

**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND COPING
STRATEGIES OF WIDOWHOOD IN MOPANI DISTRICT,
LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

By

AMANDLA DAPHNEY NGOVENI

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SUPERVISOR: DR EC ERLANK

DECLARATION

I, Amandla Daphney Ngoveni (student number: 50565443), declare that **“WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WIDOWHOOD IN MOPANI DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE”** is my product and that all the quoted sources have been shown and acknowledged through complete referencing.

AD Ngoveni

September 2021

Ms AD Ngoveni

Date:

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my beloved husband, Lawrence Mashimbye. You encouraged me to continue my studies. To my children, Vuxaka and Vunene, be inspired by this work.

I dedicate this work to my late uncle Mr Masenyani Thomas Ngoveni (Papa hulu) whom I lost while finalizing my research project. You motivated me to pursue my dreams. I will forever remember you. May your soul rest in peace.

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ABSTRACT

Background of the study: Widows in an African context are a vulnerable group of people exposed to face challenges resulting from different kinds of oppression and exclusion from social, economic and political activities. Limited research is documented on these women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood.

Aim: The aim of this investigation was to explore and describe the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood among women of Mavalani village in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province and to proffer suggestions for social work practice in rendering services regarding their widowhood to women in Mavalani village.

Methods: The research was conducted by means of applying a qualitative research approach employing phenomenological, explorative, descriptive and contextual research designs. The study was guided by two theories, namely the strength-based perspective and the theory of social justice. A sample of 13 widows was recruited through purposive and snowball sampling. The data were collected by conducting face-to-face semi-structured interviews facilitated by an interview guide with open ended questions. The interviews were conducted for 45 minutes to an hour, using an audio recorder and transcribed with the permission from the participants. An independent coder was appointed to codify the data. Data collected were analysed using the eight steps of qualitative data analysis of Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:196). Data verification was done according to the model of Lincoln and Guba (in Lietz & Zayas 2010:190) addressing the aspects of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The ethical approval for undertaking the study was obtained from the Scientific Review Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa. Relevant research ethical principles upheld throughout the study were confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, informed consent, beneficence, debriefing and management of information.

Results: The widows who are the research population of this study experienced multiple losses because of their widowhood. This include the loss of their status as a married woman; financial losses; changes in their relationships with their family-in-laws and with regard to their friendships in the community; the experiences of social support structures from the family, significant others and from religious groups; and

experiences of having to perform certain traditional rituals. The widows' *challenges* regarding widowhood included negative perceptions towards widowhood by the community, widows struggling for financial independence, maintaining relationships especially regarding the discipline of their children and engaging in new romantic relationships after the death of the husbands. *Coping strategies* utilized by the widows included religion and spirituality as coping strategies, counselling, support from families and others, self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied. Widow's accounts on *advice* to other widows with regards to dealing with the challenges of widowhood were to accept their loss, how to enter into and manage relationships with other male partners and how to deal with their children. The widows made several *suggestions directed at social work practice* with regards to widowhood. These included suggestions that social workers should provide counselling, support and debriefing sessions to widows, suggestion for community education regarding widowhood and the rights of women and suggestions that social workers/government should provide financial support to unemployed widows without income.

KEY TERMS: Challenges, experiences, coping strategies, widowhood and widows.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AN ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
Covid-19	Corona Virus Disease
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DSD	Department of Social Development
HIV /AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IASSW	International Association of Schools of Social Workers
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
PAR	Research, implementing participatory action research
SWREC	Social Work Research Committee
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNISA	University of South Africa
UNW	United Nations Women
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This introductory chapter to the research comprises a description of the background of the study, the problem formulation and problem statement leading to the research, the theoretical framework applied, the rationale for conducting the study and the research question, goal and objectives formulated for it. This is followed by a description of the research methods applied, the methods of data collection, data analysis and the data verification. Subsequently, the ethical considerations underlying to the research, the clarification of key concepts used in the study and the content of the research report are expounded before the chapter is concluded with a summary.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF STUDY

The death of a spouse is one of the most stressful events a person may experience during a lifetime (Somhlaba & Wait 2009:197). No society is excluded from its members experiencing the phenomenon of the death of a spouse causing widowhood for married women, or widower hood for married men (Dube 2019:3). Members of diverse cultures in different countries and societies react in a variety of ways and have different widowhood practices when faced with experiencing and dealing with loss and grief (Khosa-Nkatini, Wepener & Meyer 2020:1; Mburugu 2020:109).

The death of a loved one always brings a significant transition and change in a person's life. This is especially the case for African widows, because of certain prescribed cultural rites and beliefs accompanying the mourning rituals of African widowhood (Khosa-Nkatini, Wepener & Meyer 2020:1; Yawa 2010:2). Azumah and Nachinaab (2018:44) emphasise the significant consequences of the death of a husband for African women, by stating that "the death of a husband or a partner has an extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, a friend and breadwinner but also results into a radical change in a woman's social status and lifestyle". The widow has not only lost her husband and companion, but in a traditional cultural role, has also lost her provider, owner of livelihood, the authority figure in the household disciplining the children, the key connection between the

spouse and family-in-laws, the decision-maker for the family and the status of a married woman (Radzilani 2010:126-131).

Members of most African cultures practise a variety of mourning rituals intrinsic to their specific cultural heritage (Khosa-Nkatini, Wepener & Meyer 2020:1). In relation to social work, the African author Dube (2019:94) in the article titled *Empowerment and Rights-Based Social Work Interventions for Widows in Zimbabwe: A Literature review*, stated that the social work profession has limited literature on widowhood and interventions needed to assist widows. Manala (2015:1) further stated that: "The neglect and maltreatment of widows do not receive sufficient attention" despite the fact that widows are presented significantly in the female population worldwide. Therefore, the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood are important to be explored and investigated, for social workers, with the focus of implementing effective interventions and rendering sufficient services in this regard.

With the prevalence of widowhood also increasing globally because of the pandemic of the Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) which commenced in December 2019 in China, the status and plight which widows face, are exacerbated in an already unequal situation which include poverty, economic status, the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) vulnerability and ownership of property (Mburugu 2020:109).

The suffering of widows is a worldwide phenomenon and is well-documented because of the challenges these women are facing regarding oppression, widowhood rites and previously exclusion from socio-economic and political activities (Dube 2016:1; Pemunta & Alubafi 2016; Loomba Foundation 2015). Globally widowhood rites, community attitudes (perceiving widows as having a lesser status) and cultural practices in different cultures are highlighted since the past few years, especially from the human rights perspective and the deploring of gender-based violence as unacceptable and evident in a wide range of international, regional, and national conventions (Pemunta & Alubafi 2016:2).

The question arises if the same cultural rites, attitudes of communities and cultural practices apply to widowers in the African culture and communities. Literature

suggests that in the African culture, after their wives' death widowers, do not experience the same adverse effects than African widows, on their long-term livelihoods, economic and social status and the performance of rituals (Thomas 2008:1). When referring to gender discourse constructionism, described as social and cultural patterns associated with gender, there is a discourse in the African culture that males are perceived as being stronger than women and women are perceived as being subordinated to men, therefore widows need to be subjected to more rituals and widowhood practices, than widowers (Radzilani 2010:26). Gender imbalances seem to contribute to widows being more subjected than men to rituals and cultural prescriptions, resulting in the suffering of widows.

Sub-Saharan Africa is as well burdened with the largest prevalence of the Human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV and AIDS) amongst its populations, with documented research indicating that widows in sub-Saharan Africa are a high-risk population group regarding being infected with HIV and AIDS (Tenkorang 2014:46). African widows may have been infected with HIV and AIDS previously by their deceased partners, but they are also infected due to cultural practices that require male relatives to marry a deceased relative's widow which is seen as a high risk for contracting HIV (Tenkorang 2014:46). Djuikom and Van de Walle (2018:6) stated the following regarding the reaction of family and relatives towards HIV infected widows, in Sub-Saharan Africa: "AIDS widows may be shunned and dispossessed by in-laws yet left with debts incurred during the deceased's illness." The family and relatives are reluctant to assist HIV infected widows, when their HIV status is known, which further increase the challenges and hardships of these widows who need to cope without family support. Davies (2020) elaborated about the added threat of HIV and widowhood, during the 23rd International AIDS Conference, stating that persons infected with HIV in South Africa have an increased risk of death from Covid-19. The social work profession's values are imbedded in the human rights perspective and social justice, empowering individuals and assisting the oppressed and marginalised individuals and communities, of which widows form a part of this vulnerable group (Dube 2019:94).

The conditions many widows are forced to live in because of economic or social norms and cultural prescriptions are regarded worldwide in South Africa, as a humanitarian emergency and the violation of their human rights (Loomba Foundation 2015:9). As pointed out, it is crucial to note that internationally, widows face different difficulties than widowers and experience untold hardships (Cebekhulu 2015:1). The nature of the hardships experienced by widows in South Africa in different societies have similarities, but there also exist differences in societies which need to be investigated to assist widows in a specific society effectively (Anzaa, Udu & Gbari 2018:133). The findings of the Commission on Gender Equality (2013:7) drawn during a survey on widowhood in South Africa, including all the provinces, indicated that in the Limpopo province, widowhood was identified as a serious challenge in this predominantly rural area “with cultural and traditional practices being the norm.” The Department of Health and Social Development does not render specific focused programmes for this vulnerable population group, but supportive services are available (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:6).

In expanding the background to the issue of widowhood, the term widowhood is conceptualized, the scope of widowhood globally is described, the context of widowhood in South Africa is explained and the state of knowledge on the topic is described.

1.2.1 Widowhood conceptualized

The concept ‘widowhood’ as used in this study refers to married women with or without children who had lost their husbands because of the death of their husbands (Azumah & Nachinaab 2018:44; George 2012:188). Widowhood can be further described as the loss of a companion, breadwinner and supporter (George 2012:188).

The Commission on Gender Equality (2013:1) describes a widow “as a woman who has lost her husband by death and has not married again”. The concept of widow and widower are concepts culturally defined by the society (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:1). The definition of widowhood or widower can therefore differ according to culture, race and geographical areas. The reason why the concepts

widows and widowers are culturally defined by society is because these population groups' needs are recognised as a social and intra-psychic phenomenon (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:1). In many cultures widowhood is associated with a social status, with a set of prescribed cultural rituals, social practices, norms and beliefs.

1.2.2 The scope of widowhood globally

The World Widows Report of 2015 reported (from findings of the Loomba Foundation's global study for the plight of widows in 2010), that the estimated numbers of widows worldwide are 258.5 million with 584.6 million children and because of the Syrian war and other conflicts, the number of widows in the Middle-East and North Africa increased by 24% during the time period 2010 to 2015 (Loomba Foundation 2015:12). The mentioned study also indicated that their findings that the European countries are regarded as having the highest numbers of widows, starting with the Ukraine with 19,2% of widows as part of their total population (Loomba Foundation 2015:18). In contrast, India for example, has a prevalence of 10% of widowhood in its population, namely 33 million widows (Sahoo 2014:45; Anzaa, Udu & Gbari 2018:133). In combination, India and China presented as having the highest statistics of widows together, namely 35% of the widows in the world (Loomba Foundation 2015:25). The most extreme conditions of poverty are faced by widows in Afghanistan and Iraq, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Syria because of the previous and on-going conflict in these countries (Loomba Foundation 2015:18). In the north-eastern and, south-eastern parts of Nigeria, the western part of Chad, and northern part of Cameroon, around 1.5 million people have been displaced by continuous attacks on civilians by Boko Haram, leaving many widows are living in extremely poor conditions, together with facing the collapse of the economy in these areas due to the consequences of the Ebola virus (Loomba Foundation 2015:18).

