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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY, SOCIAL WORK, AND AFRICAN WOMEN STUDIES

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN KABULA WARD, BUNGOMA COUNTY,

KENYA

BY

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.

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APPROVAL

This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the university supervisor.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my lovely husband, Donald Alukonya, for his immense support during my study and for ensuring that my goal was achieved. To my children, Joelyn Ayako and Jude Don, thank you for your encouragement, care, and patience throughout the study.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CEDAW -		Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoK	-	Constitution of Kenya
ICESCR	-	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
MPA	-	Matrimonial Property Act
SDG	-	Sustainable Development Goals
U S	-	United States
UDHR	-	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	-	United Nations
HIV	-	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
AIDS	-	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
KWFT	-	Kenya Women Finance Trust
MFI	-	Micro finance institutions

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand and document the lived experiences of widows and to analyze the effectiveness of existing statutory laws and policies protecting widows in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County. The study carries out an in-depth understanding of widows' experiences using a phenomenological approach. The study explores how demographic characteristics, such as age, education, widowhood duration, and occupation shape widowhood experiences, the social, cultural, psychological, and economic experiences of different widows after bereavement, survival strategies widows employ to cope with the experiences, support systems available for widows and how existing statutory laws and policies protect widow's rights. The study examines the experiences of 20 widows who are at least one year in widowhood living in Kabula Ward.

The study incorporates the theory of intersectionality which examines how various axes of differences intertwine to shape widows' experiences while the theory of gender and power is included to help in exploring the role and position of widows in Kabula ward, and community more broadly. In-depth interviews and key-informant interviews were used to collect data. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically and presented in verbatim excerpts. Study findings show that widows' experiences vary with age, level of education, cause of spouse death, duration of marriage before spouse died, and type of occupation. These factors intersect to create both positive and negative experiences for widows. The study also establishes that despite widows facing negative experiences, they also exhibit positive experiences in widowhood. Social, cultural, economic, and psychological challenges are experienced; however, most widows engage in different activities and adopt various coping strategies to ensure their families' well-being. Informal support networks such as family, church, self-help groups, and widow inheritance while formal support networks such as government and microfinance institutions are widely adopted to cope with widowhood challenges. Additionally, the study reveals that legal frameworks enacted to protect widows are not fully utilized due to lack of legal awareness among widows, the presence of customary laws, and high court fees, thus complicating widows' access to justice. Therefore, to empower widows, the study recommends the sensitization of widows on existing legal frameworks to protect and promote their rights, the development of social and economic programs to improve widows' living standards, and the provision of counselling services to promote their psychological well-being.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Background to the study

Widowhood, a state of losing a wife or husband to death, is the most difficult incident in one's life. For numerous women across the world, the death of a spouse is signified by many losses, such as the loss of their social status, marital home, land, property, dignity, and, sometimes, their children. Miruka et al., (2015) state that, women face challenges within the society due to death of their spouses and this affects them psychologically, socio-economically and spiritually.

In 2017, UN Women estimated that there were about 285 million widows globally. Out of this, 115 million lived in “deep poverty” in fragile conditions and were vulnerable to various forms of psychological, sexual and physical abuse like rape, social exclusion, and denial of property rights by their husbands' families (United Nations, 2017). Statistics indicate that, widows who are socially and economically disadvantaged live in developing countries. For instance, in 2018, UN Women reported that 9.6 percent of widows in developing countries lived in extreme poverty due to inequality in access to resources and opportunities (United Nations, 2018).

Research on widowhood in most developed nations focus on economic challenges such as; lack of free healthcare and pensions, poverty and deprivation of ethnic social groups while placing much attention on the elderly group of widows (Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2015). According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, The United States is estimated to have more than 14 million widows. Of these numbers, more than 740,000 widows are unable to cater for physiological needs of their families which include; food, shelter and clothing (World Widows Report, 2015).

The situation for widows in other parts of the globe calls for attention because it is severe. Several studies in African countries reveal that, widows have suffered in different aspects of life as a result of widowhood. The studies involve topics such as; property ownership and inheritance rights among women in Kisii County, Kenya (Mogute, 2015), the rights of women and widowhood practices in South-Western Nigeria (Afolayan, 2015), and marital shocks and women's wellbeing in Sub-Saharan Africa (Djuikom & Walle, 2018). To these scholars, widows encounter gender inequalities socially and economically and their rights are violated. The violation comes as a result of ritual practices they undergo in the process of mourning their

spouses. Ajiboye's (2016), study on widows experiences in several African cultures argues that, the event of widowhood is characterized by 'dehumanizing' traditional ritual practices subjected to widows during the mourning process. Among the Nigerians the ritual practices include; "widow cleansing", inheritance of the widow, dispossession of husband's properties, forceful shaving of hair, among others.

In Kenya, the number of widows is estimated at eight (8) million (World Widows Report, 2015). Broadly, the World widows report notes that, many widows in Kenya suffer from discrimination, systematic seizure of property and evictions by their late husbands' families, forced re-marriages, and sexual abuses. In addition, other research show that, specifically in remote rural villages, stigmatization and discrimination of widows is still evident as documented laws are disregarded (Orwa, 2020). Studies in Kenya that have focused on issues related to widowhood cover themes such as; psychosocial challenges affecting the wellness of widows conducted in churches in Nakuru county (Muthangya, 2019), counseling as a coping strategy among widowers and widows in Meru county (Mburugu, 2019), psychosocial challenges experienced by widows and their coping mechanism conducted in Nyeri county (Mwangi, 2014) and dimensions of change in the livelihoods of rural widows amongst the Taita of Kenya (Maina, 2004). These studies provide important culture-specific data on widow experience and point to the need for more studies in Kenya's diverse cultures have a holistic view of widows' experiences in Kenya.

From the literature above, most studies on widowhood practices in Africa, Kenya included, focus on negative experiences of widows. Potash (1986), however, denotes a form of resilience depicted by rural widows in Africa. This includes: self-sufficiency, independence, and valuable contribution to agricultural labor. Without a doubt, problems for widows exist worldwide. However, a major gap in the literature is that studies emphasize negative experiences of widows and assume that all widows suffer in widowhood. Moreover, many studies depict widows as a homogenous group and disregard the diversity of widows with regard to gender, religion, education, occupation, class, ethnic background, and other structures of stratification that complicate widowhood experience.

A major break from this literature is Ogwen's (2010) study in Kibera that revealed how the intersections of age, duration of marriage prior to spouse's death, gender, social support from

family and financial status varied widow's experience. Following this study, and informed by the feminist concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990) that urges us to go beyond homogenizing experiences, the study sought to explore how diverse widows in Kabula Ward of Bungoma County experience living alone. An important dimension of this study, in addition to other axes of differences, was to examine how policies and laws in Kenya, particularly with reference to the Matrimonial Property Act (2013), shape widows' lived experience, negatively or positively.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Widowhood has rendered many women vulnerable in many areas of their lives. Most widows around the world suffer sexual and physical abuse, face stigmatization and discrimination, and are denied access to land rights (Djuikom & Walle, 2018). Statistics indicate that, African nations record high levels of gender inequality due to strict widowhood rites in spite of the presence of Gender equality as one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). Loomba Foundation (2015), documents the existence of social stigma, property dispossession, forced eviction, denial of child custody, accusations of having caused the death of husband and rituals such as wife inheritance and wife cleansing. The negative experiences that widows face are a breach of women's rights as it deprives them of dignity and freedom in society.

To ensure that the principle of promoting gender equality among men and women is adhered to, various policies and legal frameworks were put in place to promote women rights. At the international level, the frameworks include; The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UHDR) of 1948. These were established to promote women's rights and many nations, Kenya included, have enacted these policies. However, in practice, many widows continue to suffer. Specifically, in Kenya, in addition to the above-mentioned statutes, the Constitution of Kenya (CoK, 2010) offers general provisions relating to the Bill of Rights. Among the provisions is that, the needs of vulnerable groups within society, including women, should be addressed.

Following this, The Matrimonial Property Act (2013) was enacted to reinforce equal rights between spouses in relation to matrimonial property. Article 45 (3) of the act clearly states that, both spouses are entitled to equal rights during marriage and at its termination either due to break

up or death of the spouse. Despite the existence of these legal and policy frameworks, many women continue to face challenges in widowhood (Muthangya, 2019; Mburugu, 2019; Mwangi, 2014; Maina, 2004). This is particularly evident in rural areas where there is less awareness of rights, laxity in law enforcement and traditional practices strictly adhered to by the communities. (Orwa, 2020). These practices of discrimination against women entrench gender inequalities and affect the dignity and livelihoods of widows, and their capacities to care for themselves and their families. From the studies highlighted above, it is evident that most research has focused on highlighting the plight of widows in various societies. This is done in spite of ratification and enactment of laws and policies meant to improve the quality of life of women globally.

Nonetheless, while most research has examined the suffering of widows due to cultural norms and practices, and lack of social support, the study in Kabula Ward of Bungoma County was interested not only in identifying the negative experiences but also exploring spaces of widow's positive experiences that promoted their wellbeing and that of their children and families. Moreover, the use of an intersectional framework and methodology was central to illuminating how these experiences were shaped by widows' positionalities (e.g., age, education, religion, income, class among others) for more nuanced understanding of widows' lived experience in Kabula Ward. The study, therefore, was guided by the following questions.

1.3 Research questions

1. How do demographic characteristics, such as age, education, and widowhood duration shape social, cultural, psychological, and economic experiences of different widows after bereavement?
2. What survival strategies do widows employ to cope with these experiences and what support systems are available?
3. How do existing statutory laws and policies protect the rights of widows and how do widows experience these laws and policies, if they do?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General objective

The study's main purpose was to understand and document the lived experiences of widows and analyze the effectiveness of existing statutory laws and policies in protecting widows in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To examine the demographic characteristics of widows and how they shape widowhood experiences.
2. To explore and understand the social, cultural, economic and psychological experiences of different widows after bereavement.
3. To identify and understand informal and formal support systems adopted by widows to cope with widowhood challenges.
4. To analyze the effect of existing statutory laws and policies on widows' lives.

1.5 Justification and significance of the study

Kenya is listed among the top 10 African nations that have documented remarkable reforms in policy framework targeted at improving gender equality (World Bank Report, 2019). This is attributed to legal reforms that addresses gender inequality, such as; The Matrimonial Property Act, 2013; The Marriage Act, 2014; and The Land Act, 2016. Despite the existence of these legal frameworks many widows in rural areas are still discriminated against, deprived of their property, forced to undergo customary practices like widow cleansing and denied opportunities for advancement.

The proposed study might add to the myriad of studies that provide policy makers with culturally sensitive data on widows' experiences for more meaningful policy-making and implementation of the existing bills of rights for women. The research also aimed to identify areas in which widow's are more vulnerable. This would inform government institutions and development agencies concerned with widows' welfare on initiating gender empowerment programs to counter the negative experiences.

Second, most research has treated widows as a homogenous group. Yet, theoretical advances in gender and intersectionality ask us to consider a variety of variables in social lives while examining peoples lived experiences. This research, thus contributes to advances in scholarly work that seek to move away from universalizing widows' experiences and to argue for a more nuanced understanding of their lives, here in Kenya and beyond.

1.6 Scope and limitation

This study focused on lived experiences of widows living in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County. The area of study was confined to Kabula Ward which comprised of residents who share a common ethnic group with several traditional practices associated with marriage and death.

The study employed qualitative methodology to explore firsthand accounts of lived experiences of widows in the Ward. It drew on a small sample of Kabula widows to understand their experiences in-depth. Therefore, the research did not seek to generalize these experiences to other populations of widows in Kenya as the sample was small and other accounts of women's experiences would differ with cultural groups and geography.

The study was limited to the following variables; age, occupation, education level, cause of spouse death, widowhood duration, social, cultural, psychological, economic; coping strategies; and policies. The research was self-sponsored. Therefore, time and financial constraints limited the researcher's capacity to conduct a deep ethnography of Kabula widows, or to extend the research beyond the Ward.

1.7 Operational definition of terms

Challenges- Situations of difficulty or hardships encountered by widows in widowhood.

Class- A group of widows sharing similar economic status such as occupation and property value

Coping mechanisms- Strategies adopted by widows to attain resilience and enhance survival of widows.

Inequality-Unfair treatment rendered to widows due to circumstances such as gender and class

Lived Experiences-A description of a widow's life and choices and the experience they gain from the situation and choices.

Policies- These are international bill of rights for women as provisioned by Universal Declaration of human rights, (1948) and Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, (1979) that aims to promote women equality and civil rights and target the aspects that are harmful to women. These include; actions to end discriminatory harmful cultural practices such as wife "cleansing" and inheritance and property ownership, property inheritance, sexual and physical violence.

Statutory laws- These are standards and principles adopted from policies and enacted by the Kenyan government with an aim of promoting welfare and social justice for women in the society. These include the Matrimonial Property Act, 2013

Support- Form of provision, comfort, encouragement, financial assistance rendered to widows to improve their situation.

Widow-A woman who has lost her spouse by death and has not remarried.

Widowhood- This refers to a state and a period lived after losing a spouse through death (at the point of death afterwards).

CHAPTER TWO

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a critical review of empirical literature on the experiences of widows in various parts of the world. The literature examined an overview of challenges, support systems for widows as well as legal frameworks that protect widows as related to research objectives. The goal of the chapter was thus to highlight existing literature in widowhood, identify gaps in literature and present a theoretical and conceptual framework that guided the research.

2.1 Widowhood and experiences of widows

Widowhood is a period and a state of a man losing a wife and a woman losing a husband through death. The loss of an intimate partner is one of the most traumatizing events in an individual's life. The death of a spouse impacts everyday life, health, well-being, and social relations of the surviving spouse whether a widow or widower (Miruka et al., 2015). Several studies have documented the experiences of widows as the most difficult times in their lives (Oniye, 2000; Olukayode, 2015; Sossou, 2002). The studies state that, almost all aspects of widows lives are affected by the challenges they encounter. They are often maltreated by the society and thrown into financial, psychological, sexual and social trauma. A major limitation of these studies is the focus on negative experiences of widows, providing an impression that all widows suffer in widowhood.

On the other hand, emerging literature has revealed that experiences of widows differ and are influenced by several factors (Dunn, 2015; Jones, 2016; Ogweno 2010; Wang, 2019). Ogweno (2010) study on widows and widowers in Kibera slums states that, widowhood experiences varied among men and women. This is influenced by factors such as; age, duration of marriage, financial status and the amount of social support they received from the community and family. According to these scholars, these factors play a part on participants' life in widowhood. From literature, the lived experiences of widows can be categorized broadly into social, economic, and psychological aspects.

