-law. All participants concurred with this perspective. This position was also supported by a study on South African bereavement rituals among the Northern Sotho community in which shaving was done twice; immediately after burial to symbolize a new beginning and 6-12 months later at end of mourning period (Makgahlela et al., 2019). However, in the current study continuing bonds with the deceased was also noted in the naming of children sired from the levirate union. The children belong to the deceased although they have rights to inherit property from both fathers. In addition, the brother-in-law maintains his own family and home while supporting the widow's family. This suggests a double bond with the deceased and within the family. The kinship, social and economic support within the family was the fundamental principles behind the widowhood rituals. Nyarwath (2012) points

out that the widows ought to develop warm relationships with their in-laws to strengthen the spirit of family anchored on mutual respect and care within the family.

In the modern society where part of the community lives in urban settings, psychotherapists have a valuable role to play in grief management. Many widows will return to their urban dwellings without fulfilling most the rituals. It is therefore imperative for therapists to be cognizant of nuances that have a cultural embedment and strive to explore the core interventions that works in the client's setting.

IV. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, the study identified many widowhood rituals and their meanings that explains why the cultural practices are sustained over time. These rituals are deep seated among the people of Alego-Usonga that even Christianity and the spread of HIV/AIDS has diminished but not eradicated. For the Christians there is a subtle manner in which the rituals are observed. Indeed, some participants quoted the bible.

"Today it has been elaborated even further because truly speaking in accordance with the cultural practices and even in the bible, when a husband dies the wife should be taken by a brother to the deceased husband." (Participant 3)

"But there are those that are good and we cannot do away with whether Jesus came today or not because even the bible puts it that Jesus never came to violate the laws of the land but came to accomplish them." (Participant 4)

Useful connections also exist between some of the rituals and grief therapy modalities. Specific coping mechanisms were identified that could enrich grief work with clients from the community. Understanding the meaning assigned to a cultural practice would help therapists effectively support clients handling grief.

Notably, clients in need of psychological support have a variety of helpers to choose from- faith healers, traditional healers, medicine men that resonate with their needs. Although counselling training in Kenya have an element of culturally related issues, therapists mainly deliver western orientation and psychotherapeutic services. This may be due to the need to maintain international standards. However, without contextualization of client issues in a holistic manner that embraces spiritual and cultural components, healing will not be attained. There is need for therapists to recognize what works for the clients in the cultural sphere and integrate these in their sessions. Experimenting with techniques drawn from the rich African cultures and documenting these practices would strengthen homegrown techniques.

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