From the estimated 258.5 million widows around the world, 115 million are financially challenged because of the death of their spouses (United Nation Women Africa 2017:1). In the developed countries, widowhood is mostly experienced by older women above 60 years of age, while developing countries in Africa, such as Mali, Nigeria, Senegal and Zimbabwe have an increased number of young widows from 15

years of age, because of wars and internal conflicts (Dube 2019:3). It is pointed out that widows in most rural areas of Africa are especially affected by the death of their spouses because of cultural beliefs, rituals and loss of social status (Dube 2019:3).

The discrepancy between the higher prevalence of widowhood amongst women than men can be explained by various factors (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:2). Globally, women's life expectancy is 4.5 years higher than men, as indicated in the statistics of the United Nations from 2010 to 2015 (United Nations 2015:29). The age gap between men and women, caused by women marrying older men, may also explain why there are more widows than widowers (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:2). Men also tend to remarry quicker than woman after their spouses passed away, which may add to the explanation of the discrepancy between the statistics of widowers and widows (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:2). The number of widows worldwide has also increased due to the death of spouses from different factors such as sickness, accidents and wars (George 2012:187). Presently, due to the increased number of widows, widowhood with its challenges is regarded as a social phenomenon needing to be addressed worldwide (George 2012:187).

Some of the contributory factors to widowhood are wars and internal conflicts, which cause a high incidence of deaths amongst men, and the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) epidemic, resulting in early female widowhood in the Sub-Saharan Africa countries like Lesotho and Zimbabwe (Loomba Foundation 2015:52). High rates of armed violent crime in Chechnya, Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia and South Africa are also contributing to the phenomenon of widowhood (Loomba Foundation 2015:52). HIV and AIDS are identified as one of the reasons why women frequently become widows at a young age (United Nations 2015:19). Countries in Southern Africa are facing severe HIV problems with the adult group 15-49 years of age having an infection rate of 19,1% and contributing to the deaths of males in the population (Loomba Foundation 2015:19). Sub-Saharan African countries are faced with large numbers of evicted and abandoned children, and many elderly widows caring for orphaned grandchildren in many developing countries, including South Africa (Loomba Foundation 2015:18).

1.2.3 The context of widowhood in South Africa

The prevalence of widows in Southern Africa was estimated in 2015 to be more than 1 485 993 women of the total population. South Africa is one of thirty-nine countries in the world with more than one million widows (Loomba Foundation 2015:25). South Africa has many different cultural groupings including Western, Eastern and African cultures in which widows of the different groupings are dealing differently from one another with their experiences and challenges following the death of a spouse (Yawa 2010:2). The death of a spouse is a painful and traumatic life event and comes with unique challenges which may include economic challenges and hardships, social isolation and the loss of the social status of being married (Lowe & McClement 2010:127; Somhlaba & Wait 2009:197). Culture has an impact on the experience of grief and there is diversity in the personal experiences in different cultures, that follows the death of a loved one (Appel 2011:6). Losing a spouse affects all aspects of the surviving person's wellbeing, including the physical and mental wellbeing of the survivor (Bennett & Soulsby 2012:322; Somhlaba & Wait 2009:197).

Widows who disrespect cultural rituals are stigmatised, isolated from the community and treated as if they killed their husbands (Baloyi 2017:2; Tasie 2013:159). It has been argued that the intentions of these widowhood rites are to prepare a widow to be independent and be able to face the challenges of life alone, since her husband has died (Tasie 2013:160). After the death of a husband, a widow must adhere to certain cultural rites of the community concerned, for instance she would have to cut her hair, wear black clothes and cut her nails under the guidance of the older women in the community (Idialu 2012:6). All these rituals are said to protect the widow from her dead husband's spirit not coming back for her. The widow is also many times forced to marry one of the relatives or a family member to protect the deceased's property (Idialu 2012:6).

Gender discrimination and power imbalances against women in South Africa started to change with the ending of apartheid in South Africa (Cebekhulu 2015:1). South Africa is undergoing a transformational process aiming to empower women in its societies (Cebekhulu 2015). The Department of Social Development (DSD)'s

framework of integrated service delivery (Integrated Service Delivery Model 2013:6) is prominently focusing on rendering services to vulnerable individuals and groups as part of the country's social welfare services. The Constitution of South Africa accentuates equality and human dignity of all South Africans (South Africa 1996:section 9(2)), but unfortunately widows' rights are still violated through different cultural practices in South Africa (Cebekhulu 2015:2). Consequently "Researchers agree that intervention by professional social workers is essential in safeguarding the individual worthiness of the widow and self-respect inherent in her humanness" (Dube 2019:2).

1.2.4 The state of knowledge on the topic

In their social work practice settings, social workers in South Africa will often encounter vulnerable women who had lost a husband, requiring social welfare services. Investigating the essence of these experiences will enable social workers to better understand the services needed to be rendered to these widows. There are substantial gaps in the available research relating to widowhood, especially regarding international statistics which are lacking regarding this important phenomenon (Lloyd-Sherlock, Corso & Minicuci 2015:1374). Cognisance is also taken that "It can be said that there is no group more affected by the sin of omission than widows. They are painfully absent from the statistics of many developing countries, and they are rarely mentioned in the multitude of reports on women's poverty, development, health or human rights published in the last twenty-five years" (Loomba Foundation 2015:19). Limited research is available on the effects of widowhood in parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Lloyd-Sherlock et al 2015:1374, Manala 2015:1). The researcher identified limitations in the relevant literature available regarding the topic under investigation. Several national studies in the field related to the topic under investigation were reviewed and listed in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 National research studies regarding widowhood

Authors	Title of research study	Type of research
Cebekhulu, L M (2015)	Understanding the experiences of young widows in rural Kwazulu-Natal	Qualitative approach
Drenth, C M (2008)	Complicated grief in South African context- A therapeutic intervention programme	Qualitative approach
Yawa, S N (2010)	A psycho analysis of bereavement in Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana cultures	Qualitative approach
Makgahlela, M W (2016)	The psychology of bereavement and mourning rituals in a Northern Sotho community	Qualitative approach
Radzilani, M S (2010)	A discourse analysis of bereavement rituals in a Tshivenda speaking community: African Christian and traditional African perceptions	Qualitative approach
Appel, D L (2011)	Narratives on death and bereavement from three South African cultures	Qualitative approach
Somhlaba, N Z (2002)	Stress and coping strategies in recently rural black women	Qualitative approach
Seretlo-Rangata, ML. (2017)	The psychological meaning of mourning rituals in the Botlokwa community, Limpopo Province	Qualitative approach
Itsweni, P (2018)	The experiences of death of loved ones and bereavement amongst young Vhavenda widows of Tshikombani Village at Nzhelele, Vhembe District in Limpopo, South Africa.	Qualitative approach
Manyedi M E, Koen, M P & Greeff, M. (2003)	Experiences of widowhood and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people	Qualitative study

The South African studies which related to widowhood listed in Table 1.1 were available, but no research studies which specifically focused on the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo province were found. Most of the studies available were from the field of Psychology (focusing mostly on bereavement and rituals), Sociology, the Health Sciences (in relation to health issues of widows), Theology (related to religious rituals and rites) and Law (related to property issues of widows). The only two studies in the field of social work were the studies of Cebekhulu (2015) and Drenth (2008), as listed in Table 1.1. The focus of these research studies was primarily on bereavement, bereavement rituals and a bereavement model for intervention, with little focus on the actual experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows to proffer suggestions to assist social workers regarding interventions methods and support. A gap in the research literature therefore exists to investigate the experiences, challenges and copings strategies of widows in different communities in South Africa.

Widows are a specific sub-group that should be targeted for intervention and support by social workers in a democratic country, especially because of their socio-economic status after the death of a husband and the high incidence of depression experienced amongst this sub-group (George 2012:188). Research in developing countries, indicated that widows are more vulnerable to physical and psychological health challenges, they are also vulnerable to social stigmatization, economic vulnerability and humanitarian injustices, especially in developing countries (Sekgobela, Peu & van der Wath 2018:1). Therefore, the conclusion is drawn that “Professional social workers are duty-bound and mandated to ensure the distribution of social justice to the marginalised and disenfranchised widows and their vulnerable children” (Dube 2019:2). The provision and implementation of guidelines to assist social workers to render services to widows uniquely related to the characteristics of South African communities, should improve integrated social service delivery, improve social justice and limit gender discrimination.

The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development (2012) focuses on identifying and addressing unjust and unfair social, economic and political systems in the world and are committed to the Sustainable Developmental Goals of which the aim

is for social workers to take action in reaching the vulnerable populations and address poverty and injustices in all its forms (Lombard 2015:483). The Sustainable Development Declaration adopted by the United Nations at the New York summit in September 2015 by member countries, brought commitments to achieve various goals which include the eradication of poverty, promotion of well-being, gender equality and empowering of all women and girls, including widows (Loomba Foundation 2015:9). Addressing the plight of widows and their children are therefore part of social work as a human rights profession to contribute to achieving of the sustainable development goals.

The problem formulation and problem statement for the study are presented next.

1.3 PROBLEM FORMULATION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The first significant step in the research process is the formulation of a research problem, which is the point of departure of any research study (Fouché & Delport 2011:108; Kumar 2019:80). In formulating a research problem, the researcher should ensure that the focus of the problem under investigation is clearly determined and stated (Fouché & Delport 2011:108). The quality of the problem formulation process of a research study also determines the success of the research (Fouché & Delport 2011:108). Formulation of a research problem therefore, is a crucial step in starting a research project before the study is conducted (Akhtar 2014:1215). Therefore, the necessary attention is given here to the identification and formulation of the research problem and a clear description of it as the first step in the current research study.

The lack of research regarding African widowhood is noted as follows: “The challenge presented by the neglect and maltreatment of widows does not receive sufficient attention as contemporary scholarship seems reluctant to reflect on African widowhood rites and their consequences” (Manala 2015:1). Exploring different African contexts regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood would inform social work practice to deal with effective interventions and rendering assistance towards this vulnerable group. Describing the experience of widowhood is worldwide very complicated because of different cultural beliefs and traditions in

different communities (Dube 2019, Cebekhulu 2015:2; Manyedi, Koen & Greeff 2003:70).

International statistics indicated that over 115 million widows are living in deep poverty (United Nations Women Africa 2017:1). On the continent of Africa over one in ten adult women aged 15 years and older (15,8%) currently are widows (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:12). There are large numbers of widow-headed households in Africa and Southern Africa and they are particularly impoverished (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:2). Widows' deprivation is spreading especially because of the deepening of poverty in rural areas in Sub-Saharan Africa (Loomba Foundation 2015:14).