2.1.1 Social challenges experienced by widows

Across different societies, particularly in Africa, widows are subjected to a range of mourning and burial rites cited as “oppression” following death of a husband. This has had a detrimental effect to women’s social wellbeing (Matsobane, 2015). The social challenges depicted after the loss of a loved one include; wife inheritance, conflict and threat from in-laws, hatred, discrimination, prejudice, stigmatization, oppression, rejection, desertion, loneliness, and lack of intimacy (Lindiwe, 2015; Mwangi, 2014; Muthangya, 2019; Ogweno 2010; Owiti, 2015; Perry 2014; Ude & Njoku, 2017). Muthangya’s (2019) findings on psychosocial challenges affecting the wellness of widows in Nakuru County, Kenya reveal that widows experience threats by in-laws and have poor interpersonal relationships with their in-laws due to property inheritance.

The idea that traditional practices lead to negative effects on widows, has been argued by some scholars. Owiti (2015) argues that, wife inheritance can be regarded as an institution of care mainly established to support, sustain and maintain well being of the widow and children of the deceased. To Owiti, widow inheritance ought to have had reasonable grounds for it to be supported as many widows and their household gain from inheritance. On the contrary, Sidang (2019) argues that, however much we evaluate the importance of widowhood inheritance from a cultural point of view, physical effects such as health risk should be well thought-out as it has increased the spread of HIV.

From the perspectives highlighted above, it can be noted that widowhood rites and rituals are part and parcel of many communities in Africa and it defines their culture. However, debate continues about the utility of widowhood rites such as wife inheritance in the modern societies (Owiti, 2015; Sidang, 2019). In addition to these debates, this research examined how the traditional cultural practices of Kabula people negative or positively shaped widows’ experiences in the community.

2.1.2 Economic challenges experienced by widows

Increased poverty, financial stress, poor nutrition and deprivation of matrimonial resources are documented as the most pressing economic needs affecting most widows (Chapoto et al., 2011; Khan, 2018; Magoke-Mhoja’s, 2006; Walle, 2013). Global women’s report (2015), documents that, many widows are prone to poverty as they are generally uneducated, married at a tender age

and are uninformed of their rights. In developed countries, the loss of a spouse contributes to loss of monetary stability as widows lose jobs, insurance covers, or even lose ownership to homes (World widows report, 2018). In developing nations, widows fall into the poverty gap due to; illiteracy, lack of empowerment, limited resources, unemployment and lack of favorable statutory and customary laws to govern inheritance. In most occasions, the husband's relatives become the principal and entitled beneficiaries of the husband's property (Heidi, 2011).

Platteau & Baland (2000), state that in many African societies, inheritance is viewed as a significant avenue of property ownership. They support this claim by highlighting presence of inheritance laws in countries like Burundi, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In Kenya, Maina (2004) notes that, widows suffer a lot economically as economic status determines the overall wellbeing of an individual. Their households' income drops and some of them engage in illegal and harsh alternatives such as prostitution and selling illicit drugs to sustain their basic livelihood. Many widows are also left poor as property left by the husbands is controlled by the patriarchal customary laws on inheritance.

Contrary to the popular belief of poverty in widowhood, Potash (1986) claims widows living in rural parts of Africa are often independent and more thriving than their counterparts who are married. He also adds that, widows in some African cultures are identified as valuable contributors to the agricultural labor force as well as playing the role of protecting and integrating new widows in the society rather than being marginalized.

Informed by such studies that explore negative and positive economic experiences of widows, this study explored such spaces of widow empowerment in Kabula Ward engendered by traditional cultural practices and existing laws and policy programmes.

2.1.3 Psychological challenges experienced by widows

Yvonne & Browning (2002) argued that most widowed persons experience difficult moments mentally in mourning process. This is evident in the early phase of grieving and is manifested by feelings of depression, obsessive thoughts about their departed partners, changes in mood, disrupted schedules of sleep, resulting to confusion in life. A comparative study on psychological effects of widowhood in Meru County among widows and widowers showed that, there are variations in the widowed persons' mental effects as widows showed high levels of burn-out than

widowers (Mburugu, 2018). Mburugu also revealed that, death of either the wife or the husband impacted negatively the mental and physical aspects of the living spouse especially widows.

Other widely shared studies on psychological challenges in literature is that, widows exhibit psychological signs such as depression that result into feelings of trauma, demoralization, fearfulness, emptiness, loneliness, sadness, experiencing anger outbursts, helplessness, frustration, hatred, suicidal feelings and lack of sleep and lost appetite (Lindiwe, 2015; Muthangya, 2019; Mwangi, 2014). Focusing on the trend of research highlighted above, most focus on the psychological challenges experienced by widows. Hence, the study sought to add information to the body of knowledge by identifying strategies employed by widows to cope with the challenges in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County.

2.2 Informal and formal support systems

As the studies highlighted above have suggested, widows undergo various challenges in widowhood. The social, economic and psychological challenges negatively impact widows' lives. Some widows, however, are able to bounce back through adoption of strategies that enables them to deal with the situation.

Research has indicated that widow's employ different ways of coping with grief (Iruloh & Elsie 2018; Muthangya, 2019; Ogwen, 2010). Strategies applied to cope emotionally include; problem solving, problem avoidance, cognitive restructuring, self-criticism and expressing emotion. Socially, widows engage in social support groups and networks, seek divine intervention and social withdrawal. Strategies employed to cope economically include; engaging in small scale businesses such as chicken farming, dairy farming e.t.c. The strategies, though, vary greatly depending on individual's ability to seek for assistance, handle grief and emotions, and willingness to engage in a range of activities in the society to keep them busy (Muthangya, 2019).

Several scholars have identified systems of support, maintenance and adjustment for widows. These include; widow inheritance system, the government, religious institutions, individuals, non-governmental organizations, self-help groups, friends, children, siblings and relatives. Support provided is in form of donations, skills training, counseling (Abolarin, 1997; Birech &

Masinde, 2018; Khan, 2016; Nnodim et al., 2013; Oniye, 2006). These scholars conclude that, the support systems offer the help needed by widows for survival. Participants of these studies, however, stated ineffectiveness in how the systems operated and confessed to receiving support which was not enough to satisfy their needs.

In Kenya, the government is regarded as one of the major source of support to widows at both national and county level. It is involved in provision of education bursaries to students from extremely needy background, especially orphaned families (Maina, 2004; Nyambedha et al., 2003). In light of this review on coping strategies, this research aimed to identify existing coping mechanisms for widows in Kabula Ward and analyzed how these mechanisms enhanced widows' wellbeing socially, economically and psychologically.

2.3 Legal and Policy framework impacting Widows: Matrimonial Property Act, 2013

The Constitution of Kenya, 2010, presents a guide on protection of human rights specifically right's on property. One of the notable legal reforms in Kenya that addresses gender inequality is the "Matrimonial Property Act, 2013". The Act reinforces equal rights on property ownership for both spouses and grants new rights to women by recognizing the financial and non-monetary contributions to matrimonial property by both spouses, dictating that the properties should be inherited in case of dissolution of the union.

Despite the presence of all these progressive policies, widows continue to face discrimination in many communities and their rights violated. The idea of implementing universal rights of widows and international laws and connecting them with local ideas and values has not been fully successful as it does not meet international human rights standards like United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNDP) (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Barasa's (2020) study, "Experiences of Widows in the Bukusu Society Circa; 1895 to 2015 amidst Cultural Transformation, Constitutionalism and Women's Rights as Human Rights", alludes that the implementation of the statutes has been greatly hindered by myriad cultural, social, and institutional barriers. Among these are strong customs and traditions which are strictly adhered to by elders in the community.

Following such studies, the research focused on examining gaps that existed in implementation of these laws and policies in Kabula Ward. The following section details the theoretical framework that guided this research.

2.4 Theoretical framework

Grant & Onsoloo (2014), define a theoretical framework as a “blue print” or a guide for research that contains theoretical principles, constructs, concepts and tenets of a theory. The study was broadly informed by a feminist approach to understand the experiences of women in widowhood. Particularly, this study was informed by feminist theoretical advances on gender and intersectionality.

2.4.1 Gender and power

West and Zimmerman (1987), define gender as, continuous socially constructed behaviours expressed and assessed as masculine or feminine in relation to societal expectations. The concept of gender is dynamic and continues to be a major concern and a subject of discussion worldwide. Gender scholars state that, gender roles and differences emanate from a variety of factors including socialization and biology and are maintained through communication and culture by humans (Lauzen et al., 2008; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Wood, 2009).

The theory of gender and power was developed by Connell (1987). She described it as a social structural model that seeks to understand power relationships between men and women and among men and women as a function of different structures. To Connell, there are four intersecting dimensions of gender that characterize the gendered relationships between men and women. These are; power; production; emotional relations; and symbolism, culture and discourse. In many African societies, the gender order is constituted on a patriarchal structure of gender relations where men are placed in authority over women in religion, political and economic activities resulting to inequality. The perspective of patriarchal structure was applied in this research in understanding how inequality is created among widows in Kabula Ward.

Power as a dimension of gender refers to the capacity to influence and exercise authority over other individuals (Connell, 1987). The concept of power helped to explain how power is deployed between men and women in the marital relationship, resulting to different

experiences of widows. The research also examined how power is institutionalized through legislation to challenge the experiences of widows in Kabula Ward. Production, consumption and gendered accumulation dimension relate to sexual division of labour that results to unequal opportunities in the economic sector. In many societies, labour is gendered such that certain tasks are performed by men and others by women. For instance, house work is done by women while men work in the non-domestic sphere. The dimension thus was explored to understand the roles and responsibilities of widows and their husbands in their married lives, how this changed in their widowhood and what this meant for the widows lives.

Emotional relations also referred to as the structure of cathexis is a gender order that focuses on emotions, attachments and commitments. Families are formed on basis of emotional attachment, however this is gendered. Women are expected to love and care for their spouses and children, whereas men are expected to commit themselves as providers for their spouses and children. This concept was put into context to describe widow's emotional aspects in widowhood and how they dealt with the situation. Lastly, symbolism, culture and discourse are dimensions that focus on meanings we attach to events. The interpretation of events is socially constructed by the society. In this study, the concept was employed to understand the cultural representations of widows in terms of images, language, attitudes and symbols in the community.

Of importance, the four dimensions of structure of gender and power interconnect and condition each other to create positive or negative experiences for individuals in the society. The theory was hence useful for exploring the experiences of widows in Kabula Ward and in identifying how these structures might increase or decrease their vulnerability in widowhood.

2.4.2 Intersectionality theory

The term intersectionality was coined by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989). To Crenshaw, intersectionality theory emphasizes the understanding of social experiences of minority members in consideration of interconnection of various axes of stratification, such as gender, class and race. Patricia Hill Collins advanced this theory with an additional concept of the matrix of domination which argues that social categorization such as race, class, gender, sexuality and nation intersects to create discrimination and oppression. (Collins,1990; 2009).

The matrix of domination is produced by powerful people in society and legitimized through widely accepted ideologies creating oppression for individuals placed at the lower level in the social hierarchy.

Most studies in widowhood consider widows as having negative experiences in widowhood treating them as a homogenous group. To intersectionality, an individual's aspect of social identities combines to create opportunities and challenges in different spheres of life hence, opposing the homogeneity idea. The framework gives an insight for understanding how these experiences differ. Gender scholars that have incorporated intersectionality in their studies to understand experiences of different categories of groups in the society include; (Collins, 2000; Chavella, 2010; Njiru & Purkayastha 2017; Tamale, 2020; Wang, 2019).

Informed by this theory and its application by such scholars, this study incorporated the concept of intersectionality to understand how identities of age, class, occupation, religion, and education may be both empowering and oppressing in widowhood to widows in Kabula Ward.

2.4.3 Liberal feminism theory

Giddens (2001) defines liberal feminism as a feminist theory which argues that gender inequality is created by reducing the ability of women and girls to access civil rights. This branch of feminism focuses on women's legal rights and gender equality by focusing on autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship and democracy. The key theorists include; Mary Astell (1666-1731), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1799), Harriet Taylor (1807-1858), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941). According to liberal feminism, female subordination is embedded in a set of customary and legal constraints that restricts women from attaining success in the public sphere. Hence, the theorists sought to change the narrative of gendered practices of men and women by arguing that both need equal social, legal, and economic value recognition. This was to be achieved through the initiation and enactment of laws that promote gender equality.

To enforce the laws, the theorists argue that the state should provide protection of individual rights while focusing on promoting women's freedom. In pursuit of promoting women's rights in

Kenya, the government has undertaken several initiatives such as development and enactment of various policies, legal frameworks and affirmative action programmes to curb discrimination and oppression faced by women. Some of the policies and legal framework include; The Matrimonial Property Act 2013, The Marriage Act 2014, and The Land Act 2016 while the affirmative action programmes include; women enterprise fund. To analyze effectiveness of the laws aforementioned using liberal feminism perspective was imperative as it aided in examining the impact of the laid policies to widows in the community. The theory also helped unravel the challenges impeding proper implementation of the laws.