It is pointed out that insufficient research is available relating to widows and their challenges (Lloyd-Sherlock, Corso & Minicuci 2015:1375). In addition, a shortage in social work practice literature exists regarding the experiences and challenges of widows in Southern Africa (Dube 2019:355). There had been a tendency to exclude information about widowhood from routinely reported data and limited quantitative research is available comparing the effects of widowhood across international countries (Lloyd-Sherlock et al 2015:1375). A few international quantitative studies from low and middle-income countries concluded that widowhood experiences differ and do not affect all women to the same degree (Lloyd-Sherlock et al 2015:1374). International qualitative studies claim that widowhood and cultural practices are associated with disadvantages with inheritances, limited mobility out of the house, economic difficulties and restricted social participation (Lloyd-Sherlock et al 2015:1375). In South Africa there are many different population groupings with different cultures, dealing with the challenges of widowhood differently from each other (Yawa 2010:1). Within the African culture, there are various ethnic groups, for example Venda, Xhosa, Tswana, Ndebele, Zulu, Swati, Pedi, Sotho, and Tsonga in which the management of dealing with widowhood is not similar due to different cultural expectations (Yawa 2010:1).

The bereavement of widows has been well-documented in the literature of fields related to social work, like nursing, sociology, psychology, law, theology and medicine, but in social work only a few research outcomes have been documented with a specific

focus on the process of bereavement and not on the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows (Knight & Gitterman 2013:1). For the purpose of this research study the focus was on widows in Mavalani village, Giyani, in the Mopani District of Limpopo Province. Limpopo Province, one of nine provinces in South Africa, pre-dominantly is a rural area. It is known for the fact that the population within the Mopani district, in which the study was conducted, suffers from extreme poverty and also has a very high unemployment rate (Baloyi 2011:4). The Mavalani village is the largest of the surrounding villages in the Mopani District and is mainly, dominated by Tsonga speaking people. Widowhood practices within the Tsonga tribe are still closely tied to cultural and traditional beliefs (Baloyi 2017:2). The Commission on Gender Equality (2013:5) that did a national survey regarding widowhood stated in their findings regarding the Limpopo Province, including the Mopani district, that widowhood is a big challenge in this province together with the violations of widows' rights. The report regarding the national survey on widowhood recommended that: "Urgent action is needed to set up Support and Advice Desks and design rapid response systems to assist and advise women in urgent and desperate situations" (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5).

In South Africa, social workers need more African-specific guidelines to assist widows with the challenges and coping strategies required in being widows, because most social workers are trained in a western social work perspective (Drenth, Herbst & Strydom 2013). Social workers often are the 'advocates' for widows who are unable to speak for themselves and therefore need to be knowledgeable about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies widows have in different cultural settings (Dube 2016:8).

The social work profession promotes the wellbeing of individuals to enhance social inclusion, social cohesion and to help vulnerable or oppressed individuals. It is fundamental for professionals rendering services to bereaved clients from all diverse cultures to be culturally sensitive (Yawa 2010:2). Social workers in South Africa have a responsibility to assist the poor and vulnerable in society, of which widows are a vulnerable group (Lombard & Wairire 2010:99). Social workers are key partners to address inequality and eliminate poverty in the developmental framework in South

Africa and therefore need to be able to assist African widows more effectively (Lombard & Wairire 2010:99).

Against this background and due to the increased number of widows and the limited research regarding widowhood identified, the problem statement of the study was to explore the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women regarding widowhood in Mavalani in the Mopani District, Limpopo Province. The study contributed to the knowledge and improved practice guidelines of the social work profession in this regard.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale of a research study can be described as the justification, motivation, or provision of reasons why the intended study is worth studying (Heath & Tynan 2010:150). The rationale of a research study explains the purpose of the research by justifying why the research topic is important and worthwhile to be investigated (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman 2014:10). The rationale of the study means that the researcher should outline the significance and the importance of the study to be investigated (Fouché & Delport 2011:107). The focus now falls on the rationale of this study which includes the justification and motivation for undertaking the study.

The death of a husband is regarded as the most difficult time in the lives of women, especially amongst the Tsonga women, in Limpopo where widows are frequently forced to remain in the family with their in-laws, regardless of how good or bad their relationships are (Manala 2015:4).

The researcher is a social worker who previously was employed by the Department of Social Development, Limpopo Province. She observed that the Department of Social Development in South Africa does not have a specific programme for widows in Mavalani, Mopani District of Limpopo Province. Social workers from the Department of Social Development, Limpopo seemed to attend to cases of widows mostly by providing once off counselling sessions and food parcels. The findings of the Commission on Gender Equality (2013:6) about their research in the Limpopo

Province supported the researcher's observation that the Department of Health and Social Development are not rendering specific focused programmes for this vulnerable population group, and that only supportive service and food parcels are made available to them. Dube (2016:26) rightfully emphasised the need for social work research regarding widowhood as follows: "The appalling humanitarian circumstances and conditions faced by many widows create enough quests for intense literature in the profession of social work in order to inform practice".

The effectiveness of the current intervention is in question because in the researcher's experience, the widows always returned for further support and counselling. The multiple unplanned return visits by widows increase the workload of social workers. This study was motivated by a need for a deeper understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows to suggest guidelines for effective social work intervention, with specific reference to the widows in Mavalani, Mopani District of Limpopo Province.

The consequences of widowhood are experienced differently in different countries and cultural rituals and beliefs regarding bereavement and widowhood also differ (Makgahlela 2016:3; Somhlaba & Wait 2009:197). Research which documented the challenges and consequences of widowhood in certain countries found that widows frequently lose their husbands' property, including all their material possessions, especially in the developing countries (Korang-Okrah & Haight 2014:1). Therefore, widows across the world are mostly regarded as the poorest of the poor because of cultural prescriptions, religious requirements, discrimination against them and are forced to be removed from their husband's property (Owen 2011:618). It is also estimated that 81 million widows around the world have been the victims of physical abuse, especially by their family members (Sahoo 2014:47). In India, out of 40 million widows, 15 000 widows live alone and some of them live on the streets (Sahoo 2014:45).

In many developing countries the statistics about widowhood are not recorded, making their challenges invisible and difficult to be known (Loomba Foundation 2015:9). Research studies in South Africa are specifically concentrating on experiences of

spousal bereavement and bereavement rituals from different cultures, but do not focus on the challenges of the widows and how they cope with these challenges (Somhlaba & Wait 2009:197). In most of the African society, widowhood is associated with the removal of social recognition, implying that social recognition and acceptance in the society start to decline because of the changing roles from wife to widow (Anugwom 2011:89). In many African settings widows may suffer from psychological trauma due to humiliating cultural practices they had experienced and personal grief from their loss (Onyekuru 2011:357). In South Africa, a study conducted of widows in Thohoyandou indicated that widows felt that their husband's deaths took away their purpose in life (Makatu 2015:497).

Taking into consideration the reasons and justification for the study previously explained in the introduction (1.1.) and problem formulation (1.2.), it is clear that there was a need for greater sensitivity and acknowledgement of widows' experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood, to provide effective support and services (Makgahlela 2016:4).

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework in research is defined as the specific theory a researcher applies to guide and explain a research problem (Imnenda 2014:189). The theoretical framework provides guidance, structure and support to the researcher on how to approach the study as a whole (Grant & Osanloo 2014:13). Choosing a theory is an important step to begin with in the research process, as the theory will give structure to the whole study (Ngulube, Mathipa & Gumbo 2015:56). In this research, two theoretical frameworks are applied, namely the strength-based perspective and the theory of social justice, which are respectively discussed. These perspective and theory were chosen, as they are relevant to the research problem at hand.

1.5.1 Strength-based perspective

Strength-based social work practice is focusing on the strengths and empowerment of persons, groups and communities and argues that focussing on people's problems

entrapped them in these problems and may result in rendering services which can be oppressive and limited (van Breda 2019:245). The strength-based perspective was developed in acknowledgment to criticism of the mainstream disease-based and psychotherapeutic theories, where the focus was on the illness, disability or limitations of persons (Guo & Tsui 2010:235). Saleebey was the first person to introduce the strength-based perspective in social work and since its introduction, this perspective has been applied to different programmes to focus on the strengths and capabilities of persons, rather than on their inabilities and limitations (Guo & Tsui 2010:235). Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger (2017:28), identified Saleebey's six principles for the strength-based perspective which comprise the following in the context of the current research study :

- Every individual, group, family and community have strengths. The widows in Mavalani, Mopani District Limpopo have certain strengths and capabilities to deal with their experiences and challenges of widowhood and to develop coping strategies needed to improve their psychosocial functioning.
- Trauma and abuse, illness and struggle are challenging but they may also present opportunities. The widows of Mavalani, Mopani District Limpopo have abilities, strengths and skills and through facilitation and collaboration with a social worker they can develop new skills to overcome their challenges.
- The upper limits of individuals, groups and communities are unknown. Individuals (widows), groups and communities must not be underestimated in setting goals for themselves to achieve. The potential of the widows in Mavalani, Mopani District of Limpopo Province, were unknown and must not be underestimated. The social worker rendering services to them needs to utilise their undeveloped resources and talents to improve their wellbeing and functioning.
- Collaboration is the best way to serve clients. The strength-based perspective encourages collaboration between social workers and the client-system. The social worker in service delivery needs to establish a collaborative relationship with widows in Mavalani, Mopani district, which includes playing an active role in determining the outcome and drawing from a person's assets and strengths to the benefit of their psychosocial wellbeing.

- Environments have resources which can be identified and utilised. Resources for the widows in Mavalani, Mopani District, need to be identified to assist them in managing their challenges, which include the Department of Health, The Department of Social development, Department of Local Government and housing non-profit organisations, faith-based organisations and churches, the Magistrate's Court and the headman or chief and leaders in the community of the village.

The strength-based perspective recognised that communities are important and that all their members need to work for social justice. The community concerned, can be included in efforts of educating and advocating human rights and social justice for this vulnerable group.

The relationship of the client and the social worker is equally collaborative and active in problem solving (Pulla 2017:236). The strength-based process emphasises the empowerment and the strengthening of a relationship of both the client and practitioner to achieve their goals (Pulla 2017:97; Simmons, Shapiro, Accomozzo & Manthey 2016:126).

Applying the strength-based perspective assisted the researcher in viewing the study participants from a worldview perspective of being resourceful and resilient persons in the face of their challenges. The researcher focussed on the strengths the study participants brought with them, which empowered them to overcome the challenges they have experienced. The potential and inner resources of the participants were acknowledged as coping strategies to deal with the experiences and challenges of widowhood. The strength-based perspective assisted the researcher also to focus on identifying the resources in the environment that the participants benefited from and their inner strengths and abilities as a resource to address their challenges. Empowerment is crucial in assisting clients to resolve their issues and believing that they are able to resolve their problems (Pulla 2017:98). Using the strength-based perspectives assisted the researcher to suggest guidelines for social workers from a strength-based perspective to empower widows to cope with their experiences and challenges.

1.5.2 Social justice theory

The social justice theory is mainly concerned with the redistribution of resources, material goods and social benefits, rights and protections to the society, especially the vulnerable groups (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:25). It also emphasizes the issue of fairness and equal rights of the individual (Bankston 2010:175). One of the goals of social work is to remove the inequalities and unjust social conditions of the society by creating an equal and just society (Kam 2014:728). Social workers need to identify needs of communities, groups and individuals like widows to address areas of injustice (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:25). The researcher applied the social justice theory to this research study to understand the widows' experiences and challenges as a vulnerable group in the society, to further identify structures of oppression and violation of the rights of widows and to be able to advocate on their behalf.