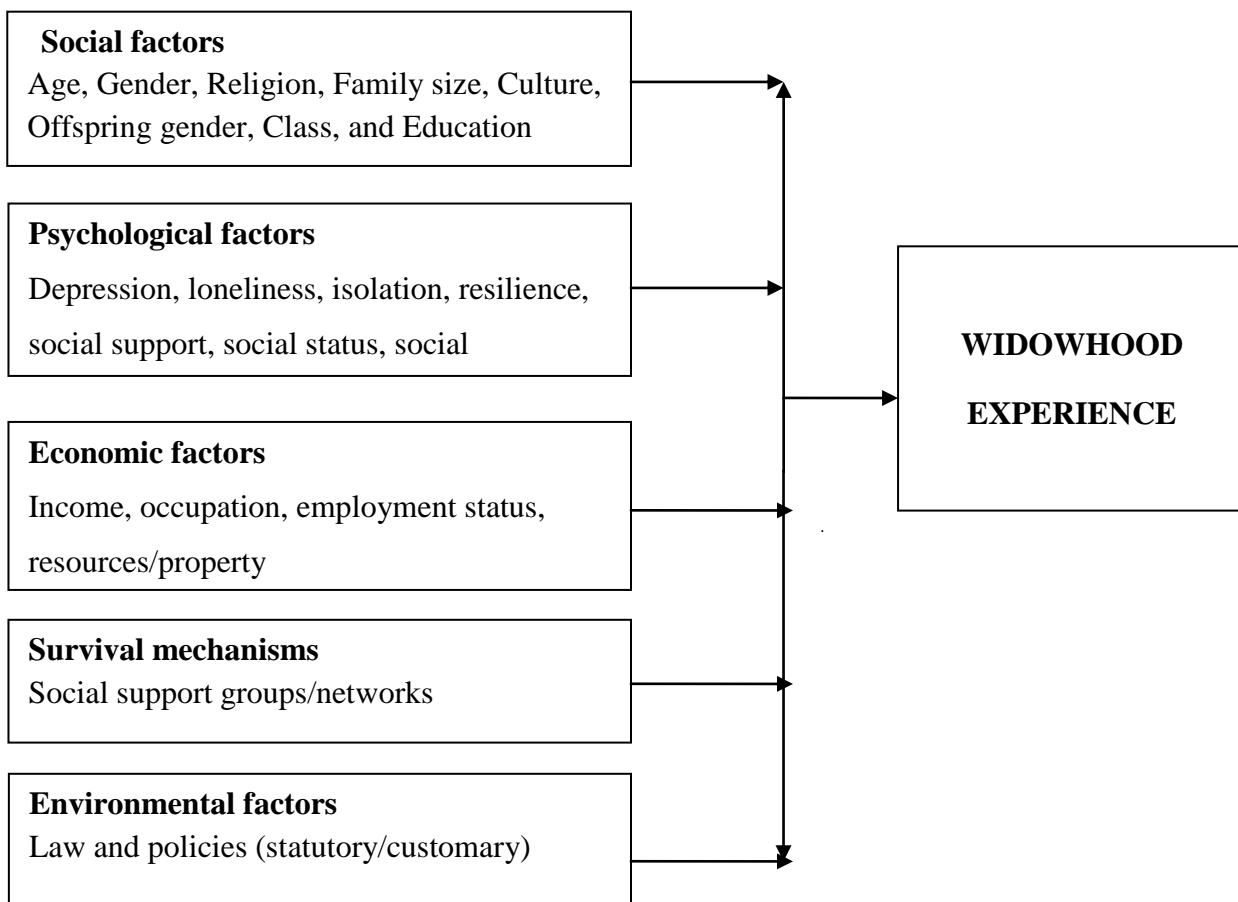
2.5 Conceptual framework

The framework for this research was informed by the literature and theory on widowhood. It indicated the relationship between independent variables and dependent variable. The independent variables for the study were; social factors (culture, age, gender, religion, family size, offspring gender, class, education), economic factors (income, occupation, employment status, property), psychological factors (depression, loneliness, isolation, resilience, social support, social status, social integration and environmental factors (law and policies) while the dependent variable was the widowhood experience

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent variable

Dependent variable



CHAPTER THREE

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology that was employed in the study. The section discusses the research design, study location and description, target population, unit of analysis and observation, sampling techniques, techniques of collecting data, data analysis and presentation. It also highlights the key ethical considerations that guide the study.

3.1 Research design

A research design is a conceptual structure within which a study is conducted and constitutes an outline of procedures and techniques for gathering, processing and analyzing data (Kothari, 2004). The study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach. The utilized research design approach allows participants to explore and describe their situation through perception and experience in the phenomenological event (Lester, 1999). The study adopted this design as it allowed participants to provide a deeper understanding on the lived experiences of widows by qualitatively exploring their views on experiences encountered before and during widowhood.

It is against this background that the approach was used to aid in understanding widow's experiences by deeply exploring and describing their lived experiences in widowhood through listening to marriage histories, narratives about death of the spouses and observing their daily activities and reactions as they responded to the interview questions.

3.2 Study location and description

The study was conducted in Kabula Ward, Bumula constituency in Bungoma County which is situated in Western part of Kenya. Bungoma County covers an area of 3,953 square kilometers and has a population of 1,670,570 persons with 812,146 male and 858,389 female (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, (KNBS 2019). The county is composed of nine constituencies. The main mode of production for sustenance is agriculture, centering on crop farming and livestock production. The region is highly dominated by Bukusu and Batura ethnic group. Kabula ward covers an area of 41.8 Km² and is comprised of two sub-locations namely Kabula and Watoya. The ward is estimated to have a population of 20,704 persons with 9,982 males and 10,722 females (*Bungoma County Integrated Development plan BCID 2018-2022*). Documented data

from national level (KNBS) and county level (BCIDP) groups all women under the category of vulnerable and marginalized, without a clear distinction of their marital status. The area was also ideal for the study as it is known to have Bukusu as the most dominant ethnic group with many indigenous inheritance beliefs and practices that have remained intact and strictly adhered to across generations (Wekesa, 2015).

3.3 Target population

Target population is the set of elements that the researcher concentrates on in collecting information from (Bless, 2006). The target population for the study was widows from Kabula Ward. Women widowed for more than one year were considered for the study as the study assumed that one year is an adequate period for one to be able to explore a widow's lived experience. Location leaders, village elders, church elders, and social development officers were included in the study as key informants and were helpful in the identification of ideal participants for the study and highlighting widow's experiences in the community.

3.4 Unit of analysis and observation

Unit of analysis is the person, or object that is the target of investigation (Bhatacherjee, 2012) while the unit of observation refers to the item that a researcher observes while gathering information about the unit of analysis (Sheppard, 2020). The unit of analysis in this study was the lived experiences of widows while the unit of observation in this study was women who were at least one year widowed. The study also included; village elders, church elders, and social development officers in Kabula Ward.

3.5 Sampling and Sampling techniques

Sampling is the process of choosing several persons from a population such that the selected group contains elements that will be a representative of the characteristics of the study (Orodho and Kombo, 2002). The sampling strategies employed in the study were purposive and snowball sampling. Due to the nature of the study and the need to include diverse categories of widows, purposive sampling and snow ball sampling were used concurrently.

3.5.1 Purposive sampling

Purposive sampling, a technique that allows the researcher to select participants that have characteristics that the researcher desires was adopted (Sheppard, 2020). This allowed the researcher to select a variety of widows from a diverse background. A sample of 20 widows was purposively selected. Women widowed for more than one year were selected, with the youngest aged 28 years and the oldest 69 years. The researcher also purposively selected 6 key informants for the study who included the chief, assistant chief, religious leader, social development worker, village elder and a chair person of widows support group in the ward.

3.5.2 Snowball sampling

Due to the nature of the study snow ball sampling was also adopted. In this technique, a researcher begins by identifying a few participants that matches the description of the study, and then asks them to recommend others who meet the selection criteria (Bhatacherjee, 2012).

The researcher thus, asked the initial purposively selected widows and Key informants to assist in identifying other widows in the community who were then included in the interview. However, even though this referral system enabled the researcher to locate a considerable sample of the target population, participants were purposely selected in order to ensure diversity in age, religion, education, class, duration of widowhood among other local stratification structures. The process took place until saturation was attained.

3.6 Data collection methods and instruments

The study utilized both secondary and primary data sources to garner information about the study.

3.6.1 Secondary data

Secondary data collection involved analysis of published materials from a diverse source of documents such as journals, articles and other publications. The information obtained in this method was statistical data and literature review that identified issues related to widowhood such as challenges widows face, coping mechanisms and documented legislation on human rights.

3.6.2 In-depth interviews

As a research which takes the “lived experience” as the unit of analysis and exploration, the study employed interview a primary and a qualitative method of data collection that involves collecting information through face to face with a defined number of respondent. In depth interviews, were best suited for the study, as they provided a rich and deep understanding of how widows live.

The instrument for data collection was a semi-structured in-depth interview guide which had entailed open ended questions that allowed the participants to freely express their feelings, attitude and perception in widowhood. 20 widows were interviewed on their social, economic and psychological experiences, coping mechanisms employed, support accorded in widowhood and their knowledge on rights, laws and policies governing women particularly widows in Kenya. Basic demographic questions were also asked during the interview to determine participants, age, and religion, level of education, occupation and widowhood duration. During the interview process, the researcher audio recorded the conversation with a digital recorder and took down field notes on behaviors observed such as reactions, emotions and daily activities of the participants with their consent which was later transcribed for easy analysis. The interviews were conducted in Kiswahili and English language and they elicited insightful views from the participants on the subject under the study.

3.6.3 Key informant interviews

Key informants are individuals who are knowledgeable, willing to participate, communicative, impartial and have an understanding of a given issue that the researcher is studying (Marshall, 1996). The key informants included chiefs, religious leaders, village elders, social development workers and a chairperson of widow support groups. 6 key informants that is; a chief, a religious leader, an assistant chief, a village elder, a social development worker and a chairperson of widow support groups were interviewed. The key informants provided insights on the challenges that widows encounter in widowhood, form of support provided to widows and effectiveness of laws and policies in protecting widows’ rights. To achieve the objectives of the study the researcher used a semi structured key informant guide and sought consent from the participants

before conducting the interviews. The face to face interviews conducted in English and Kiswahili were audio recorded and later transcribed.

3.7 Data analysis and Data interpretation

In order to make the data collected meaningful data analysis was done. Kombo & Trumb, (2006) state that, data analysis is a process of examining data collected in a study while making conclusions and interpretations. It is in this context that thematic analysis an approach to analyzing qualitative data by categorizing patterns of themes in interview data was adopted.

The audio files were first named against participant's number. The audio recorded data from the interviews conducted was then translated and transcribed. Non-verbal responses and gestures observed from the participants were typed. The researcher read the transcripts and coded the data thereafter identifying and generating themes. Identification of supporting verbatim excerpts from participants to back up the findings, analysis and discussion was also done. Several statements from the participants were selected to provide clarity and support the themes identified. Textual data which involved demographic information of the participants was presented in descriptive form that included charts and percentages. Both textual and non textual data yielded the findings and recommendations of the study.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research provide guidelines to researchers as they conduct their research. To Akaranga & Ongong'a, (2013), ethics refers to "a way of life, social norms for conduct that differentiates between acceptable and unacceptable behavior". It is in this sense that the researcher sought a field work letter from Sociology and social work department at the University of Nairobi as well as authorization letter to collect data from the research body NACOSTI.

The researcher also considered the following ethics:

Informed consent: Prior to each interview, the researcher informed the participants about the study purpose, objectives and benefits. The researcher also sought participant's permission orally to participate in the study and informed them of their right to drop out of the study at any point they felt that they were not comfortable. The researcher collected data only from those widows who consented to participation.

Confidentiality: The researcher ensured that the identity of the participants was concealed by assigning codes to each participant. The information given by the participants was also treated with adequate level of confidentiality.

Covid-19 protocol: The researcher strictly adhered to Covid-19 guidelines established by the government by sanitizing, wearing masks and keeping social distance while interviewing participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of qualitative data collected from the study. The discussion of the findings is done in relation to available literature in order to identify similarities and differences between the current study and previous studies, and to build on those studies. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first part presents the demographic data of the participants in form of graphs and charts. The second part analyzes themes identified and uses excerpts from individual participants to support the analysis.

The proposed sample size for the study was 25 widows and 10 key informants. However, due to unavailability of some participants sampled for the study, only 20 widows were interviewed. This did not affect data collected as the sample falls within the acceptable size for qualitative analysis. The participants varied on several demographic traits such as age, religion, duration of widowhood, level of education and occupation.

The key informants interviewed for the study were 6. Initially, the researcher had anticipated to interview 5 key informants in each of Kabula Ward location (Kabula and Watoya). They included a chief, assistant chief, social development officer, village elder, chairperson of widows groups and a village elder. The researcher established that some of the key informants were based in one location (Kabula) which was the head office of the ward.

Data collection was done using in-depth interview guides for both widow participants and key informants. The researcher also obtained data from observation of widows' daily living activities, emotions and reactions towards widowhood status.

4.1 Demographic information of widows

The determine how each individual characteristics influenced widows experiences the study sought to gather demographic information on age, level of education, duration of widowhood, cause of spouse death and occupation of the participants.

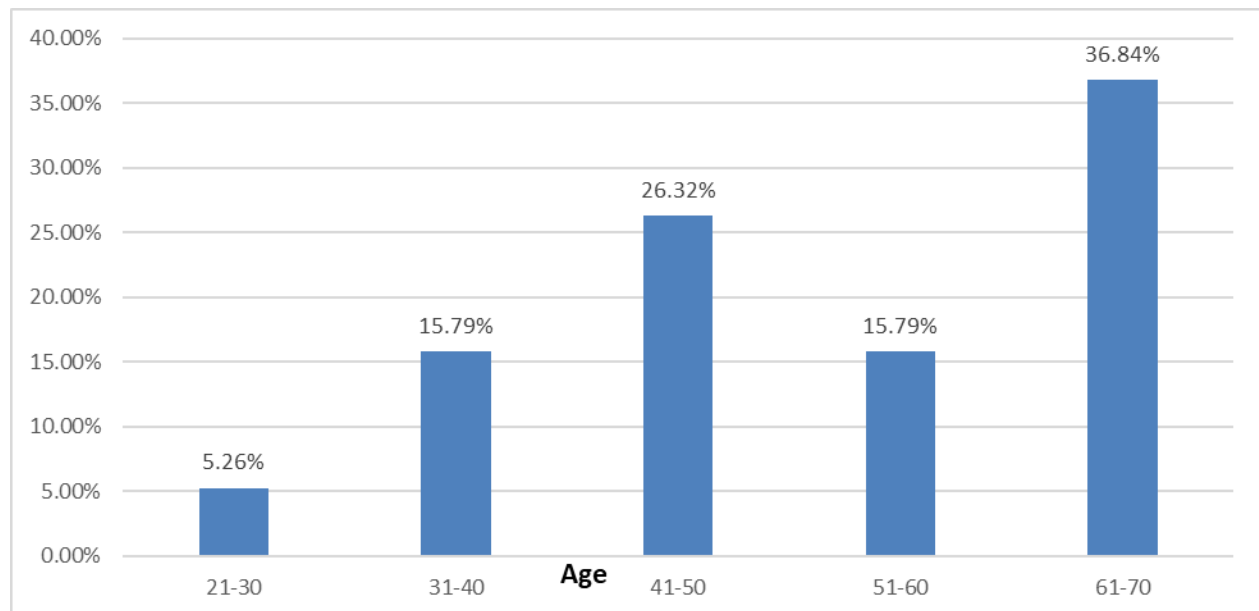
TABLE 4.1 Demographic information of the participants

RESPONDENT	AGE	LEVEL OF EDUCATION	CAUSE OF DEATH	DURATION OF WIDOWHOOD	OCCUPATION
1	45	Secondary School	Illness	5	Farmer
2	45	Primary school	Illness	11	Farmer
3	63	NIL	Illness	6	Farmer
4	69	Primary school	Illness	13	Farmer
5	50	NIL	Violence	3	Farmer
6	69	Primary school	Illness	20	Farmer
7	62	NIL	Illness	4	Farmer
8	45	Primary school	Illness	10	Farmer
9	56	NIL	Accident	12	Farmer
10	40	Primary school	Illness	2	Farmer
11	65	Primary school	Illness	20	Farmer
12	30	Secondary School	Illness	3	Farmer
13	65	College	Illness	15	Teacher
14	40	Primary school	Illness	5	Farmer
15	45	Primary school	Illness	5	Farmer
16	66	Primary school	Accident	8	Farmer
17	60	Secondary School	Violence	3	Farmer
18	62	Primary school	Accident	5	Farmer
19	38	College	Accident	3	Teacher
20	28	Secondary School	Violence	2	Farmer

4.1.1 Age of participants

Age is an important variable in examining widows' experiences because it gives us insights on gaps, advantages, and disadvantages that exist between younger and older widows. Figure 4.1.1 below indicates that widows bereaved at an older age (51-70) were at a higher percentage and constituted 11 (52.63%) of the participants interviewed. On the other hand, young widows (below 40 years) had the lowest percentage of 21.05 %. This comprised 4 of the total participants with the youngest being 28 years.

Figure 4.1.1: Age of participants



The study found that the number of older widows in the community was high as they were less likely to be remarried unlike their counter parts who were bereaved at a younger age. The elderly widows attributed this trend to being bereaved at an advanced age. They stated that they were not ready to assume responsibilities of new marriage like child bearing and wife duties. Some elderly participants also stated that their advanced age lowered their chances of attracting a spouse. They reported that majority of men in the community showed displeasure in elderly widows due to physical and biological changes associated with aging. The changes mentioned by the widows included; diminished sexual capacity, grey hair, skin wrinkles and being less active. To add on, some stated that remarriage was a sign of disrespect especially to widows whose sons were already married and residing in the same compound.

A 69-year-old widow stated that:

“Am already old and I don’t feel I have anything that would attract a man. More so, I feel there is no value that I am going to add to the newly married partner. The responsibilities that come with marriage are a lot and I am not ready to commit myself. Furthermore, getting a new husband with daughters’ in-law around is shameful and disrespectful.” (Widowed for 13 years, Kabula location)

One of the younger widows on the other hand stated that, most of the young widows in the community remarry for economic support, love, and companionship. This occurs in few months or years after death of a spouse. The sentiments were also echoed by a key informant. However, not all young widows remarry as some of them cited various reasons for not remarrying.

A younger widow stated that:

“When you get married, the expectations are that you will grow old with your husband. When death strikes suddenly, one is thrown in a world of confusion especially when having young children. To avoid many miseries, many young widows opt to get married so that they can have a support partner for social and economic gain. As for me, remarriage is not in my thoughts. The demands associated with marriage need commitment. For example, bearing children, and performing wife duties. I am taking this as a period to visualize how my children’s future will be.” (30 years old, widowed for 3 years).

Study findings indicate that participants’ age and gender intersects to produce varied experiences among the widows. To the elderly widows, physical and biological aspects of ageing coupled with gender to create negative experience. Some widows reported that they faced biasness due to ageing process. They felt like they were invisible creatures due to ageing, a condition where women experience loss of value on physical look, low libido, and limited functionality. To these widows, body changes made men lose interest in them.

On the contrary, it was noted that some of the participants, regardless of age, exhibited a positive experience in widowhood status. The widows cited freedom from obligatory duties assigned to wives by the marriage institution. The option to remain single gave them autonomy and liberty which acted as a form of power. Some of them used the socially acquired position to rise up to challenge widowhood myth of vulnerability.

4.1.2 Level of education

The study sought to establish widows' level of education. Participants were requested to state their level of education as follows; primary, secondary, college, and university. Figure 4.1.2 below shows these results.

Figure 4.1.2: Level of education

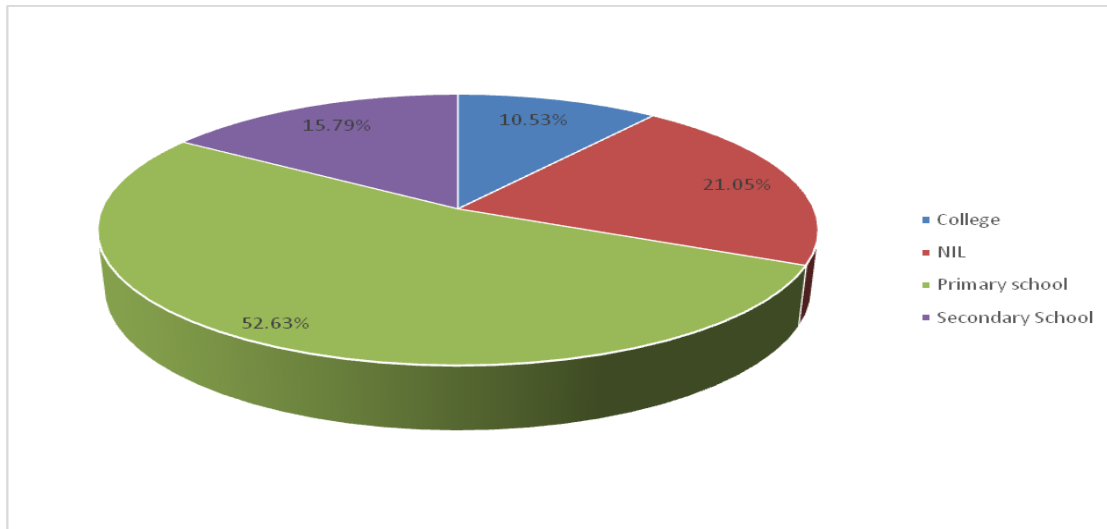


Figure 4.1.2 indicates that, 10 (52.63 %) of the participants attended primary school education. 4 (21.05%) did not go to school while 2 (10.53%) had college education. Of the 52.63% that had primary level of education, 6 (31.58%) did not complete primary schooling.

The study established that participants who did not have any level of schooling attributed the cause to parent's ignorance. Some of them stated that, their parents did not perceive education as an important aspect that enhanced an individual's wellbeing. This negatively affected their financial status, as they were not able to secure formal employment.

A 50-year-old participant who did not have any formal schooling stated that:

“My parents never took me to school as they claimed that education was not important. We learnt house chores and helped our parents on the farm. In current society, it is very difficult to get formal employment when you are not educated. I thus I ended up doing manual jobs on people's farms.”

Participants who had not completed primary and secondary level of education cited various factors such as family responsibilities, lack of school fees, early marriage, and early pregnancies as impediments to education access.

One widow stated that:

“I come from a family of 10 children. Being the eldest, I was expected to contribute to the welfare of the family by accompanying my parents to work on people’s farms. I thus dropped out of school to join my parents in fending for the family.” (45 years old, primary school dropout, Watoya location)

Another widow participant further noted that:

“I come from a poor background where my parents could not afford to pay school fees. One day I was sent home to collect money for exams, which my parents told me they didn’t have. I was forced to stay at home and since then I never set my feet back to school.” (45-year-old, secondary school dropout, Kabula location)

On the contrary, some uneducated widows were determined to educate their children despite lacking formal education. They stated that they worked hard and even sought other avenues for paying school fees such as bursaries. To them, education is an essential element to a good life.

One widow participant from Kabula location stated that:

“My parents could not afford to take me to school. I would not like the same to happen to my children. I work extra hard to ensure that they go to school. I engage in small-scale businesses and apply for bursaries to raise their school fees. With education one can get a job and have a good life.” (40 year old, uneducated)

On the other hand, few of the widows who had post-secondary education stated that they were grateful to enroll in higher institutions of learning. They cited that they were equipped with knowledge and skills, which enabled them to secure formal employment.

A 65-year-old retired teacher who had a College Diploma from Watoya location stated that:

“After my secondary school education, I enrolled at a teachers’ training college then later employed as a primary school teacher. I have worked for over 30 years but retired a few years back and currently earning my pension. I use the little cash I get for upkeep as well as investing around my homestead”.

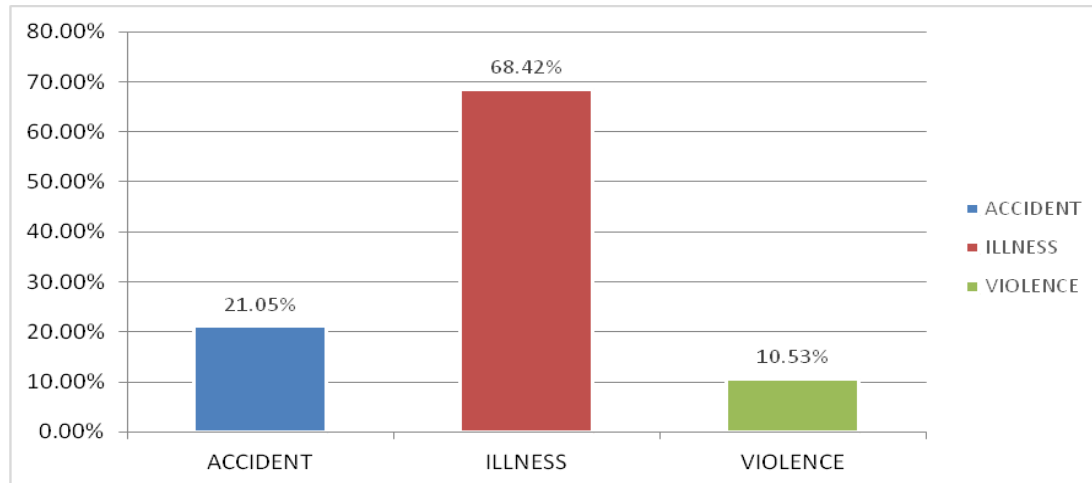
The research noted that most of the widows in the community equated wellbeing to high level of education, formal employment, and high financial income. Participants with high level of education cited good financial returns, which enabled them access basic needs, while participants with low education cited difficulty in accessing basic needs due to low income. However, some widows with low education had put extra effort to ensure their children go to school with the notion that they would get good jobs. Through observation, some were able to supplement their income by cultivating crops around their homesteads and engaging in small- scale business to raise school fees. Others were applying for bursaries for their children education. Hence, lack of education is not an impediment to having a good life but a motivational factor.

The findings of the study imply that participant’s level of education somehow influenced economic wellbeing. To the educated widows, formal education acted as a source of power, which improved their financial status because they had formal employment, in addition to their small-scale farming and other businesses. While some widows with low education cited difficulty in fending for their families, observation revealed that few adopted various strategies to ensure their children received education. Their strength lied in cultivating land probably inherited from their late husbands, exploring bursaries and engaging in other small-scale businesses.

4.1.3 Cause of spouse death

Participants were asked to state the cause of the death of spouse (Figure 4.1.3). This was crucial to understanding their emotions and reactions towards the loss of a spouse.

Figure 4.1.3: Cause of spouse death



As shown in Figure, 4.1.3 responses obtained established that the common cause of spouse death was illness. This comprised 14 (68.42%) of the participants while 4 (21.05%) of the participants mentioned accident as the cause of death. 2 (10.53%) pointed out violence as cause of death which emanated from conflict between the spouse and friends while on a drinking spree.

The findings of the study established that participants whose spouses had died as a result of illness experienced financial constraints. 8 (39.10%) of the participants stated that they had spent a lot of money and even sold off property to pay for treatment which reduced their financial capacity. The long duration of treating the ailing spouse exhausted family finances. They claimed that they somehow felt relieved of the burden of care for the sick spouse, which was financially very demanding.

A widow bereaved because of sickness stated that:

“My husband was admitted at Bungoma referral hospital due to sickness. His condition had deteriorated as he could neither eat nor walk. Due to long stay in hospital, we spent a lot. Furthermore, I had spent 3 months checking on him at the hospital, which was too demanding. I ended up selling a piece of land to cater for the bills but he eventually died.” (66 years old, with no education)

Participants whose spouses had died as a result of accident and violence stated that they were deeply shocked after receiving phone calls informing them of their husbands' demise. 26.87% stated that, they were in denial at first upon receiving the news of the demise, a state that culminated to stress.

A widow bereaved as a result of an accident stated that:

“My husband used to work in sugarcane farms and he assisted in transporting harvested sugarcane to factories. I received a phone call one morning after he failed to return home that he was involved in an accident and died. I could not believe it. It was the worst news ever as it happened too soon.” (38 years old, with 3 children)

The circumstances under which the spouse died had an impact on the psychological and economic aspect of widow's lives. Widows who reported to have spent their savings and even sold off their land for their spouses' treatment stated that they were limited financially. Some felt a sigh of relief from the burden of taking care of sick spouse for a long time, which drained them emotionally and physically. Participants also expressed varying degrees of emotions: some stated they were in denial and confused, others were shocked and stressed which meant they were psychologically affected.

4.1.4 Duration of widowhood

In an attempt to understand various experiences of widows in the community, the researcher sought to find out how long the participants had been widowed. The findings are presented in Figure 4.1.4.

Figure 4.1.4: Duration of widowhood

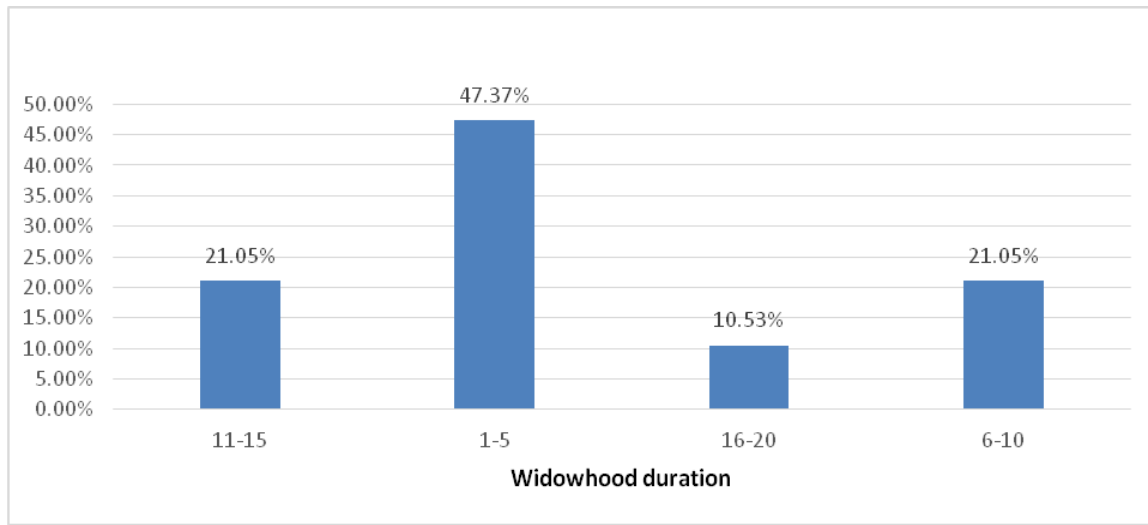


Figure 4.1.4 shows that the duration of widowhood varied among widows. Of the 20 participants sampled, 10(47.37%) revealed that they were widowed for a period of 1- 5 years. 4 (21.05%) were widowed between 6-10 years while 4 (21.05%) were widowed for 11-15 years. The longest duration was represented by 2 participants with a span of 16-20 years.