The principles of social justice in social work is guided by the principles of human rights, liberty and equal opportunity (Kam 2014: 724). The principles of social justice of equity, access to goods, participation and rights are illustrated and described in Table 1.2 (Kam 2014:724):

Table 1.2: Principles of social justice

Equity	To ensure fair distribution of available resources across society
Access	To ensure that all people have access to goods and services regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity etc.
Participation	To enable people to participate in decisions which affect their lives.
Rights	To protect individual liberties to information about circumstances and decisions affecting them and to appeal decisions to people feel are unfair

Rawls, an American philosopher, and a contemporary social and political thinker developed the theory of social justice as a fairness principle (John 2014:12). In this

regard, Kam (2014:724) articulated Rawls' three principles of social justice which entail the following:

- The freedom principle, in terms of which people are entitled to freedom and equal rights (Kam 2014:724). When people are not allowed to express their basic rights, it is called social exclusion. It is very crucial to make sure that people exercise their rights which include their right to freedom, justice and peace (Hodge 2010:208).
- The difference principle, which states that where there is economic and social inequality, it is considered to be unfair and unacceptable, unless it benefits the people who are disadvantaged (Kam 2014:724).
- The equal opportunity principle, according to which every individual in the society should have a fair and equal opportunity in all conditions (Kam 2014:724). Every individual regardless of culture, nationality, economic system, political and religion is entitled to every basic right (Hawkins 2010:72).

The social justice theory assists social workers to be aware of the impact of oppression on clients that hinders them to identify their ability to reach their potential (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino & Toporek 2011:7). The role of the social worker in this case, is to remove the inequalities by engaging in social and political action, to promote respect and the wellbeing of people (Chu, Tsui & Yan 2009:288). Promoting social justice is recognised as being the very important mandate of social workers since the beginning of the social work profession (Kam 2014:726). Three perspectives describing the social justice theory are presented as follows:

- Utilitarian perspective

The utilitarian perspective focuses on the social relationship and the distribution of resources to people. It is regarded as an unconditional, unmitigated responsibility. This perspective does not lie on individual equality, but on social equity, responsibility and relationship which in social justice plays an important role in social work (Gasker & Fischer 2014:48). In cognisance of the focus of this research study, social workers have the responsibility to advocate for widows to be treated equally and justly.

- Conservative perspective

'Conservative' is the term used to advocate for effective social welfare services to people who are unable to support themselves or take care of themselves (Thyer 2010:261). The central concerns of this perspective are equality, freedom and inherent respect for individual's empowerment (Gasker & Fischer 2014:47). Widows are a vulnerable group who is in need of effective social work services and social workers need to advocate for them regarding their needs and injustices in communities and with policy makers.

- Liberal egalitarian perspective

The liberal egalitarian perspective advocates for free social cooperation in which all citizens are equal, having equal advantages, fairness and protection of individual rights (Gasker & Fischer 2014:48). Social justice is all about distributing goods to the people who are disadvantaged, and this distribution is not done because of feelings of empathy, but because it is the people's right to claim it (Bankston 2010:165). The goal of social justice is to ensure that people reach their potential and to remove oppressive environmental barriers (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino & Toporek 2011:7). Social workers need to identify the oppressive barriers facing widows in the community and advocate for anti-oppressive justice for them.

This concludes the brief theoretical review on the strength-based and social justice theories. The next section addresses the research questions, primary goals and objectives of the study.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTION, GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

In this section the formulation of the research question, research goals and the objectives of the study are discussed.

1.6.1 Research question

A clear research question is formulated to assist the researcher to develop the purpose of the study (Brink, van der Walt & van Rensburg 2018:70). A research question aims at providing answers through the collection, analysing and verification of data (Jansen 2016:3, Engel & Schut 2012:28). It is emphasised that writing a clear and a brief

research question is a very important step in conducting a successful research study (Tully 2014:31). The research question needs to be clearly formulated and specific to enable the researcher to get correct and valuable answers regarding the aim and goal of the study.

To meet the characteristics of a sound research question it is required that -

- the research question must be clear, and it must be easy to understand from it what is to be investigated;
- it must be possible to find answers to the research question connected to the literature and theory pertaining to the matter being researched;
- sub-questions should be related and connected to one another;
- it must contribute to the body of knowledge about the research topic; and
- it must be formulated to contribute to the study (Bryman & Bell 2011:89).

By considering the abovementioned characteristics the research questions for the study was formulated as follows:

- What are the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood of the women in Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province?
- What suggestions are to be made for social work practice in rendering services to the widows in the Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province?

1.6.2 Research goal

The research goal is derived from the research question and problem statement (Fouché & Delpont 2011:108). The research goal or purpose is regarded as that which the researcher hopes to determine or achieve with the study (Sudheesh, Duggappa & Nethra 2016:24) In other words, the research goal, purpose or aim is the 'dream' that the researcher wants to attain with the research (Fouché & de Vos 2011:94). The goal of the study needs to consist of statements of what the researcher wants to achieve (Tully 2014: 33). The research goal is further defined as the overarching purpose of a research project and the goal is formulated straight, to the point and very brief (Thomas & Hodges 2010:38). In this study, the research goal clearly described and determined what the researcher wanted to achieve with the research study. Taking the above-

mentioned guidelines into consideration, the goal for this study was formulated as follows:

- To develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood of the woman in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo.
- To proffer suggestions for social work practice in rendering services to women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo Province regarding their widowhood.

1.6.3 Research objectives

Research objectives should include all the details of the problem, be specific and ensure that all necessary resources are available (Doody & Bailey 2016:22). Research objectives are the identified steps the researcher has to take one by one and within a certain time span to achieve the goal or 'dream' of the study, that comprises of exploration, description, exploration, correlation, evaluation, intervention and action research (Fouché & de Vos 2011:94,). Research objectives are therefore described as the alteration of the research question into phrases to explore, to determine, and to examine (Kumar 2019:86). From the above definitions, the researcher understands research objectives as what needs to be done in the study to operationalize and achieve the research goal.

The following research objectives were formulated to accomplish the research goal of the study:

- To explore and describe the nature of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood.
- To describe the findings regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo, regarding their widowhood.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood and proffer suggestions about it for social work practice.

This section presented the research question, purposes and objectives of the research. In the following section the research methodology applied is described.

1.7 Research methodology

Research methodology refers to the theoretical or philosophical orientation to conduct a study (Nieuwenhuis 2016b:51). Research methodology comprises of ontology and epistemology principles that inform how the study is conducted (Sarantakos 2013:29). Research methodology provides the researcher with the strategies on how to get answers to the research question (Kumar 2019:4). The research methodology informs the reader of the details on how the study is conducted (Brink et al 2018:187). In this study research methodology is regarded as the specific procedures or strategies of how the study will be conducted to find answers to the research questions. The research approach and research design are further discussed.

1.7.1 Research approach

'Research approach' is regarded as the plans or the research procedures that span the steps from broad assumptions to a detailed methods of data collection, data analysis and the interpretation of data (Creswell & Creswell 2018:3). There are three types of research approaches, namely the quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell 2018:3). The prospective researcher should know how these approaches differ from one another to make an appropriate choice about which approach is suitable for the study (Fouché & Delpont 2011:63). A quantitative research refers to the collection of numerical data or measurement of data in a study (Lune & Berg 2017:12). The qualitative research focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning people or groups apply to their social problems (Creswell & Creswell 2018:4). The mixed method research approach is used to collect and combine data from qualitative and quantitative research (Creswell & Creswell 2018:4).

In this study a qualitative approach was followed. A qualitative research study describes the quality of phenomena by using words, images and description to better understand our life (Lune & Berg 2017:12). In qualitative research the researcher

frequently collects in depth data from a few participants to understand the meaning individuals ascribe to the phenomenon or phenomena being studied (Marlow & Boone 2010:11). Qualitative researchers want to know the meaning of a phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell & Creswell 2018:7).

The qualitative research method is the approach bringing meaning to experiences and describing the perception of the participants about the matter being researched (Fouché & Delport 2011:65). The qualitative researcher collects data from participants about their everyday life by discussing open ended questions contained in an interview guide with them (Ivankova, Creswell & PianoClark 2016:309). Qualitative research methods depend on the text and image of the data, making use of diverse designs and utilizing the specific steps in the analysis of the data (Creswell & Creswell 2018:179). The researcher wanted to explore the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of the widows concerned in depth. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was the most appropriate for this study.

In applying the qualitative research method, the researcher took cognisance of the following characteristics of qualitative research as proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018:181-182):

- Qualitative research is conducted where participants live or perform their everyday life tasks. This researcher went to the natural environment where the participants live, to collect data. The researcher conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews by using an interview guide with participants whilst visiting the participants at their homes or a secured venue in Mavalani Village. Therefore, the researcher was able to observe the participants in their natural living environments where they could express their feelings and ideas.
- Qualitative researchers collect data personally as the key data collecting instrument in their research, by observing participants' behaviour, interviewing participants and by examining relevant documents. In this research, the researcher collected the data by using semi structured interviews with an interview guide, asking and discussing open-ended questions to obtain in depth data concerning the matter at hand. The researcher observed and interviewed

the participants and continuously reviewed interpretations and decisions during the process.

- In qualitative research, researchers do not only depend on one data resource but also obtain data from other sources of data. This may include collecting and noting data by observing the participants' behaviour during interviews and obtaining information from documentation. The researcher obtained data by interviewing various participants in Mavalani Village. The participants were in different life phases and ages as indicated in the inclusion criteria. Participants' behaviour was observed, noted and various scholarly works were consulted to acquire a full comprehension on the subject of the study.
- In processing the data, qualitative researchers work with inductive data analysis that includes identifying and building patterns, categories as well as organising and sorting the data according to themes by adding more units of information. This process, according to Creswell and Creswell (2018: 182) takes the form of working back and forth amongst the database to establish a comprehensive set of themes. The researcher applied the process of inductive data analysis in the study to ensure that comprehensive themes have been established to group the data obtained.
- Learning and understanding the meaning the participants attach to the phenomenon studied, are very important. In conducting the interviews and processing the data, the researcher ensured that she understood the nature of the participants' experiences, challenges and coping strategies as widows and that she learned from it. This study reported on the multiple perspectives and factors relevant to the research. For this purpose, existing literature of researchers about the topic was also studied and taken into consideration.
- The qualitative research design is adjustable, meaning that the actual process of the research can be changed during the process of collection of data. The paramount of qualitative research is about learning from the participants' issues or problems. Therefore, the researcher engaged in the most suitable practices and methods to obtain the data required in this study. Using semi structured interviews with an interview guide comprising of open-ended questions, made the interviews adjustable and enabled the researcher to steer interviews in the correct direction to obtain the information required. A further adjustment took

place when the researcher added a question to the interview guide after conducting the pilot testing.

- Reflexivity as a characteristic of and a form of inquiry in qualitative research, involves researchers conveying their own background and how it influences their interpretations on the information in the study. It also acknowledges the changes brought about in researchers as a result of the research process. The researcher has taken the context of the environment of the participants where they are living and how it influenced them in consideration for this study.
- Qualitative researchers report findings from a holistic view. In this case, the researcher reported on and described an all-inclusive picture in depth obtained of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of the widows concerned.