Participants widowed for a long period expressed less emotions and exhibited some form of adjustment and resilience in their status. They stated that they were able to adopt various strategies to cope with challenges encountered.

A 56-year-old participant, widowed for 12 years narrated that:

“My husband left me with 6 children. As we speak, I have raised my child single handedly and I am glad I am at this stage where 5 of the children are fending for themselves. It was hard at first but as time went by I learnt how to live with the situation. I am having one in secondary school that I am paying schools fees for. I have learnt how to manage through farming, rearing chicken and engaging in merry go round networks”.

On the contrary, participants widowed for shorter duration expressed grief, sadness and overwhelmed by responsibilities. However, these eased as the duration increased as they cited receiving support and learning how to cope with the situation.

A more recently widowed younger participant stated that:

“Life has not been easy since my husband died. His death was so sudden and I always feel like he left too early leaving me with the burden of taking care of 3 children. I have to ensure that they get education. Sometimes I give up when I lack basic needs and when I think about him I get stressed. It’s lonely and cumbersome at the same time.” (30 year old, widowed for 3 years).

Analysis of the findings establishes that widows exhibit varying experiences in relation to duration of widowhood. The research identified that widowhood duration determined social, economic, and psychological experiences of widows. All widows experienced psychological difficulty regardless of age during the first years of bereavement. Socially, widows bereaved for a short duration alluded to receiving support although the help varied with needs. Economically, all widows narrated that they faced challenges initially but they were adopting various strategies to assist them in providing for their families.

4.1.5 Occupation

The study sought and obtained details about the occupation of the participants for understanding its role in shaping the experiences of widows. The results of the findings are as shown in Figure 4.1.5

Figure 4.1.5: Occupation

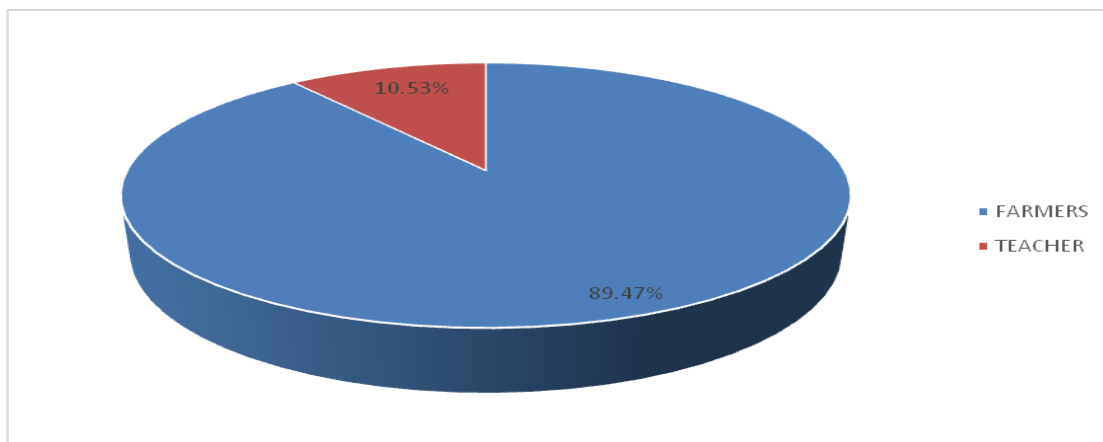


Figure 4.1.5 indicates that 18 (89.47%) of the sample population were farmers while 2 (10.53%) of the participants were teachers.

The findings of the study established that, most of the participants (89.47%) of sample engaged in farming activities. The widows were employed occasionally to work on other peoples' farms. Majority of them claimed that they engaged in menial jobs, which did not bring in sufficient income to cater for all household needs.

One unemployed widow stated that:

“I wake up early in the morning to go out and look for casual jobs on peoples' farms. The pay is usually little like Kshs150-Kshs. 200 depending on the season. Planting season is always the lowest. Sometimes you may even miss the opportunity as the farm owner may claim the number of workers on the farm is enough for the day. This makes me feel like if given a chance I might go back to school, read hard and then secure formal employment or start a business so that I earn good money to sustain me.” (40 year old, uneducated farmer).

The other 10.53% of widows were primary school teachers. They stated that though they had a monthly salary, it was not sufficient to cater for other needs such as paying school fees. However, they supplemented their salary with other income generating activities such as selling produce from crop cultivation and livestock rearing in order to meet their needs.

A 38- year- old employed primary school teacher reported that:

“Being a teacher in this community carries a high social status as people have great respect for you. The pay however is low compared to other formal jobs but I count myself lucky. I am able to sustain my basic needs but also engage in with other small businesses so that am able to pay my children school fees”.

A previously employed widow stated that:

“I have been working as a teacher and am glad the little I got while working was utilized in the best way possible. The pension am earning at the moment is worth sustaining me. I also have an advantage that my child an adult now is employed.” (65 year old, retired primary school teacher)

Most uneducated widows mentioned lack of education as a factor that inhibited ease of access to resources. The widows claimed that this denied them an opportunity to be in the formal sector. To them, formal employment meant high financial returns and good life. On the other hand, the employed ones argued that the salary earned was not sufficient to cater for all needs. It was however noted that, regardless of the type of employment of the participants, they engaged in other forms of economic activities to earn extra income for the wellbeing of their families. The research concluded that education determined the type of occupation of the participants and this in turn influenced their income level.

In summarizing this section, it is clear that employing an intersectional perspective allows us to understand the experiences of widows through interrelations of multiple axes of differentiation. The study found that widows had advantages and disadvantages as a result of the intersection of their age, education, occupation, duration of widowhood and circumstances under which the spouse died. For instance, the study establishes that age influences social life of widows. Some young widows remarry for security and financial purposes unlike older ones. Others opt to maintain singlehood life due to reduced family responsibilities and cited freedom and autonomy in their lives.

Level of education determined the type of occupation of the participants hence influencing the economic experiences of the widows. Widows with higher level of education and employed cited good financial returns while widows with no education cited lack of formal employment hence low returns. However, through observation, it was established that they were engaging in other activities to supplement their income. Furthermore, psychological aspects of the widow's lives were influenced by cause of death and duration in widowhood. The longer the duration in widowhood the lesser the emotions expressed and vice versa.

The findings hence deconstruct the extended notion of homogeneity in widowhood experiences by identifying factors that influence their experiences and how they interlink to create positive and negative experiences. The study's demographic results are in agreement with Ogweno (2010) study in Kibera and Wang (2019) study in China which revealed that, several factors such as age, duration of widowhood, and finances varied widow's experiences.

4.2 Social, economic, and psychological experiences of widows

The researcher sought to identify various social, economic, and psychological aspects that together create the experiences of widows in the community.

4.2.1 Social experiences of widows

The findings of the study identified wife inheritance, mourning rituals, stigmatization and isolation, as social experiences of the participants.

4.2.1.1 Wife inheritance

Wife inheritance, a practice of remarrying a widow to her husband's elder or younger brother is commonly embraced in many African countries. In Kenya, the practice of wife inheritance and widow cleansing is common in western parts of the country. Some of the participants revealed that they opted for wife inheritance because they were young and unprepared for family responsibilities left behind by their late husbands. They hence engaged in this practice for security and material/financial support.

One widow stated that:

“After my first husband died, I had to wait for 40 days before making a decision on whether I would get remarried. I therefore agreed to be married to his younger brother through the intervention of my family, community elders and my late husband's family. I was young by then (24 years) and all I wanted was provision for my children and companionship as I thought I would not manage alone. Unfortunately, he also died years later.” (45 year old with no education)

One key informant echoed the sentiment by stating that, most young widows engaged in the practice for their children support. Some unions however did not last as the “new husband” controlled and manipulated them. They ended up losing property and eventually evicted from their homes.

A male key informant reported that:

“Widow's age has been a determinant factor for widow's remarriage in the community. Most remarried widows are young. They have however lost their

property especially land to the so called “husbands” as they seek for protection and security. Being a patriarchal society, men have authority over property hence they take the opportunity to transfer the ownership of the property to their name which renders the widow poor.” (54 years old, Local Chief, Kabula location).

On the other hand, some participants stated that they were not ready to engage in the practice due to various reasons. Some argued that they were embedded in Christian values, which do not support the practice while others claimed that their age was way advanced to cope with demands of a new marriage.

A 69 year old participant, widowed at 56 years stated that:

“If you look at me right now there is nothing attractive due to ageing. Most men want young women who are energetic enough to meet their demands. As for me, the age is far much gone I can’t bear a child at my age which most men want”.

Another 63 year old participant, widowed at 57 years added on that:

“I don’t want to be involved in new responsibilities of taking care of another man as at now. The responsibilities I had with my husband were enough”.

A male village elder echoed this by stating:

“The elderly widows opt to focus on wellbeing of their families rather than getting married again. Their age also plays a role for them not indulging in wife inheritance as they feel that it’s a burden and also there is no value they are going to add to the newly married partner”.(62 year old, Remwa village-Watoya location)

A 62 year old widow pointed out that:

“Since the introduction of modern religion in this region, most traditional practices have been fading away. I am a staunch member of a Pentecostal church (PEFA) and my religion does not support cultural practices such as

widow inheritance. I therefore did not engage in the practice due to the values and beliefs of my church”.(uneducated with 5 children)

Study findings show that participants who engaged in wife inheritance were young widows who were seeking support in taking care of their children. According to the study, a close member of the husband’s family, preferably the brother would inherit her and assume the roles played by the deceased husband. This finding confirms the results of Simiyu (2005) and Owiti (2015) study in Western Kenya, which argued that, wife inheritance, is an institution of care hence widows opt to engage in the practice for family support and maintenance.

Although it is evident that levirate marriages are in the community, the study adds new insights to the literature by revealing that the practice is not compulsory. The study identified factors such as age, faith, and economic status as influencing widow inheritance. Some of the widows reported that they did not engage in the practice due to their strong Christian beliefs. Others stated that high cost accompanying the rituals rendered many widows impoverished.

These results imply that age, income, culture, and religion interrelate to construct the experiences faced by both younger and elderly widows. Some young widows not only engaged in widow inheritance to fulfill cultural traditions but also for security and financial gain. This acted as a form of liberation from the struggle of family responsibilities. To other widows, religion and expected family roles superseded the cultural traditions, as they believed that the traditions were meant to marginalize women. Inheritance norms were accompanied by discriminative demands, which entailed sharing property with the “new” spouse, which some widows preferred to shun.

4.2.1.2 Mourning rituals

In many African societies, various rituals and traditions are conducted upon death of an individual. The findings of the study established that widows are expected to perform some rituals with the aim of breaking off the ties of spirit between the living and the dead and to signify a new beginning. Some of the participants stated that the rituals involved demolishing houses, bathing in the river and washing husband’s clothes at the nearby river to cut off any association with the departed.

One participant noted that:

“One of the rituals I was to participate in was to demolish the house that my husband and I used to live in order to let him out of the house. For the ritual to be performed, I was expected to buy a cow and slaughter it as well as prepare traditional beer (Busaa) to appease gods. The cost was a bit expensive for me so I decided that I was not going to slaughter the cow but I decided to demolish the house on my own.” (50-year-old poor widow, no education)

The research however noted that in spite of the rituals being part of the mourning process, some widows did not engage in the practices as they had strongly embraced Christian teachings as one participant stated:

“According to our culture, I was expected to shave my hair, take a bath in the river and wash my husband’s clothes at the river to cleanse his spirit off me. I however did not engage in the ritual because I am a Christian and we view such rituals to be somehow outdated. He also died before paying my dowry hence my family said I will not engage in any rituals or traditions.” (50 year old widow, no education).

Several studies have established that widowhood rites in Africa were established for the wellbeing of widows. Tasié’s (2013) research in South Africa stated that some elements of the rituals are meant to instill courage and resilience to widow after death of a spouse. This is in agreement with the study, which establishes that rituals signify a new beginning to the widow. On the other hand, the rituals had a negative impact to the widows socially, economically and psychologically. Some rituals were economically expensive like slaughtering a cow and demolishing a house which reduced the financial capacity of widows.

Similarly, some scholars have indicated that mourning rituals are discriminatory in nature. To them, mourning rituals are a gendered experience as it applies only to women and tends to jeopardize human dignity. For example, Djuikom & Walle’s (2018) study on widow’s experiences in sub-Saharan Africa stated that widows are subjected to ‘dehumanizing’ traditional mourning ritual practices like bathing in the river in presence of other women who accompany

her. The study resonates with the findings as it revealed that the rituals are particularly meant for women and this influenced their emotional stability. Unlike other parts of Africa, such as Nigeria where Ajiboye (2016) found that these rituals were compulsory, this study found that many widows did not engage in the rituals due to Christianity and modernization.

Religion, culture, and economic factors influence widow's participation in mourning practices. For example, the more an individual was tied to religion the less likelihood they would engage in the ritual. For those who were willing to engage in the practice, cost was an influencing factor. Some rituals demanded a lot of cash which some would forego and engage in less costly rituals such as head shaving. Others engaged in the practice in order to comply with the expected cultural traditions and avoid issues such as nightmares.

4.2.1.3 Stigmatization and isolation

Participants' especially younger ones reported to have faced stigmatization from community members. 2 of the participants claimed that they were not free to hold conversations and mingle with other community members, especially men. They were described by other women as potential snatchers of other women's husbands hence stigmatization led to isolation. Some excluded themselves from participating in public events while others decided to avoid communal events due to such experiences.

A 30 year-old widow with 2 children stated that:

“Sometimes I fear attending social gatherings or even having a walk around. Any conversation I may have with a man does not sit well with the women in the community. They always think that I want to snatch their husbands from them. I can tell it from their reactions”.

On the contrary, it was ascertained that not all young widows had this experience. A few widows reported having received social support from family, friends and neighbors during their grieving period and after.

A 38 year old widowed for 3 years narrated that:

“I had a very difficult moment when I lost my spouse. We were married for four years by the time of his death. We were still a young family with great ambitions and envisioned a bright future together. His death affected me but I am grateful I received emotional and financial support from my family, friends, neighbours and more so encouragement from fellow widows”.