1.7.2 Research design

The role of a research design is to explain, justify and describe what kind of study is planned and to ensure that the research question find answers (Kumar 2019:154). A research design is described as the plan that provides the structure or the plan the researcher will follow during the research project (Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:44). The research design must provide a detailed outline of how data will be collected and analysed, and the selection of a research design depends on the various dimensions of the research process (Bryman & Bell 2011:40). The concept 'research design' can therefore be explained as a strategy used to clearly identify the selection of participants, methods of collecting data as well as methods of data analysis (Nieuwenhuis 2016b:72). From the abovementioned definitions, the researcher understands research designs as the strategy and the overall structure the researcher will follow during the research study. A phenomenological design, complemented by an explorative, descriptive and contextual strategy of inquiry were followed in this research.

The utilisation of a *phenomenological research design* in a study entails the description and understanding of people's perception of a certain phenomenon (Delpont, Fouché & Schurink 2011:305). Phenomenological research views a person's behaviour as a

product of how people interpret their environment, in order to understand or grasp the meaning of a person's behaviour (Bryman & Bell 2011:15). A phenomenological research design describes the lived experiences of all people selected to participate in the study (Creswell & Creswell 2018:13). The researchers collect the data from the people who experience a phenomenon and develop a thorough description of the experiences of all individuals selected to participate in the study (Nieuwenhuis 2016c:78). With this research study, the researcher wanted to explore and describe the women's lived experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood and also to interpret their meaning, therefore the use of the phenomenological research design is tailor-made for this study.

The *descriptive research design* is appropriate in assisting the researcher to describe the researched phenomenon's characteristics and to provide answers to the research question (Brink et al 2018:96; Hesse-Biber & Leavy 2011:10). The major goal of social science studies is to describe situations and events based on scientific observation (Babbie 2016:91) The descriptive research design is required when a researcher wants to observe and then be able to describe what has been observed (Babbie 2016:91), when the researcher wants to accurately define and describe a phenomenon studied (Fouché & de Vos 2011:96). The descriptive research design is set to describe the natural phenomenon, situations and problems based on the data provided about the study topic (Kumar 2019:15). The researcher applied the descriptive research design to extensively describe the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women's in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province.

An *exploratory research design* provides and familiarizes the researcher with subjects when a topic is relatively new (Babbie 2016:90) and where there is a shortage of basic information on a new phenomenon of interest (Fouché & de Vos 2011:95). The exploratory research design assisted the researcher to obtain insight and a better understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women regarding their widowhood in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province (Babbie 2016: 90).

The qualitative researcher seeks to describe and to understand the events and actions studied within the natural context in which they occur (Babbie & Mouton 2014:272). Compiling a *contextual research design* begins at understanding the phenomenon which is under investigation and it can be cultural, social and physical (Svensson & Dumas 2013:447). The researcher studied the widows where they live to better understand their context of living. Interviews were conducted with participants in their natural environments to obtain information about their experiences, challenges and their coping strategies.

1.8 Research method

Research methods refer to specific techniques that are used in the collection of data, analysis and interpretation of data in a research study (Creswell & Creswell 2018:16). Research methods comprise observation, interviewing and collecting of data (Nieuwenhuis 2016b: 51). Discussing the research method applied, is the section that needs to be clearly outlined by justifying or providing reasons why a particular method or methods are selected (Anderson 2010:4). The choice of research methods should be connected with the research objectives and the research question (Thomas & Hodges 2010:43). The researcher regards research methods as the tools that are used in the research study to collect, analyse and interpret data. In describing the research method applied in this research, the focus is on the research population, sampling and sampling techniques; data collecting; pilot testing; the method of data analysis; and data verification.

1.8.1 The research population

A research population is the entire group of persons that the researcher is interested in to study and draw conclusions from (Babbie 2016:116). In this context the population refers to individuals, case records, events or organisations that possess the specific characteristics concerned or needed to deal with in addressing the research problem (Strydom 2011c:223). The research population consists of all the elements from which a sample is selected to be studied (Bryman & Bell 2011:170).

The researcher understands the research population to be the group of individuals that have the specific characteristics selected to be studied.

The research population of this research consisted of the widows from Mavalani Village in the Mopani district of the Limpopo Province, from which a sample of participants were drawn by means of specific sampling techniques as discussed in 1.7.2.

The reasons for selecting the Mavalani village in Mopani district for this research are explained in the presentation of the problem formulation and rationale of this study (see 1.2 and 1.3). The general research population for this study were widows from Mavalani village, Mopani district, Limpopo Province and more specific, widows residing in Mavalani village in Giyani (a city which includes different villages). Mavalani village is one of the largest villages in Giyani. The inhabitants of Mavalani village form a large community, and during the period that the researcher was employed at the Department of Social Development, many widows of this village required assistance from the social workers. In a discussion with a social worker, presently employed at the Department of Social Development, it was confirmed that there are still higher caseloads of widows from Mavalani village, compared to that of other villages in the area, confirming the researcher's previously observations that widows always returned for further support and counselling. (see section 1.4) (Hlungwani 2019). Mavalani village has many women inhabitants who are widows, making their widowhood one of the major social problems to be addressed in that community (Maluleke 2019). Therefore, participants from Mavalani village were selected for this research and they contributed in assisting the researcher to obtain rich and descriptive data about their situations. In practical terms, Mavalani village was accessible to the researcher and it was cost effective and convenient for the researcher to conduct the research study there.

1.8.2 Sampling

Sampling is the procedure used by the researcher to select a group of people or units representing the research population from which to obtain the information needed for

the research (Brink et al 2018:115). A sample is a part of or a selected group which is carefully chosen by the researcher from a drawn population (Brink et al 2018:117). It is normally not possible in research to include the whole research population in the research study because of time and cost, therefore sampling is used (Maree & Pietersen 2016:192). The researcher understands sampling as the group of people drawn from the population, to obtain information for the research.

There are two basic sampling methods, namely probability and non-probability sampling (Maree & Pietersen 2016:192; Babbie 2016:193). Probability sampling is driven by the principle of representativeness of a sample of a population, where every member has an equal chance to be selected in the sampling process (Flick 2018:174). Non-probability sampling refers to the type of sampling methods used when it is impossible to determine the entire population or gaining access to the entire population and therefore each element will not have an equal chance to be selected out of the population (Pascoe 2014:137). Non-probability sampling is the preferred sampling method in qualitative studies and focuses on the relevance of specific characteristics of individuals for deciding about their inclusion or not in a sample (Flick 2018:174).

Qualitative research samples are usually smaller and are not required to be representative of the research population (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole 2013:175). For sampling in quantitative research, larger samples or a subset of the research population are usually used, samples are required to be representative of the research population and it allows the accurate generalisation of results (Bless et al 2013:165). Because this study is a qualitative study, non-probability sampling was used to obtain participants. It was also an appropriate choice for this research due to time restrictions and limited financial resources for the researcher.

1.8.3 Sampling methods

There are a variety of strategies available in sampling methods to recruit participants (Padgett 2017:71). A distinction is made between probability sampling methods and non-probability sampling methods. Probability sampling methods includes simple

random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling and cluster sampling (Maree & Pietersen 2016:192; Brink et al 2018:119).

Non-probability sampling methods include convenience sampling, quota sampling, snowball sampling and purposive sampling (Maree & Pietersen 2016:197) and are mostly used in qualitative research. The use of convenience sampling consists of and includes elements or persons that cross the researcher's path (Strydom 2011c: 232). Quota sampling refers to different characteristics that are selected based on the population parameters, allocating proportions to the characteristics, making sure the characteristics stipulated exist or are representative in the population being studied (Babbie 2016:188). Snowball sampling can be used when an existing participant refers the researcher to new participants for the study (Babbie & Mouton 2014:162). Purposive or judgemental sampling is used to choose participants based on their characteristics applicable to the study, to provide in depth information (Anderson 2010:4). A sampling method is selected by the researcher with a specific purpose in mind (Maree & Pietersen 2016:198). The purpose of applying a non-probability sampling method in qualitative research is to gather wide, rich and diverse information or data (Strydom & Delport 2011b:391).

In this research, the researcher used the non-probability sampling techniques called purposive or judgemental sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is where the researcher will draw a sample which is relevant to the research questions or research topic (Bryman & Bell 2011:186). In this case, the researcher purposively selected widows as participants who have personal knowledge and experience about the research topic (Flick 2018:181). Pascoe (2014:142) recommends that in purposive sampling a set list of characteristics needs to be determined to carefully select participants from the population. In purposive or judgemental sampling participants are selected based on the researcher's knowledge and judgement regarding who will be able to give the richest information regarding the subject under investigation (Babbie 2016:187). Purposive sampling is also used in this study because it is not possible to gain access to the entire population and it would be too costly. Therefore, financial resources and time limitations made the use of purposive sampling the most appropriate method for the planned research (Maree & Pietersen 2016:10).

Snowball sampling is a sampling method which is frequently used in qualitative research, and the results obtained from snowball sampling cannot be generalised to the larger population (Pascoe 2016:143). Snowball sampling has particular application value in qualitative research since it is concerned with reaching out to potential participants who are difficult to identify (Strydom & Delpont 2011:393). Recruiting by means of snowball sampling involves that the researcher should identify a few participants of the target population and ask them whether they are aware of other persons with the same characteristics who also fit the population, to be contacted (Babbie 2016:188).

As stated, the study focused on the population of widows from Mavalani village in Mopani district. Applying purposive and snowball sampling techniques, enabled the researcher to obtain the necessary participants from this area to collect the relevant required information about the research topic. Participation was voluntarily, and participants were not forced to be part of the study. Only widows who were willing and available formed part of the sample. A conscious effort was made to find widows in different age groups to gain an in-depth understanding of widowhood through obtaining information from participants in different stages of life.

As widows are regarded as a vulnerable population, in applying the necessary research ethics, specific attention must be given to safeguard them from any harm which includes being cautious and specific regarding the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Bracken-Roche, Bell, Macdonald & Racine 2017:18). In this regard, Bracken-Roche et al (2017:18) expressed themselves as follows: "The implication of vulnerability all tend towards careful inclusion rather than outright exclusion of vulnerable groups from research." The core ethical principles regarding vulnerable populations entail respect for persons, concern for welfare, justice and informed consent (Bracken-Roche et al 2017:6). The ethical principles of autonomy and respect for persons obligate the researcher to allow prospective participants to have the freedom to make their own choices after having been fully informed about the purpose of the study, its risks and benefits (Bracken-Roche et al 2017:18). Participants needed to be able to understand all information given to give their informed consent to participate in the

research. All the participants who were selected for the study were able to fully understand the nature of the study and gave their informed consent to participate in the research. The subject of research ethics and vulnerable persons are further discussed under the heading Ethical considerations (see 1.12).

To be included in a sample, participants met certain criteria. The sample of this research participants had to be widows residing in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province, who –

- have been widowed for at least one year;
- before their husbands' decease, have been staying with their husband;
- were between the ages of 18-65 years;
- could comfortably express themselves in English and in Tsonga;
- were available and willing to participate in the study; and
- fully understood the nature of the study and the process of informed consent.

The exclusion criteria not to include widows in the sample, were widows who were -

- not residing in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province;
- younger than 18 years;
- older than 65 years;
- not willing to participate in the study;
- unable to comfortably express themselves in English and in Tsonga; or
- not able to understand informed consent and to follow the interview process.

In qualitative methods it is not possible to determine the sample size in advance (Bless et al 2013:179), as the size of a sample in qualitative research is determined by means of the principle of data saturation. Data saturation refers to the stage where the information obtained for all emergent themes including categories, has been saturated and no new information is generated (Creswell & Creswell 2018:84). Therefore, in this research the researcher did not determine the sample size at the beginning of the study but applied the principle of data saturation (Brink et al 2018:128).

The researcher made an appointment to see the headman of Mavalani to request permission to conduct a study in his village. She requested permission to conduct the

study in the village through an informative letter explaining the purpose of the study (Addendum A). After the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study, the headman was requested to act as a gatekeeper and assisted in obtaining a suitable participant who was willing to participate in the research study, taking in consideration the inclusion criteria and making use of the snowball sampling technique. A gatekeeper is a person or member of a group or community with a social standing or a traditional authority figure or leader at grassroots level (Silverman & Patterson: 2015:43). Sometimes it is important for the researcher to firstly approach the gatekeeper for assistance in making the necessary arrangements, rather than approaching prospective participants in the study directly (Bless et al 2013:35). The researcher explained the planned research and answered all questions raised by the prospective gatekeeper regarding the research study. The researcher followed the university's Covid-19 guidelines as prescribed to students, to ensure the safety of the researcher and headman during contact making (Unisa: 2020).

The researcher made the necessary arrangements telephonically and then visited the prospective participants by appointment, after the first participant referred the researcher to other prospective participants. The prospective participants who were willing and qualified to participate in the study were given consent forms to sign to indicate their willingness to be part of the study (Babbie 2016:64) (see Addenda B and C). The researcher made appointments for the individual interviews with the participants at times and venues suitable to the participants. A venue was also secured in Mavalani village for the participants who were not comfortable with conducting the interviews at their homes.

With the issues of the research population, sample, sampling methods and selection criteria clarified, the attention now falls on the data collection.

1.9 DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of data collection is to obtain information from participants to answer the research question (Bless et al 2013: 184). The researcher understands data collection as an activity to collect data from the participants in order to find answers to the

research question. The preparation of participants for data collection, the method of data collection and pilot testing are discussed.

1.9.1 Preparation for data collection

It is emphasised that prior to the beginning of a study, the researcher should obtain the necessary permission to conduct the study from the authorities in charge (Creswell & Creswell 2018:92). Creswell and Creswell (2018:92) added that permission can be received through writing letters explaining how, where and when the study will be conducted. After the researcher received ethical clearance from the Department of Social Work's Social Work Research Committee (SWREC) at the University to conduct the study, the researcher made contact with the headman of Mavalani personally by arranging an appointment with him.

The headman of Mavalani village as the person of authority at Mavalani village, was requested to provide the researcher with access to the village to conduct the study of the participants. The researcher telephonically made an appointment with the headman, arranged to meet him in person to present particulars about the study and requested permission to conduct the study in his village in writing (Addendum A). He was also asked to act as a gatekeeper and to refer the researcher to a willing prospective participant for recruiting and to assist with the recruitment of other participants in the study. The researcher followed the university's Covid-19 guidelines as prescribed to students, to ensure the safety of the researcher and headman during contact making (Unisa: 2020).

Certain prescribed protocols for researchers from the University of South Africa needed to be followed during the collection of data during the covid-19 pandemic in South Africa (Unisa:2020). The researcher adhered to the necessary measures which needed to be put in place and only collected data when face-to-face interviews were permitted with the necessary caution and following the prescribed protocol. Face-to-face interviews were therefore conducted adhering to the strict conditions as prescribed. The researcher further took the following precautions to adhere to the University of South Africa's Covid-19 guidelines (Unisa: 2020):

- If the researcher or the participant was not feeling well, they had to cancel the intended contact for the collection of data by means of a visit.
- The researcher conducted telephonic pre-screenings before the visitations and a register of all participants that were part of the face-to-face data collection activities was kept and updated.
- The researcher ensured that she wore an appropriate cloth mask and that she was screened before meeting with the participants.
- Participants were advised not to touch their faces and the researcher also did the same.
- During face-to-face contact, the researcher ensured that she and participants always wore face masks and used hand sanitizer.
- The researcher kept a physical distance of two meters between her and the participants.
- The surfaces where the interviews took place were sanitised before starting with the interviews and after the interviews.
- The handling of hard copies of documents was done by using disposable gloves.
- No sharing of drinks or food was done.

The researcher was also mindful to adhere to the ethical principles to be followed during research. The ethical principles concerned are discussed under the heading Ethical Considerations (see 1.12).

By using the snowball sampling technique, the researcher asked the first participant to refer her to another prospective participant and continued with this referral process. When referred to a prospective participant, the researcher telephonically made contact with her, to introduce herself and secure an appointment if the participant was interested in being part of the research study. It is imperative for the researcher to explain the purpose of a study to prospective participants (Babbie 2016:309). Therefore, prospective participants selected for the study, were contacted and the purpose of the study was explained to them in writing (Addendum B) and verbally when visits were made to the prospective participants.

The ethical issues and the need for obtaining informed consent was discussed before participants were asked to sign the consent form (see Addenda C and B). After the participants gave their consent to be participants in the study, the researcher arranged an appointment to explain the study and secure a further appointment to conduct the interview. Interviews were conducted with the participants at their homes where confidentiality and privacy were able to be maintained, if this was not possible, the researcher arranged a suitable venue in cooperation with the gatekeeper where interviews could be conducted in privacy (Greeff 2011:350). The researcher conducted the interviews at a time suitable and appropriate for the respondents (Bryman & Bell 2011:219). The researcher obtained written permission from participants for digitally recording the interviews (Addendum C). Taking written notes during the interviews was also important, because it assisted in reviewing the answers and the information obtained (Nieuwenhuis 2016c:94). In this research the interviews approximately took an hour and were recorded by using an audio recorder with the permission of the participants.

The gathering of data, storing of data and who would have access to the data have to be dealt with correctly in terms of the research ethics (Bryman & Bell 2011:128). Therefore, the researcher informed the participants about which persons would have access to the data, namely the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and the independent coder. The participants were also informed that the data will contain pseudonyms to ensure anonymity and be securely stored for a period of five years after which it will then be deleted.

1.9.2 Method of data collection

Data may be collected in many different forms from the sample of participants, including by means of group administration of questionnaires, postal or email surveys, telephone surveys or face to face interviews (Maree & Pietersen 2016:175-177). Data collection regarding quantitative research studies differs from the data collection methods used in qualitative research (Du-Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje 2014:148). The most frequently used quantitative data collection methods are surveys, experiments and content analysis (Du-Plooy-Cilliers & Cronje 2014:148). Data collection methods in

qualitative research consist of obtaining data by means of studying documents and textual data, making observations, conducting interviews and focus groups (Nieuwenhuis 2016c:88). The most basic level in qualitative research for collecting data involves three major approaches namely conducting single interviews, eliciting narratives in a single interview, and conducting focus groups stimulating discussions (Flick 2018:61).

In qualitative research an interview can be described as a direct method of obtaining information or data from participants and it is often used in exploratory, descriptive and case study research (Brink et al 2018:143). Researchers frequently use face to face interviews, semi-structured by means of an interview guide, consisting of open-ended questions to collect the data required from individual participants or focus groups in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility between the researcher and the participants (Greeff 2011:352; Bless et al 2013:21). The goal of conducting semi-structured interviews is for the participant to provide information to enable the researcher to understand the participant's views, experiences and perspectives (Zahle 2017:146). Researchers conducting interviews to collect data may use an interview guide to structure and guide their interviews (Bless et al 2013:21). The interview guide gives the researcher guidelines of the issues or topics they hope the interview might cover or address (Greeff 2011:352).

In semi- structured interviewing, the researcher often uses an interview guide to assist in covering the topic and all the questions, whilst the interviewer may change the sequence and wording of questions during the interview to obtain clarity (Bryman & Bell 2011:225). By recording semi-structured interviews data can be saved or obtained from video tapes, recorded tapes and from field notes (Brink et al 2018:145).

In this research, data collection was by means of conducting face to face interviews with the widows of Mavalani village. The researcher made use of semi-structured face-to-face interviews assisted with an interview guide with open ended questions. Semi structured interviews were used to collect data from the widows about their experiences, challenges and coping strategies. An interview guide was used to guide and direct the interviews and ensured that the interview maintained a focus (Greeff 2011:352) (see Addendum I). Open ended questions comprising the interview guide,

were non-judgemental, unbiased and focussed to allow the participants to participate freely during the interviews (Greeff 2011:352).

At the beginning of the interview, the following biographical questions were asked:

- How old are you?
- Do you have children? If yes, how many?
- What is your highest school or educational qualification?
- Are you currently employed? If yes, what type of job do you have?
- When did your husband pass away?

The following open-ended questions were discussed to gather information from the participants:

Questions related to the topic

- Please explain your experiences of being a widow.
- What are the day to day challenges that you encounter due to the death of your husband?
- Describe the nature of your family relationships before and after the death of your husband.
- What kind of support did you receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?
- What kind of support did you not receive from people such as relatives and friends that would have assisted you more effectively?
- What are the coping strategies that you use to deal with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband?
- What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges that widows face and to assist other widows?
- What do you think about the traditional rituals have to be followed by widows after the death of their husbands?
- How can social workers assist women in widowhood?

The researcher planned to use specific interviewing skills to ensure a productive interviewing process. These skills used during the interviews included clarification, active listening and probing. The researcher needed to listen effectively and be

sincerely interested in the topic being discussed (Babbie 2016:312). During the interviews the researcher also paid attention and listened actively to the interviewee by maintaining eye contact (Bryman & Bell 2011:230). The researcher adhered to the guidelines for effective interviewing of participants by actively listening to what was said, maintaining eye contact and being interested and attentive during the interviews. During the process of data collection, the researcher applied active listening skills to listen and to understand the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows as described. Probing in the form of asking non-directive questions was used to motivate or to request interviewees for elaboration of answers (Babbie 2016:269; Creswell & Creswell 2018:191). Applying clarification skills was used to obtain clear statements from the participants (Greeff 2011:345). The researcher also asked follow-up questions to get clarification from the participants during the interview sessions about the matters discussed.

1.9.3 Pilot testing

The role of pilot testing in qualitative research is to ensure that the research instrument developed performs well as a whole (Bryman & Bell 2011:209). Pilot testing assists the researcher to establish before the time how a research instrument will perform when applied in the study and to proactively identify problems and areas where adjustments to the research instrument are needed (Dikko 2016:523). Pilot testing should be administered beforehand to a few people who will not be members of the sample in the study, to test the interview guide and make the necessary adjustments to it before it is used to collect the data for the research (Bryman & Bell 2011:209). Pilot testing can be described according to Koonin (2014:257) “as a pre-warning system, because possible errors or difficulties with the measure instrument will emerge during the pilot testing”. Modification can be done on the research instrument, to ensure its effectiveness.

The researcher did pilot testing by using the interview guide to conduct semi-structured interviews with two widows who met the criteria for inclusion in the sample. They did not participate in the actual study and the information that was obtained from them was not included as part of the study. The pilot test can assist the researcher to make

the necessary adjustments to the interview guide as the data collection instrument, to ensure that the data required for the research are obtained.