On the other hand, some older widows were treated with respect. Some were privileged to secure leadership positions in the community such as, mentoring and guiding other women in the community due to their commitment and resilience in marriage. Their time availability due to reduced family responsibilities was also a factor considered in appointing them as leaders. Others were encouraged to take positions previously held by their husbands.

A male village elder who was a key informant stated that:

“Elderly widows earn respect in the community. They are viewed as role models to the younger generation both in church and in the community. This is due to the endurance they have signified in their marriage tenure and also in widowhood. Some are given leadership roles in church and in the community, while others succeed their spouses leadership duties particularly community leadership.”(62 year old, Remwa village-Watoya location)

The findings of the study show that widowhood status has an impact in social life. A number of young widows impacted negatively stated that isolation denied them freedom to interact with other members especially in social networks thus instilling a feeling of imprisonment in their own communities. According to Lindiwe (2015) and Mwangi (2014), most widows experience stigmatization and isolation. The study findings override their results by revealing that the circumstances that lead to stigmatization varies. In their findings, stigmatization is associated with non-compliance to mourning practices associated with widowhood such as refusal to engage in widow cleansing while this study only identified the label “husband snatcher” as the cause of stigmatization leading to isolation.

These experiences however, did not apply to all widows. Some older widows reported to use the status to impact the lives of other women (both widows and non-widowed) positively through mentorship and guidance. Some younger widows reported to have received support in their widowhood.

The research hence establishes that despite women being marginalized in the community they actually do have power, which can be exploited to create a positive impact. Their resilience, experience and availability can be tapped to empower and transform other members of the society through mentorship and guidance.

4.2.2 Economic Experiences of Widows

Most research indicates that, widows face a lot of economic challenges. These include; poverty, financial stress, and deprivation of matrimonial resources((Chapoto et al., 2011; Khan, 2018; Magoke-Mhoja's, 2006; Walle, 2013) The findings of the study reveal that majority of Kabula ward widows experienced economic difficulties in provision of basic needs and acquisition of property such as land.

4.2.2.1 Basic needs provision

The research identified that patriarchal mode of production was the order in the community. It was ascertained that household labour was gendered such that certain tasks were performed by men and others by women. For instance, house chores were done by women while men were the bread winners and providers. Family responsibilities were shared amongst partners hence loss of a spouse meant that widows took additional household roles in the household. Some women mentioned challenges in providing basic needs which was attributed to high dependence on their spouse for family needs such as food, school fees, clothing and proper shelter.

A widow narrated that:

“Life was easy when my husband was alive as he used to provide for most needs in the family. Since his death, I have had to solely provide for my family. My biggest concern is paying school fees for my children who are in secondary

school. The school fee is too high, which is a challenge to afford.” (45- year-old, unemployed, no education).

Lack of formal schooling was also identified as a contributing factor to lack of basic need as majority of them cited that they never got an opportunity to be educated. 89.47% (18) of the widows stated that they were “not employed” due to lack of education hence did not have professional skills and knowledge to work in formal sectors. To them, education determined good life as an educated and employed person is guaranteed of monthly salary and hence is able to provide for their families.

One widow pointed out that:

“My parents never took me to school and you know in this country when you are not educated you can’t get a job. People who have full time jobs have a salary but for us we are engaged in menial jobs. The jobs are seasonal for instance weeding and harvesting. What we earn is not sufficient to cater for obvious basic needs for our children.” (40 years old, no education, unemployed)

In spite of the challenges widows encounter in life, a key informant noted that there was improvement in some households after husband’s death. In such households, the deceased husbands had control over land and other properties. For example, they dictated whether to sell, farm or lease out land and would be in control of money collected. They would spend the money on alcohol in total disregard of their expected family obligations. Such actions propagated domestic violence, financial and psychological distress for wives. Such male behavior also pushed women to take up extra family responsibilities. To such widows, death of spouse enhanced social freedom and economic development.

One key informant stated that:

“We have witnessed a difference especially in families where the husband was a drunkard. After the man dies the woman gains independence and authority over property. Widows in these families have been able to utilize properties such as land left by the spouses without restrictions. They have been able to farm, provide for their families to an extent of having surplus for sale. This is

evident as some have built good houses and educated their kids without much struggle as they have freedom to do anything they feel is good for their family.” (45 year old, male, social development officer).

It is evident from the study that some widows feared extra family responsibilities. This is attributed to the customary idea that men are breadwinners and the women’s role is to take care of the children and maintain the household. Gender differences in marriage are also noticed in the community as most of the women were dependent on their husbands. Male domination lowered women independence to explore in the non-domestic sphere, which in turn rendered them weak.

According to Global women’s report (2015), loss of a spouse renders many widows poor, as they are generally uneducated, married at a tender age, and uninformed of their rights. While most of the data agrees with this report, this study also finds that widowhood period can be an enlightening period. For some widows, widowhood enhanced their freedom in decision making in social and economic spheres. This improved their social and financial status. This was observed in some widows homesteads where they engaged in crop cultivation, rearing animals, had their children educated and lived in well-structured houses.

4.2.2.2 Property inheritance

In many countries, widows face challenges of property inheritance Platteau & Baland (2000), Findings of the study established that some widows had difficulty in accessing property left by their spouses due to customary practices. The study, for example, found that bride wealth influenced property inheritance. Some widows were denied opportunity to inherit property because their husbands had not paid bride wealth and they were, therefore, not recognized as bonafide wives.

One widow stated that:

“My husband had not paid bride wealth for me. According to our culture, bride wealth is proof of customary marriage. The customary law thus could not recognize me as his wife in spite of us being married for years and having

children with him. I was thus not entitled to inherit his property.” (60 - year-old, no education)

The study also found the persistence of the preference of male children in property inheritance. Male children are traditionally permanent residents in the community while female children are expected to grow of age and be married off to other families or communities. This argument qualifies sons to inherit property from their parents while daughters inherit from their husbands when they marry. The customary law hence played a role in property inheritance.

A 50-year-old widow with 5 male children narrated that:

“ I had a very good relationship with the first and second husband. I was blessed with 9 children from both marriages with 5 being boys. The first husband left me with a piece of land which was a quarter of an acre while the second one left me with an acre of land for their son’s inheritance. I currently cultivate part of the land and sell produce for their upkeep and education. I have already slotted a portion to the sons who are married as I wait for the younger ones to grow older so that I can allocate them their portion. Daughters are not accustomed to inherit land as they are married off to other families”.

The customary laws in the community appeared to be a double-edged sword as it acted in favor of some widows and disfavored others. While some widows inherited their husband’s property others were denied the rights to inheritance by in-laws on claims that she was a stranger in the compound. Other participants stated that their in- laws initiated the process of evicting them from their matrimonial property so that they could possess their “brothers” property.

“I have been in constant conflict with my in-laws as they wanted me to move out of their homestead and possess the house and land that my husband left me with. I reported the matter to the community elders but they said it was a family matter to be solved by the two families. That is, my late husband’s family and my family. I have never settled since then.” (62 year old widow with 5 children; 3 male and 2 female)

The findings also suggest that education and statutory law was a major contributing factor to widow's acquiring property. In this study, property inheritance was linked to level of education attained by participants. A few participants who were educated and were aware of the existence of the law had used it to secure their husbands properties.

A 65-year-old, retired teacher with one male child narrated that:

“My relatives wanted me to take all the property that we had worked for with my husband. He was a military man and we were blessed with two children. Unfortunately, one died and I was left with one. The relatives claimed that the wealth was too much to be left to a widow with one child. I went to court to fight for my rights and justice was granted. I finally own the land and other properties like house”.

In most African communities, land is regarded as the most essential property as it gives a sense of identity to individuals. The patriarchal structure of family qualifies this as the property passed on to sons across generations. Several research reports indicate that, widows encounter unequal inheritance rights where some are stripped of their land, evicted from their matrimonial home and denied access to bank accounts by their husband's relatives subjecting them to poverty (World widows report, 2018; Khan, 2018 & Walle, 2013). These studies concur with the findings of the study which identified that most widows are denied the opportunity to inherit their husband's property. Majority of the widows narrated the existence of customary laws dictating property inheritance, especially land. All these events happen amidst presence of a gender responsive legal framework “The Matrimonial Property Act (2013) which was introduced to safeguard the rights of women in relation to securing property.

Using gender and power approach, it can be noted that there are gender differences in relation to roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women in family structures particularly on property control. This means gender influences how power is distributed in institutions. Many African societies are embedded on patriarchal structure of gender relations where men are placed in authority over women resulting to inequality. Similarly, it was noted that men in Kabula ward, have authority and control of ownership over property, in this case land. The study however notes that despite women being termed as marginalized and vulnerable individuals they have an

opportunity to use customary laws, education and statutory laws to their advantage in relation to property possession.

4.2.3 Psychological Experiences

Many studies on widowhood across the world have depicted that widow's experience a difficult moment psychologically compared to married women and male counterparts (Mburugu, 2018; Lindiwe, 2018). The psychological challenges highlighted by scholars include; trauma, depression, loneliness, anxiety, emotions.

This study established that widows faced various psychological challenges such as disbelief, confusion, low self-esteem, shock, stress, loneliness, and anxiety. Some widow participants indicated that they were in denial and in disbelief upon receiving news spouse death particularly sudden deaths. One widow's reaction expression is as follows:

"I just received a phone call early in the evening informing me that my husband had passed on. I was confused and couldn't believe it because he was very healthy and no signs of sickness could be seen. He had just left in the morning for his usual daily errands. I was informed that he got an accident on his way back home." (38 years, widowed for 3 years)

Another widow participant reported that:

"I was called by a nurse to go to the hospital where my husband was admitted. I really wondered why the call was made because I had visited him a few hours earlier. Upon arrival I was taken to the morgue. Seeing his cold body lying on slab left me dumbfounded, confused and I started wailing." (40 years, widowed for 2 years.

Another widow narrated that:

"It's been 8 years since my husband passed on. We had a good relationship and had very precious moments together. I am lonely. His absence really affects me. When I attend burials I always imagine him lying in the casket and I weep but in the process I shed tears for my beloved husband. I have adopted this as a strategy to relieve my emotions." (66 years old, widowed for 8 years)

Some participants reported that despite being in a rocky relationship with the late spouse they were negatively impacted by the loss however they expressed lower levels of stress and anxiety compared to widows who had good relationships with their spouses in marriage.

A widow who said narrated this:

“My husband was a drunkard; he used to beat me forcing me to seek shelter elsewhere. I couldn’t bear that kind of life hence I decided to move out. I was affected physically and psychologically. We were separated at the time of his death. I felt sad on learning of his demise but I don’t regret being single and a widow.” (45 year old, widowed 5 years)

Nevertheless, widows overcame grief as time passed by at varying pace. They claimed that this was a result of support they received social support networks such as family, church and self-help groups.

A widow reported that:

“The most difficult part for all widows is during and after the funeral. Everyone leaves and you’re left alone. You have to learn how to persevere. Somehow we learn how to adjust by adopting various strategies that enhance our survival.” (45 year old widowed for 5 years)

Many widows reported that death of their husband caused stress and loneliness as they had lost a companion regardless of the quality of relationship they had before death. They felt a huge gap left by the spouse and the thought of losing someone they once shared life with took a toll on them. The study findings resonate with Muthangya’s (2020) study in Nakuru County which found that, widows experienced grief effects such as shock and disbelief, confusion, and aggression upon learning of spouse demise. This study however noted that the challenges differed with magnitude of emotions expressed by the participants and were influenced by factors such as circumstances of death, duration of widowhood and relationship with the husband prior to death. For instance, widows bereaved at an older age and for a longer duration (6 years and above) reported improved emotions like lower levels of stress and expressed resilience in handling family matters. On the contrary, young and recently widowed participants (below 5

years) reported higher levels of stress, loneliness and anxiety as they were not emotionally prepared to cope with the loss and taking additional family roles.

4.3 Informal social support networks as coping mechanism

The study focused on identifying the effectiveness of informal social support systems in Kabula Ward. The study identified church, family and self help groups as social support systems and strategies that widows adopted as coping mechanisms.

4.4.1 The Church

The role of religion as a social institution is to provide comfort and solace to individuals during times of personal and social crises such as death of loved ones. All participants were Christians of different denominations that offered emotional and spiritual support to their members. This helped widows cope with grief.

A widow who narrated that expressed these sentiments:

“The church really supported me when my husband died. They were involved in burial preparations and offered me comfort when I was at my lowest”. She added on that..... “The church organizes weekly meeting for women regardless of whether you are widowed or not where we gather and pray for each other. It is through prayers that I am able to push on with life even when circumstances are hard in life hence I find solace in church.” (66 year old, Roman Catholic).

Widows also engaged in church activities such as participating in prayer meetings, church choir, visitations and cleaning church premises as strategies to cope with grief and loneliness. The church on the other hand provided messages of hope through prayer and teachings that encouraged widows to endure tough times. The interaction with other church members reduced loneliness.

A female key informant stated that:

“Widows engage in different church activities such as cleaning the compound, singing in choir, and attending weekly devotion programs. This engagement supports and improves their emotional stability as they interact with others

and share their experiences.”(A 60 year old, church elder, Anglican Church of Kenya)

Widows’ especially elderly ones engaged more in church activities unlike when the spouse was alive due to lesser responsibilities and more independence.

A male key informant pointed that:

“The church has been a pillar in supporting the bereaved. For the past 15 years I have served here, I have had widows as the most dedicated members of the church than married counterparts. Through interaction, some have stated that their household roles had reduced and furthermore they didn’t have anyone to report to at home unlike married women. Some of them confess that they find it easier to overcome stress and thoughts when in church than at home.” (55 year old, Bishop, New life ministries)

The church also demonstrated its support to the widows by providing material aid to widows. The participants reported that, they received foodstuffs and clothes from church member.

One widow and a key informant reported that:

“As a leader in my church and widows group, we mobilize members to contribute food stuffs and clothes and then organize a visit to widows. A visit is done at least once in every month to one of the widow member. The church members contribute food and clothes and task few church elders to widow’s homes to assess their situation. They distribute the items to them depending with the need identified and offer emotional support through prayers and encouragement.”(62 year old, Chairlady, church widows group)

One key informant had this to say:

“The church has really contributed towards the wellbeing of the widows in the community. The office of the chief collaborates with the church annually in holding a seminar to create awareness and enlighten widows on how to

overcome some of the challenges they face. Through this, we have seen some improvement in livelihood for some of the widow.” (Male, Chief, Kabula ward)

The Church institution has played a great role in supporting widows in the community by offering emotional, spiritual, and material aid to widows. The findings of the study also reveal that most widows adopt strategies such as turning to God for strength and comfort and by participating in church activities to reduce loneliness through interaction. The engagement increased with loss of spouse. Older widows were more devoted to church than younger ones. Most of the elderly widows stated they engaged in church activities due to fewer domestic responsibilities. For younger widows, involvement in church was minimal as they reported handling household tasks such as taking care of children, which limited their time from engaging in social activities. Despite church offering support to widows, the help is focusing more on spiritual nourishment neglecting other aspects of life. The church leaders affirmed that the support is not holistic due to limitation of finances hence unsustainable.