In the next section the method of data analysis is discussed.

1.10 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the process of drawing meaning from or making sense of information or evidence collected for a research project (Thomas & Hodges 2010:23). Qualitative data analysis is described as a process that involves many levels of analysis in sequential steps (Creswell & Creswell 2018:193). It is also described as a process of understanding the phenomenon under study by description, classification and interconnection, where the researcher understands, interprets and explains the collected data (Graue 2015:8). Qualitative data analysis is any form of analysis that uses non-numerical approaches to derive meaning from research data (Thomas & Hodges 2010:23).

The researcher analysed the data collected from the participants, by performing the following well-known eight steps for qualitative data analysis as proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:196):

- The interviews must be transcribed, organised and the data carefully sorted according to the different types. The researcher listened to the voice recorder, transcribed the interviews from the voice recorder by making notes, and read the notes carefully to familiarize herself with the data while sorting and organising it.
- The interview transcripts must be selected and read to get the meaning of the transcripts. The researcher randomly selected interview transcripts and read thorough them in order to grasp and understand the meaning of the transcripts.
- After completing this for several participants, a list of all topics identified in the transcriptions must be compiled, grouped together according to their similarities and differences and be listed in a label column. As required, the researcher made a list of all topics and categorised them according to their similarities and differences.

- The topics are abbreviated and categorized, codes are assigned to different clusters of topics and it must be found out if new categories and codes emerged. The researcher took a list and went back to the data and set up a fitting abbreviation for each topic as a code. She also gave attention to the types of codes she developed when analysing the transcripts.
- The most descriptive wording for the topics is established and translated into categories. Where possible, the list of topics should be reduced by grouping topics relating to each other together. After coding, the researcher grouped together similar topics into categories.
- A final decision on the abbreviation and alphabetical codes for each of these themes or categories must be made. The researcher made a final decision on the abbreviation and alphabetical codes of each theme.
- The data material for each category must be assembled in one place and a preliminary analysis be performed. The researcher assembled the data belonging to each theme in one place and conducted a preliminary analysis of it.
- If necessary, the existing data must be recoded. The researcher recoded the existing data where necessary.

In analysing and processing the data, the necessary attention was given to its verification.

1.11 DATA VERIFICATION

In qualitative research assessing the trustworthiness of the data obtained is fundamental and is described as the test value of data analysis, its findings and conclusions (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:123). Qualitative researchers prefer to use credibility and dependability to evaluate qualitative research (Babbie 2016:405). The trustworthiness of this study was based on the model of Lincoln and Guba (in Lietz & Zayas 2010:190), which addresses the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the data. These four criteria of trustworthiness and the techniques applied for establishing trustworthiness are summarised in Table 1.3.

Table 1. 3: Summary of trustworthiness criteria and techniques for establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba in Loh 2013:5)

Criteria	Techniques
Credibility (internal validity)	Prolonged engagement Persistent observation Triangulation Peer debriefing Negative case analysis Referential adequacy Member checks
Transferability (external validity)	Thick description
Dependability (reliability)	Triangulation Dependability audit-examining the process of the inquiry (how data were collected, how data were kept, accuracy of data)
Confirmability (objective)	Examine the product to test that the findings, interpretations and recommendation are supported by data

The respective trustworthiness criteria and techniques for establishing trustworthiness entail the following (Lincoln & Guba in Loh, 2013:5):

- **Credibility**

Credibility attempts to answer questions like how to ensure that the reader will trust the findings and how congruent the findings are with regard to reality (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:123). Credibility is seen as an equivalent to internal validity to express that the study conducted is accurate in the description and identification of the subjects (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011:419). The subject under investigation should be accurately identified and described to enhance credibility (Yin 2011:19). Conducting repeated peer debriefing sessions between the researcher and the supervisor together with taking reflective notes and member checks, are measures to ensure credibility (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:123).

The researcher ensured the credibility of the study by using member checking to determine the accuracy of the findings. During interviews the participants were given the opportunity to make comments and corrections to verify the researcher's interpretation of the information that they have shared during the interviews. The researcher also used multiple data gathering methods and theories to obtain richer and better information and to check the reality of the findings. The researcher ensured that a well-established research method and research design was established and used to ensure the study's credibility (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:123).

- Transferability

Transferability is when the researcher questions whether the research findings of a study can be transferred to other studies (Fouché & de Vos 2011:420). In qualitative research, transferability does not include generalised claims, but it focuses on the research readers to connect the study elements and their own experience (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:124). Transferability refers to the ability to apply research findings of a particular study in another context or to other participants (Babbie & Mouton 2014:277). The responsibility of the researcher is to provide full information of the context by allowing the reader to decide if the research can be transferred to another context (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:124).

The researcher purposefully selected participants to gather detailed descriptions and data about the topic under study that were applicable to the whole population. Included were particulars of the context, the participants and the research design that this information could provide the reader with the opportunity to assess and compare it with similar contexts, enabling the readers to make their own decision regarding transferability (Bless et al 2013:237).

- Dependability

Dependability in research means that the research processes should be transparent. Therefore, the researcher needs to write his or her qualitative research procedures out and save it, to allow other people to review and to understand his or her work (Yin 2011:19). Dependability requires the researcher to carefully describe the research, to follow a clear research strategy and to ensure that every step has been taken carefully

(Bless et al 2013:237). Dependability indicates how the research design and data gathering methods were implemented in the study. The research design may change during the study and new data sources and data gathering methods may be absorbed to justify the study (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:124). The researcher ensured that dependability was achieved by presenting the research process in detail and step by step in terms of the abovementioned requirements.

- Confirmability

Confirmability is the final construct associated with objectivity (Strydom 2011:125). The findings need to be clearly linked to the data (Liets & Zayas 2010:197). Triangulation may be used to enhance confirmability and decrease the researcher's bias and an audit trail also increases the confirmability by tracing all the procedures and decisions step by step (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:125). An audit trail is a process of systematically documenting all the decisions and procedures applied by the researchers through the research process (Schurink, Fouché & de Vos 2011:422). Confirmability is regarded as the final construct that is associated with objectivity (Schurink et al 2011:421). The researcher ensured that her personal interests and motivation did not shape or influence the use of the data, the findings and the interpretation of the findings.

The data verification as applied in this study will strengthen the findings of the study. The focus next falls on the ethical considerations underlying this study.

1.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical guidelines in research are developed to define the rights of participants including the community (Strydom 2011a:127). Research ethics can be described as the moral principles that provide rules and behavioural expectations for the conduct towards participants, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students (Strydom 2011a:129). Ethical issues should be reflected throughout the research process, such as when the researcher starts to conduct the study, during the collection and analysis of data and in sharing and storing of the data (Creswell & Creswell

2018:90). Researchers need to know for certain what is proper and improper in conducting a scientific research inquiry (Babbie 2016:62).

Widows are regarded as a vulnerable population because of “an identifiably increased likelihood of incurring additional or greater wrong” (Bracken-Roche et al 2017:18). Several definitions are available for defining the concept of a ‘vulnerable population’. In summary, this term implies a “disadvantaged sub-segment of the community” and that the utmost care must be taken to protect these persons from any harm or exploitation in research studies (Shivayogi 2016:53).

The principles of safeguarding vulnerable persons, like widows, include the process of obtaining informed consent, using authorised substitute decision makers, addressing privacy and confidentiality concerns, having respect for persons, justice and the selection methods of participants (Shivayogi 2016:53). Widows are a vulnerable population because of their individual characteristics and their context or environment (Bracken-Roche et al 2017:18).

The principles applied to safeguard the interests of this specific vulnerable population’s interests included the following (Shivayogi 2016:53):

- The consent forms used clearly communicated all information about the research. Provision was also made for any possible anticipated harm that could befall participants. The process of obtaining the participants’ informed consent is discussed in 3.8.1, to describe how this principle was applied.
- Supervision and observational study monitoring are some of the actions which could be taken to safeguard vulnerable persons. Consultations with the supervisor and peer reviewers were used to ensure that all safety measures were taken to safeguard any persons in the study against harm and exploitation.
- The privacy and confidentiality concerns addressed in sections 3.8.2 and 3.8.4 were adhered to. Mechanisms of privacy and confidentiality also included ensuring adequate time and an appropriate environment for the interviews. The researcher secured a venue which was available if the participants were not ensured of privacy in their home environments when conducting the interviews.

- Respect for a person entails the treatment of a person as autonomous and to protect a person with diminished autonomy. Researchers need to take the person's wishes and opinions in consideration and provide all information needed for them to make an informed decision on whether to participate in the research or not.
- The researcher needed to clearly state the benefits of this research and who will receive it. The benefits of this research were the making of suggestions for rendering more effective social work services for widows in the Mavalani village.
- The researcher applied the accepted clear and specific selection methods of research participants with inclusion and exclusion criteria, as discussed in the preparation for data collection (see 3.5.1) and method of data collection (see 3.5.2) of this report.
- Meaningful support should be offered to vulnerable persons when necessary. The researcher made arrangements with a social worker to assist with the debriefing of participants if necessary. After completion of each interview the researcher inquired about the extent to which the participant was involved in the study and her emotional well-being, in order to support the participant. Participants were informed about the social worker who was available to assist them in providing support through debriefing sessions after the study if necessary.

In more detail, during the research the researcher applied the ethical considerations and principles of confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, beneficence, privacy, debriefing and management of information, which respectively entail the following:

1.12.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality in research means that researchers are required to safeguard every participant's identity (Silverman 2016:33). Maintaining confidentiality requires that whilst the researcher knows the identity of the participants and the nature of their responses, he or she undertakes not to disclose the information by linking it to the participant concerned (Babbie 2016:65). In maintaining confidentiality, it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that data are not disclosed for other purposes

than research (Brink et al 2018:31). Confidentiality is also described as the arrangement to control the access to private data (Delport & Roestenburg 2011:119). The participants were informed about the ethical consideration of confidentiality before the interviews started and it was explained how it would be maintained. The researcher ensured that she kept all the information obtained safe where no one would be able to access it and she used pseudonyms for the participants so that it would not be possible to identify them. She only discussed the information with her supervisor for the research purposes.

1.12.2 Informed consent

Informed consent remains very important even in a situation where the participants are not interested to listen to the researcher's explanation, the researcher must always provide a full and clear explanation of the investigation in a language that participants understand and without unnecessary interference (Strydom 2011a:118). Informed consent implies that participants have to be informed about the interviewing process that will be followed and how the information obtained from the interviews will be used. Participants also need to know and understand the role of the researcher (Qu & Dumay 2011:253). The researcher should take into consideration that informed consent may have implications in cultural settings (Bless et al 2013:32). Informed consent comprises of the following three elements (Brink et al 2018:31):

- The kind of information required from participants.
- The researcher should check the level of understanding of participants, if they are able to give or to grant consent.
- Participants have an option to participate or not in the research, or even to withdraw from the research.

The fact that widows are considered as a vulnerable population, makes the aspect of informed consent a cornerstone in the ethical principles regarding vulnerable populations. The researcher needed to treat the participants respectfully and in context of upholding their personal interests, to recognise their autonomous choices and decisions to participate or not in the study, without any forceful actions to convince

them to participate (Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues 2016:13).