4.4.2 Family and extended kin

The study identified immediate, secondary and extended kin as family members who offered emotional and financial support to widows. The type and quality of support however, depended on the relationship between the widow and the family members. Some participants stated they had good and close relationship with family specifically the in-laws whose support was highly valued. Other participants reported they had ‘sour’ relations with their in-laws thus did not receive support from the in laws.

One widow who received support reported that:

“When I got married, my husband’s parents were already dead but his brothers (my in laws) were living in the same compound with their wives. When he died, I received emotional support from them and other relatives as they walked with me through the journey. I also received basic needs support for sometime before I could stabilize. Many years have passed and I still live here with them. I have never witnessed any form of harassment nor violence from them.” (66 year old, widowed for 8 years).

Widow inheritance was also viewed as a form of support in the community. Levirate marriages were adopted with the purpose of retaining the husband's wealth and financial support to the children. According to the view of one participant who was previously inherited, the practice ensured that her children were taken care of and she was able to secure her husband's property. The participant who is currently a widow stated that:

“After my first husband died, I was inherited by his brother with the aim that my husband's property is maintained in the homestead and the children are well taken care of.” (65-year-old).

On the other hand, some participants revealed that although they had good relationship with family when spouse was alive, the relationship took a different turn after spouse death. They claimed they faced eviction from their matrimonial homes by their in-laws.

A 62 year old, widowed for 5 years who narrated that:

“I had a good relationship with my husband. We were able to provide for the family as we shared responsibilities. We received support from family members. This however, changed when he died as I was chased out of my husband's land by my relatives and I had to go back to my natal home with my children.”

The study established that immediate family members offered relentless financial and emotional support to widows. The support offered included; moral support, frequent home visits and guardianship. On the other hand, support offered by secondary kin was dependent on quality of relationship with the widow. For widows who had conflicts with their in-laws reported to have received either minimal or no support at all. Some were even evicted from their matrimonial home.

4.4.3 Self help groups

Self-help groups are informal groups of people formed to address common issues, for social support and improve living standards. Merry go round, famously known as “chama” a Swahili word meaning an association or a club, is the most form of social network adopted by local communities for empowerment. Chama is a model that brings individuals together, mostly

women, who meet occasionally either on a weekly or monthly basis to contribute and give out funds on a rotational basis (Kinyanjui, 2014).

The study found there were various “chamas” in the community initiated by widows to create an atmosphere where they can meet, interact, advice, encourage one another, and boost finances. The groups differed in frequency of meetings and amount of money contributed where some groups contributed money as low as Kshs. 100 fortnightly while others contributed as much as Kshs. 1000 monthly and paid on a rotating schedule, to a member at a time. This approach assisted members to cope with economic needs, as most widows were able to utilize their earnings from chamas effectively bringing about positive change in their lives. Some widows were able to start income generating activities such as chicken rearing, subsistence farming, as well as buying household items.

A widow narrated that:

“I am in a chama that makes a contribution of Kshs. 500 per person monthly. I have been able to buy chicken for rearing. I do sell eggs and also some chicken when in need more money. This has enabled me to meet my daily needs.” (38 year old, teacher).

Some widows were not able to participate in “chama” because finance limitation.

A 45 year old unemployed widow stated that:

“I work on people’s farms and am paid Kshs. 200 per day. If I do a budget for the family I am left with a deficit hence it’s difficult to join the group. The groups are sometimes strict such that when you miss a contribution you are fined hence I haven’t joined.”

As described in most literature, there are various systems of support, maintenance, and adjustment for widows in the society with self-help groups being the most sought after by many widows. According to Birech & Masinde, (2018) study in Nandi County, self-help groups facilitate interaction between members and improves finances of their members. Similarly, the study found that, widows in the community enrolled in self-help groups as a strategy to help them overcome challenges such as isolation, poverty, and hopelessness. It is also through this

networking space that widows share their experiences as they envision their future. The study however, unveiled that not all widows were able to join the groups due to financial limitations.

According to available literature, various support systems assist widows to adapt to new status and manage their daily activities. Such support systems included religious institutions, neighbors, non-governmental organizations, self-help groups, friends, children, siblings, and relatives (Birech & Masinde, 2018; Khan, 2016; Nnodim et al., 2013). This study identifies family, church, and self-help groups as the informal support systems of widows in the community. Few widows however expressed dissatisfaction on extent and suitability of support given as their needs varied. For example, professional counseling was not offered by the institutions mentioned despite some widows reporting psychological problems.

It was also noted that the support systems did not provide the kind of support envisaged. For instance, the relationship between a widow and family members before the death of her spouse determined the extent of and quality support accorded to her. While some widows expressed full support from their in-laws, others noted that their strained relationship with in-laws affected the support given to them.

4.4 Formal social support networks as coping mechanism

Widowhood can be overwhelming and sometimes challenging. The study thus sought to identify formal social support sources adopted by widows and its effectiveness in promoting resilience. Research findings suggest that, most widows took different measures to cope with the loss of spouse and for survival. Among the formal social networks identified in the study, include the government and Microfinance institutions.

4.3.1 Government

Study findings revealed that Kenya National Safety net program in collaboration with county government and other donors runs an education programme for school going children in the community. The program, called Orphans and Vulnerable Children Program (OVC), catered for education of children at primary and secondary school levels. Through this program, widows with school going children below the age of 18 years benefited. Once the children reached the age of 19 years, they ceased to benefit from the programme.

One key informant noted this:

“The current program that is available is for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and targets specifically school going children below the age of 18 years. The target includes partial orphans, total orphans or disabled children. If you are a widow and have children in this category you are bound to benefit from the program.” (48 years old, Male, Social development officer).

The other program identified by some widows and key informants was bursary, an education program facilitated by the county government to help needy students’ from poor background and orphans access education. However, to benefit from the program students do application to determine eligibility. Few widows reported that, the program eased the burden of paying school fees even though it was not satisfactory.

One widow pointed out that:

“I have applied for bursary severally for my secondary school children and I was lucky that one of them was allocated some amount some time back. The bursary however is not sustainable as there is no assurance of getting the funds. This prompts one to look for other ways of getting money to pay school fees.”(45 year, unemployed, 5 children)

One key informant stated that:

“As a village elder I am mandated by the social development office to assemble and inform widows when there is food donation event at the county level. The process has challenges. I am expected to forward a specific number of widows’ in most cases 20 names. A considerable number of widows are left out due to limitation of the resources. The selected widows are entitled to get donations once in two years so as to give other widows an opportunity to benefit from the same.” (A male village elder, Remwa village.)

The study recognizes social protection for vulnerable groups in the community. However, the study findings established that local and national government did not have extensive and specific programs for widows. The support offered was channeled to other vulnerable categories such as

orphans and disabled children. The social development officer however, termed these programs as ineffective due to lack of mechanism to ensure its efficiency and sustainability. The officer claimed the program faced challenges, as help offered was not consistent, and the intended beneficiaries would receive support occasionally due to resource limitation. To the widows, the program was not holistic therefore did not cover widows diverse needs.

4.3.2 Micro finance Institutions

Microfinance institutions (MFI's) are financial bodies that offer loans to low income individuals through intermediaries (local registered groups) (United Nations, 2005). Several micro finance institutions exist in Kenya however, Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) established to empower women by offering loans has ventured in Kabula Ward. KWFT has reportedly improved lives of women in the community. Some widows reported they have been able to start and run small business, pay school fees as well buy essential household items like water tanks.

One widow reported that:

“We had started a Merry go round programme for 20 women including widows where each member contributed at least a Kshs.500 on a monthly basis. The group was later registered to enable us access more finances for personal and group development. Members were at liberty to apply loans depending with one's needs. As for my case, I bought a dairy cow for rearing and I can attest that I have been able to pay my bills by selling milk.”(45 year old, with secondary school education)

A key informant and a widow narrated that:

“With KWFT initiative, we have recorded a few cases of assistance in relation to basic needs from widows as it promotes their economic resilience. Some widows have become entrepreneurs through this programme.” (Chairlady, widows self help group)

Others participants had been discouraged from taking part in chamas as few members of the group failed to repay loans. The institution recovers its money from other members' savings who act as their guarantors hence they lose their cash.

A widow participant narrated that:

“I once registered in a women group “chama” that had access to KWFT services. We did savings and took loan in turns as we guaranteed each other. This however did not end well as some of the women who took loan failed to settle their debts and this forced the micro credit organization to withhold our cash. I lost all my contribution and from this experience I can never join any chama.” (45 year old, secondary school leaver).

Many studies have analyzed that MFI are rampant in most rural communities and are a strategy to improve living standards of individuals with low income. (Maina, 2013; Khan and Rahaman, 2007). The study similarly reveals that KWFT has significantly improved the lives of women specifically widows by providing finances that saw them grow economically, for example enabling them to run businesses. The challenge highlighted in the study is that MFI conditions for loaners disadvantaged some widows as they lost their money due to some members defaulting to repay their loans. This has created fear in other women who felt that the programme is impoverishing women instead of empowering them.

4.5 Effect of existing statutory laws and policies on widows' lives

Human rights are rights entitled to all human beings regardless of their sex or status and without discrimination (United Nations, 2015). Provisions such as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UHDR) of 1948 and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979 have been documented to promote these rights. CEDAW, an international bill of rights for women is meant to promote equality and targets to eliminate the aspects that are harmful to women. These include; actions to end discriminatory harmful cultural practices such as wife “cleansing” and inheritance, property ownership and inheritance.

The 2010 constitution in Kenya contains a number of articles in regard to women's rights. These include; The Matrimonial Property Act, (2013) and The Land Registration Act, (2016). The

former states that, a spouse is entitled to equal rights on property ownership and grants new rights to women by recognizing the financial and non-monetary contributions to matrimonial property by both spouses. The latter states that, if any of the spouse or both obtains a land during the marriage period for any purpose the surviving spouse is entitled to the inheritance and ownership of the property.

To establish the effectiveness of statutory policies and laws in the community, participants were asked about their knowledge on women's rights. The study found that most widows were not aware of laws and policies regarding women's rights due to lack of formal education, sensitization, and legal awareness.

A 56 year old and uneducated widow stated that:

"I have never heard of any law or policies regarding human rights. I do have knowledge of the new constitution in Kenya which was promulgated some years back but I have never read it as I don't know how to read. As I told you earlier I never went to school perhaps if I did I would have read it and understood the contents therein."

Another widow stated that:

"Educational campaigns would be a great forum to create awareness on the presence and importance of these policies and laws. I wish the government would take the initiative to educate its citizens on such laws and policies as they always do during their campaigns because we are missing out a lot." (38 year old teacher)

Some widows feared engaging the court in legal matters due to institutional barriers presented. The participants pointed out limited finances and prolonged duration of delivering justice. The widows claimed that cost of court proceedings and lengthy processes acted as a hindrance to seeking justice. They hence opted for traditional dispute resolutions such as negotiation to solve property and other family issues. The informal system of justice was however not commonly

embraced as the elders were ascribed to provide justice guided by social norms that put women at a disadvantage.

One widow stated that:

“I had conflict with my in-laws over my husband’s land where they claimed I was not entitled to inheritance and I took the matter to community elders. I could not seek justice in court. The process is long and you also need to have a lot of money to file the case and pay a lawyer which I don’t have at the moment.” (60 years, secondary school education)

In spite of the negative experiences narrated by some widows, positive stories also emerged in relation to the laws enacted. Some widows reported that they were able to secure husband’s property through formal system of justice that ascertained that they were the right successors.

A widow narrated that:

“My husband used to work in the military and when he died I faced challenges of eviction and land grabbing. I decided to seek justice from the court and later I got favor and was able to get the land and property back.” (65 years, retired teacher, 28 years married, 15 years widowed).

The study reveals that laws introduced for women advancement have not been fully effective. Despite presence of laws protecting women in Kenya, the findings show infringement on widows’ rights. Empirical literature in various parts of developing countries has reported that women continue to face challenges in accessing matrimonial property and discriminating ritual and mourning practices (Muthangya, 2019; Mburugu, 2019 & Mwangi, 2014). The reports point out that, women still encounter violations of rights even in the presence of established laws meant to eliminate inequality. The findings of Lindiwe’s (2015) study in South Africa and Orwa’s (2020) study in Kenya revealed that lack of knowledge on women rights subjects widows to injustices such as evictions from matrimonial home.

Similarly, the study in Kabula Ward found out various reasons posing as hindrances to achieving full implementation of the laws. According to liberal feminist theory, nature patriarchal societies, traditional practices and laws that favor men render most women vulnerable and marginalised. For instance, the patriarchal nature of most African communities that favor men on property ownership and inheritance disadvantaged widows from inheriting property. Presence of customary laws and practices that discriminate against women also acts as an impediment to enforcing these laws. The study also identifies a lapse in the system of justice such as costly procedures and lengthy court proceedings that bar women from seeking justice. The ineffectiveness intensifies further due to lack of education and inadequate information by widows on their rights.

The research however noted the legislation protected widows who had information about laws and their rights. The findings deduce that vulnerability in widowhood is a creation of culture and gender. The traditional norms implemented by community elders turn to be drawback to women. For instance, presence of norms that give men power over property and ritual practices that discriminate against women. The restrictive cultural environment also perpetuates injustice by denying widows them the ability to own, inherit, manage and control property.

The research however adds to nuance of data by stating that some widows do acquire property. To some widows, education and knowledge of law created an advantage. These heightened their determination and confidence to fight for their spouse's property, which resulted in justice. This means laws guarantee strength to all women regardless of their status while power lies in institutions of justice and education, offering opportunities for prosperity as some widows utilized them to accumulate more wealth. This infers that law sensitization and women empowerment could improve widow's lives. Basing on liberal feminist ideology, the state has a role to play to ensure the barriers that hinder women from accessing justice are eliminated.

This chapter has presented and analyzed findings on the 5 research objectives. The next chapter presents summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the study.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations of the study as well as suggestions for further research based on the study findings.

5.2 Summary of findings

The purpose of this study was to understand and document the lived experiences of widows in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County. In particular, the study aimed to explore and understand how demographic characteristics shape widow experiences; social, cultural, psychological, and economic experiences of widows; identify mechanisms adopted by different widows to cope with bereavement; and analyze the effect of existing statutory laws and policies on widows' lives.

5.2.1 Demographic characteristics of widows

Study findings show that widow experiences varied with age, level of education, circumstances under which the spouse died, length of marriage before spouse died, and type of occupation. The study revealed that majority of widows living in the community were elderly 11(52.63%) and between ages 51-70 years. The young widows aged 40 years and below comprised 4 (21.05%) of the participants. The high number of elderly widows was attributed to low rate of remarriage due to bereavement an older age unlike their younger counterparts. The key informants reported that younger widow's remarriage was facilitated by factors such as security, companionship and financial support. Age influenced the experiences of widows as the elderly with grown children cited fewer family responsibilities and more social freedom. Young widows were overwhelmed by family responsibilities, such as taking care of their young ones hence their social participation was low.

Most widows 10(52.63%) had basic education with 2 having completed tertiary education. The high number of participants with low level of education was influenced by parent's unwillingness, lack of schools fees and social factors such as early pregnancies and early marriages. The level of education determined the type of occupation of the participants hence

influencing their economic experiences. Widows with higher level of education were employed in the formal sector and had constant income than widows with low level of education. Widows with low level of education claimed that they engaged in informal labour whose income was low thereby negatively influencing their economic wellbeing.

14(68.42%) of widows mentioned illness as the cause of spouse death. 4(21.05%) stated accident as the cause of death while other participants mentioned conflict as the cause of death. The cause of spousal death influenced psychological and financial wellbeing of widows. Widows bereaved as a result of accident and violence expressed shock, disbelief and confusion upon receiving news of spouse demise. On the other hand, long duration of illness forced some widows to sell off property in order to cater for treatment which reduced their financial ability. Others reported to have been relieved of the burden of daily care for the sick.

Majority of the participants 10(47.37%) had been widowed for a period of 1-5 years. The longest duration of 16-20 years was represented by 2 participants. The duration of widowhood influenced the psychological experiences of widows. The study established that participants widowed for a long period expressed less emotions and exhibited some form of adjustment and resilience in their status due to adoption of various strategies to cope with challenges encountered. On the contrary, participants widowed for shorter duration expressed grief, sadness and overwhelmed by responsibilities. Nevertheless, these emotions eased as the duration increased for they cited receiving support from various social support networks and learning how to cope with the situation.

Most participants 18(89.47%) engaged in informal labour, specifically farming. To them, low levels of education denied them a chance to be employed in the formal sector hence relegating them to menial labour which influenced their economic wellbeing. They claimed that informal sectors had low income returns. Only 2 widows were in formal employment. They cited receiving a monthly income though it was not adequate to cater for all household needs.

5.2.2 Social, cultural, economic and psychological experiences of widows

The study sought to understand the experiences of widows after a spouse's death. These experiences were categorized into, social, economic and psychological experiences.

Social experiences of widows: The study identified wife inheritance, mourning rituals, stigmatization and isolation as problems experienced by widows in the community. Mourning rituals and wife inheritance were shunned by majority of participants due to Christian and modern influences which view these practices as barbaric and against human rights. The findings also revealed that, young widows in the community faced stigmatization and isolation as they were seen as potential husband snatchers. They stated that, other women would segregate or talk about how they were planning to steal other people's husbands especially if they were seen engaging in conversations with male persons in the community. This denied them freedom of social interactions. While some widows encountered social challenges as a result of widowhood, others reported to use the status to create a positive impact to other women in the community. Their experiences and resilience added a social advantage as they mentored and guided other women in the community.

Economic experiences of widows: Study results show that death of spouse affected the economic stability of many households especially women who traditionally rely on their husbands for provision. After the death of a spouse, many widows experienced difficulties in providing for their families and in securing their late husband's properties. This is because, in patriarchal societies such as in Kabula Ward where men are in control over productive resources, widow inheritance was common. On the other hand, the study revealed that widows rose to challenge the traditional norms by taking additional family roles initially performed by spouse and engaged in various economic activities for sustenance. Among the roles taken include provision of security to the household. They also engaged in self-help groups, running small scale businesses and farming in order to cater for household needs. However, these activities did not significantly change widow's material conditions.

Psychological experiences of widows: The findings further indicated that psychological challenges are unavoidable in widowhood. All widows experienced varying degree of emotions such as regret, shock, confusion, and denial. Though widows acknowledged receiving emotional support from church, family and friends, the study established that professional counselling was overlooked. The emotional support rendered focused on immediate needs and ignored long term implication of widowhood to widows. While some widows expressed emotions such as shock, denial and confusion others exhibited some form of adjustment through adoption of various strategies such as engaging in church activities to reduce isolation and loneliness.

5.2.3 Informal support networks as a coping mechanism

The study revealed various informal networks that widows were part of in order to cope with widowhood situation. The networks mentioned by participants include; church, family and self-help groups and widow inheritance which offered spiritual, social, material and financial support to the widows. Widows actively participated in activities and interactions in church and self-help groups as a strategy to reduce isolation and loneliness, as well as to build their self-confidence. Some widows had previously been inherited as a way to support their children and as a form of securing husband's property. These informal networks however, were unsatisfactory for they did not offer support according to their varying needs.

5.2.4 Formal support networks as a coping mechanism

The study identified various formal institutions sought after by widows to solve financial challenges that they experienced. The government and Micro-Finance Institutions were highly considered by widows for economic and social development. The government through the county government disbursed money in form of bursaries to cater for orphans and vulnerable children's education, below the age of 18 years. Micro finance institutions reportedly improved the lives of widows economically through group loan financing. This had enabled some widows to run businesses, pay school fees and buy essential household items. However, to some widows, government support was unreliable. To other widows, microfinance institutions rendered them poor due to failure of some members of a group to repay borrowed loans hence making them lose their monetary contributions.

5.2.5 Effects of existing statutory laws and policies on widow's lives

The formal system of justice is evident in the community but it was deemed ineffective by participants due to various challenges it presented in upholding women's rights. Lengthy court processes, high cost of court fees and access to justice, lack of legal awareness and customary laws acted as impediments to proper implementation of the laws. These factors combined to deny women justice as most widows reported to face violations of their rights. For instance, some widows were forcefully evicted from their matrimonial home by their in-laws and denied the right to inherit their spouse's property.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusion is made;

In Kabula ward, widows are generally seen as powerless and vulnerable individuals. However, the study concludes that there is an association of different factors combining to create diverse experiences of widows in the community. Among the factors influencing their experiences include; age, level of education, cause of spouse death, duration of widowhood and occupation. This implies that, widows suffering should not be regarded as a common phenomenon to all widows as the axes of difference might create marginality in one area and an advantage in other areas. This finding hence deconstructs the ideology of homogenizing widows as vulnerable and marginalized individuals. Moreover, both positive and negative experiences were evident.

It can be noted that social, economic and psychological challenges are inevitable in widowhood however, the magnitude of challenges varies. Despite widowhood being a devastating stage in life, the study shows that it does not deter most widows' ambitions in life. Notable in the study too is changing gender power relations after the death of spouse. For instance, widows taking up additional roles previously performed by their spouse and rising up to be socially and economically empowered. This occurs through adoption of formal and informal social support networks as coping strategies to tackle problems they encounter. Involvement of widows in these networks and engagement in various social and economic activities enhances their wellbeing and that of their households. Nonetheless, these were termed as unsatisfactory and ineffective by some widows as their needs varied. Some claimed their needs were not sufficiently catered for. The formal system of justice is evident in the community with various policies and legal frameworks enacted to promote and protect women but presented various challenges in

upholding women's rights. This hinders widows in accessing justice especially matters concerning property inheritance.

Even though widows had negative experiences, positive experiences emerged in the study. Some of the positive experiences included; widows taking up leadership positions and roles previously held by men in a patriarchal community. It was also evident that widows engaged in various economic activities and adopted various coping strategies for household survival. The presence of legal frameworks also presented a positive experience to some widows who inherited their husband's property using the enacted laws or some widows were able to pursue legal avenues to secure the property.

5.4 Recommendations for policy and practice

To counter the negative experiences identified by widows, such as lack of basic needs, violation of human rights, limited knowledge on women's rights and lack of social justice, the study recommends the following:

1. The Social development office should sensitize the community on existing legal frameworks in order to increase widow's protection.
2. The Social development office should collaborate with other institutions such as community based organizations to initiate programs for economic and social empowerment of widows. This may increase the ability of widows to provide for their families.
3. Both state and non-state actors should provide professional psycho-social support to address the psychological and social challenges experienced by widows.
4. Joint participation of formal and informal systems of justice to discuss the implications of both legal and customary laws on widow's rights in Kabula Ward which might address the longstanding issue of widow disinheritance.

5.5 Recommendations for further research

1. The study suggests further research to explore factors influencing the effectiveness and sustainability of social support systems for widows in the community.
2. The study suggests the need to explore the lived experiences of widowers in the community and examine the adjustment mechanisms adopted by widowers. This would help in identifying the gaps that exist between widows and widowers and point out activities that might improve widowhood challenges.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

INTRODUCTION LETTER

Rhoda Makanga

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TO THE ASSISTANT CHIEF
KABULA/WATOYA SUB LOCATION,

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH STUDY AT WATOYA/KABULA SUB LOCATION

My name is Rhoda Makanga. I am a registered Masters student in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Nairobi. I am conducting research on “The lived experiences of widows in Kabula Ward” and understanding the impact of existing laws and policies on widows’ lives. I write to seek permission to conduct this research in Kabula Ward. The findings of the research will provide key recommendations that may assist in identifying interventions that promote widow’s development. The study is also conducted with an aim of contributing to the existing body of knowledge regarding the experiences of widows in their communities.

Yours Faithfully,

RhodaMakanga

APPENDIX 11

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Rhoda Makanga, a registered Masters student in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Nairobi. You are invited to take part in research on, “**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS IN KABULA WARD, BUNGOMA COUNTY**”. The purpose of your participation in this research is to help the researcher understand and document the lived experiences of widows and effectiveness of existing laws and policies in protecting widows in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County. The researcher will gather information through interview and audio recording. Kindly note that participation in this study is voluntary and the information you provide will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity.

CONSENT

I..... hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and I consent to participating in the research project. I understand that I am participating freely without being forced in any way and am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time should I not wish to continue. I also understand that my answers will remain confidential.

APPENDIX III

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

SECTION A: Demographic information

Name of respondent (optional).....

a). Age of respondent : Below 20 years () 20-30 years () 31-40 years () 41-50 years ()
51-60 years () Above 60 years () (Actual age.....)

b). Level of education: Primary () Secondary () College () University ()

Other (specify).....

c). Employment status: Employed () self-employed () unemployed ()

d) Children ()

d). If employed or self employed, what is your occupation/main source of income?

e). What is your monthly/annual income?

f). How long ago did your spouse pass away?

h). How old were you when your spouse passed away?

i). How old was your spouse when he passed away?

e). What was the cause of your spouse's death? Illness () Natural cause () Accident ()
Violence () Specify.....

f). What is your religious affiliation? Christian () Muslim () Hindu () Other.....

SECTION B

1. Please tell me about your experience on losing your spouse. [Probe: When did it happen? how did it happen? What were your emotions at the time of his death?]
2. How is it living as a widow? How has your life changed? Do you encounter any challenges? (Probe if not mentioned: Psychological, social, financial).
3. Are there traditional practices that widows go through in this community? If yes, which one? Did you go through any practice and what was your experience?
4. Did/Have you experienced any difference in the way you relate to others (family, friends, colleagues, community, and church) after the loss of your spouse? How have these changed over time?
5. What are the most difficult adjustments you have faced and how did you handle the experiences?
6. Are you involved in any social networks [Probe: church/religious widow groups, registered widow's organizations, community affiliations]. What is the purpose and activities of those groups? How have they helped you?
7. Please describe kind of activities you engage in as a way of coping with the loss of your partner?
8. What have been your sources of support? (Probe: Immediate Family, Friends, Church, Government (bursary), Widows' groups, Relatives, Neighbors, Co-workers, Professionals). What kind of support have you received from them?
9. Are you aware of any laws that support women in Kenya? If yes, have these laws helped in any way to support you?
10. Have you, for example, had an issue for which you sought help from the chief? Please explain the issue and how the chief helped you.
11. What would you like to see in the community that would be of help to widows?

APPENDIX V

KEY INFORMANT GUIDE

My name is Rhoda Makanga. I am a registered Masters student in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Nairobi. I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of widows in Kabula ward, Bungoma County. The objective of this study is to understand and document the lived experiences of widows and effectiveness of existing laws and policies in protecting widows. I will gather information through interview and, if you agree, I will audio record the interview. Kindly note that participation in this study is voluntary and the information you provide in this research will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity.

SECTION A: Demographic information

- a) Gender: Male () Female ()
- b) Age: 20 – 29 () 30 – 39 () 40 – 49 () 50 – 59 () 60 and above ()
- c) Educational level: Certificate () Diploma () Masters () Any other ()
- d) Profession/Position: Religious leader() village elder() Social development Officer()
Chief/Assistant Chief () chairperson ()

SECTION B

1. What are the experiences of widows in this community? (**Probe:** social, psychological and economic).
2. What has led to the suffering of widows in the society and how do these challenges affect their well being and households?
3. What do the widows do personally in order to adjust to their new experiences? (Social, psychological and economic)
4. What form of support does the government/religion/community offer to widows?
5. In regard to human right laws particularly gender laws in Kenya, what impact has it made in protecting the rights of widows?
6. What are the impediments to law enforcement on issues pertaining widows in the society and what actions should be taken against those who violate the law?
7. What suggestions would you give to improve the policies and quality of the ongoing support services?



UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
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27th August 2021

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RHODA .N.MAKANGA - C50/86090/2016

Through this letter, I wish to confirm that the above named is a bonafide postgraduate student in the Department of Sociology & Social Work, University of Nairobi. She has presented her project proposal entitled: "Lived experiences of widows in Kabula Ward, Bungoma County, Kenya."

Rhoda is required to collect data pertaining to the research problem from the selected organization to enable her complete her project paper which is a requirement of the Masters degree.

Kindly give her any assistance she may need.

Thank you.

Prof. C. K. Nzioka
Chairman, Department of Sociology and Social Work





REPUBLIC OF KENYA



**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION**

Ref No: **129271**

Date of Issue: **09/September/2021**

RESEARCH LICENSE



This is to Certify that Ms. RHODA MAKANGA of University of Nairobi, has been licensed to conduct research in Bungoma on the topic: Lived experiences of Widows in Bungoma County for the period ending : 09/September/2022.

License No: **NACOSTI/P/21/12879**

129271

Applicant Identification Number

**Director General
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY &
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