The researcher ensured that participants were fully informed about the nature of the research. To participate and be interviewed, each participant had to give their consent by signing a consent form (Addendum C).

1.12.3 Beneficence

In social research, it is not allowed to physically cause any form of injury to participants even though they have volunteered themselves to be part of the study (Babbie & Mouton 2014:22). It is more difficult to determine emotional harm experienced by participants than physical harm, but due to the negative consequences of any form of harm to participants, it is the researcher's responsibility to protect participants from any form of harm (Strydom 2011a:115). Researchers must ensure that participants' well-being is protected in all areas, including the physical, psychological, emotional, economic social or legal areas (Brink et al 2018:29). A researcher conducting a study that exposes participants to any form of physical and/or emotional harm of which the researcher is aware, are ethical obliged to make the necessary changes to such a study to ensure that it does not happen (Strydom 2011a:116). In this research, the researcher ensured that she protected participants from any harm by giving them the opportunity to decide to what extent they are willing to share their experiences, challenges and coping strategies. They were also informed of the opportunity to avoid questions that they feel uncomfortable with. After completion of the interviews the researcher inquired about the extent to which the participant was involved in the study and her emotional well-being, to support the participant and inform participants about the social worker who was available to provide support through debriefing sessions after the study.

1.12.4 Anonymity

Anonymity means that no individual should know the identity of any participant, and it also insures the privacy of participants (Strydom 2011a:120). Anonymity is maintained when the researcher and the reader of the report are unable to identify participants or

link specific information to a specific participant's response (Babbie 2016:65). Anonymity should be applied throughout the research processes and starts with the researcher's first contact with the participants until the publication of the research report and the findings (Bless et al 2013:33).

The following steps can be taken to ensure anonymity (Brink et al 2018:31):

- Name the records of participants' input with codes and numbers.
- Continue to use code names during the discussion of data.
- The list of participants with real names should be destroyed.

The researcher maintained anonymity by making sure that no data could be linked to individual participants' responses or matched with their names and identities.

1.12.5 Privacy

The privacy of participants should be maintained. In the context of a research project the meaning of privacy is for the researcher to hold or keep information not meant for others to observe or to analyse, to him or herself. Every person has the right to his or her personal privacy and to make the decision about how, when and to whom to disclose particulars of their behaviour (Strydom 2011a:119). The researcher ensured that all participants' privacy was respected and that no information about them would be disclosed or shared without the knowledge of the participants. Privacy also includes the participant's right to refuse to respond or divulge some of the information unwillingly during an interview (Bryman & Bell 2011:127). The researcher did not force the participants to respond to the questions or share their information during the interview if they did not want to do so. It is the right of the participant to determine to which extent and about which situations they are prepared to disclose their private information, which may be their opinions, behaviour or beliefs (Brink et al 2018:30). The researcher ensured that interviews were conducted privately at participants' homes if convenient for them, but when privacy was not possible, she made arrangements to secure a venue where the interviews were conducted in privacy.

1.12.6 Debriefing

Interview sessions were conducted in a supportive context without any threatening or confrontation. A debriefing facility was nevertheless available if required. The process of debriefing is described as follows (Fouché & Delport 2011:122):

- Debriefing sessions occur after the study when participants are given the opportunity to express any negative experiences of the research and its consequences to a professional person other than the researcher. This may require therapy if necessary. In providing this facility the researcher ensures that any harmful effects on participants as a result of the study are being dealt with.
- Researchers must correct any misunderstanding under participants that may have emerged during the study.
- During the period of termination and withdrawal of the therapy, debriefing should be done with care, especially where participants has benefited in some of the research aspects.

The researcher made arrangement for a social work colleague to be available for debriefing sessions with participants needing to express their research experience during the interviews. After the interviews the researcher gave participants the opportunity to evaluate the extent of their emotional involvement in the study, to give them support and refer the participants if needed for debriefing sessions to the social worker with whom the arrangements were made to assist participants with debriefing sessions.

1.12.7 Management of information

The gathering and storage of data and the sharing of data presented raise additional concerns about confidentiality and other ethical issues. Access to the collected data needs to be protected and secured (Bryman & Bell 2011:128). It is very important for the researcher to handle the storage of data with care, especially data that include or concern humans (Joshi & Krag 2010:743). In managing data collected from the participants, the researcher kept all hard copy recordings of the notes and transcripts of interviews in a secure and lockable place (Brink et al 2018:31). Access to collected

data stored on the researcher's computer was protected and secured by the use of a password to prevent unauthorised access.

1.13 CLARIFICATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

For clarification purposes the focus now falls on the concepts central to this study and their meanings in the context of the research.

1.13.1 Challenges

The word 'challenge' is defined as follows:

- "... a new or difficult task that tests somebody's ability and skills" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010. Sv "challenges").
- "... something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination" (Collins English Dictionary, 2010. Sv "challenge").
- "... a test of one's abilities or resources in a demanding but stimulating undertaking" (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2011. Sv "challenge").

Challenges in the context of this study refer to the difficulties widows encountered in their everyday lives and how they overcame and dealt with these challenges.

1.13.2 Experiences

The term 'experiences' is described as follows:

- "... the things that have happened to you that influence the way you think and behave" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2010. Sv "experience").
- "... the process of getting knowledge or skill from doing, seeing or feeling things" (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2013. Sv "experience").
- "... to refer to the past knowledge and feelings that make up someone's life or character" (Collins English Dictionary 2014 Sv "experience").

The researcher views experiences as things a person encountered, has undergone, underwent or experienced. In this study the focus was on exploring widows' experiences in dealing with their situations of being widows.

1.13.3 Coping strategies

'Coping strategies' can be described as –

- the ability of persons to deal with internal and external stress in times of difficulties (Holubova, Prasko, Ociskova, Kantor, Vanek, Slepcky & Vrbova 2018:73);
- how individuals react towards stress or a stressor (Pratt, Pietrantonio, Cleognani 2011:182); and
- actions used by people to overcome their stress or to adapt to live in a stressful situation (Hirsch, Barlem, Almeida, Tomaschewski-Barlemuk-Barlem, Figueira & Lunardi 2015:501).

In this study the coping strategies or ability and skills employed by widows to deal with their stressful situations of being widows, were explored.

1.13.4 Widows

A 'widow' is defined as a woman who was married whose husband has died and she has not remarried (Idaulu 2012:6; Anzaa & Udu 2018:133 & Doris 2018:1). The researcher views widows as a woman who was married whose spouse has died and she has not married again (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:1).

1.13.5 Widowhood

'Widowhood' refers to the loss of a companion, breadwinner and supporter (George 2012:188). Widowhood refers to the condition in which the widow or widower get into after the death of their husbands or wives (Anzaa, Udu & Gbari 2018:1). The concept 'widowhood' as used in this study refers to married women with or without children who lost their husbands because of the death of their husbands (Azumah & Nachinaab

2018:44; George 2012:188). This study wanted to explore the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows regarding their widowhood in Mavalani village.

1.14 CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report of the study is divided into different chapters as outlined below:

Chapter 1: General introduction to the study

This chapter outlines the introduction to the study, the problem formulation, the rationale for the study, research question, goal and objectives addressed in the study, research approach, research design, ethical consideration, and clarification of the key concepts.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter a review of the literature regarding the issue of widowhood and all its central concepts are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

This chapter contains an exposition of the application of the qualitative research methodology and research methods as applied in the research.

Chapter 4: Presentation of research findings

The research findings as sorted into themes, compared, confirmed and contrasted with existing literature related to the topic by means of literature control, are presented in this chapter.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations of the study

This chapter is a summary of the research findings presenting the conclusion and recommendations and suggestion made resulting from the research.

1.15 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

Chapter 1 comprises of an overview and the research plan of the study. This is divided into the problem formulation and problem statement, the rationale of the research study, its theoretical framework, research methodology, research methods, data collection, method of data analysis and data verification, ethical considerations and clarification of key concepts.

The next chapter provides an overview and background of the relevant literature regarding the topic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

A literature review can be described as: “a review of the existing body of knowledge on the subject matter” (Thesen 2014:17). This chapter expands the discussion of the concept ‘widowhood’, as described in the literature. The focus falls on the cultural, ritualistic and mourning practices associated with widowhood and its implications; current international and national widowhood practices and rituals; and the implications of widowhood practices and rituals for widows. This is followed by a discussion of the implications of patriarchy in widowhood and an overview is given regarding the challenges widows experience; and their coping strategies with widowhood. In addition, the international legislation to protect women and widows around the world and national legislation employed in South Africa to support women and widows are debated.

2.2 OVERVIEW OF WIDOWHOOD CULTURAL PRACTICES AND RITUALS

Widowhood practices are a phenomenon which differs in terms of the cultural belief systems and rituals that are performed in various communities (Azumah & Nachinaab 2018:44). Widowhood practices can be further described as the activities, including traditional and cultural principles, performed by widows during mourning periods after the death of their husbands (George 2010:56). In different African tribes, mourning rituals differ regarding the social status, gender and age of the deceased (Itsweni 2018:27). The rituals performed from the different cultural perspectives reflect the beliefs and attitudes of the community towards death. Mourning rituals begin immediately after the death of a family member and certain rituals are already performed before the burial of the family member (Itsweni 2018:27).

Members of communities worldwide are expected to conform to specific cultural rituals and practices of mourning and South Africa is no exception to this rule (Itsweni 2018:27). Although communities worldwide are faced with changes because of evolution and modernisation, replacing cultural rituals and practices cannot happen

without displacing inherent customs and replacing them with other social constructs and social organisation (Itsweni 2018:32). Social changes in traditional practices and rituals are resisted when it threatens entrenched customs and power structures of a community. Therefore, many rituals are accepted because of cultural obligations, and non-adherence to it leads to social exclusion in communities (Itsweni 2018:32). As in other countries worldwide, the South African government has ratified international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1979 and the Beijing Platform of Action of 1995, putting legal frameworks in place to protect women, yet in-depth studies on widowhood practices are still ill researched (Dube 2016:26).

With reference to widowhood, Ntozi (cited in Manala 2015:4) explains that “In many societies, widowhood is a process characterised by rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression”. Widowhood cultural practices and rites mostly represent a widow as a person who has bad luck or may be blamed for the death of her husband and who should therefore not at that stage be part of community members’ gatherings and should especially not socialise with women who still have husbands (Manala 2015:4). These widowhood rituals and practices embedded in the cultural beliefs of a specific ethnic group, therefore also cause the community to exercise certain behaviours and expectations of how widows need to be treated and are being perceived.

Culture is defined as the guiding principles of people’s behaviour in society (Chukwu-Okoronkwo 2015:71). Culture involves a group of people in the community that has a common way of thinking, and their behaviour identifies them as belonging to a particular culture (Radzilani 2010:32). Culture causes people to act and interact in a particular way in different contexts (Radzilani 2010:32). This means that culture can be shared and learned because it symbolises people’s beliefs, values and attitudes that shape their perception and behaviour (Dlukula 2010:41). South Africa has various cultures and languages, therefore each tribe respects and follows their own cultural traditions. Every culture has its own rituals and customs, although there are also similarities amongst certain cultural practices that guide and shape how the bereaved mourns (Seretlo-Rangata 2017:1). Culture and the practices of certain rituals like

widowhood rituals, are interrelated concepts which are dependent on each other and described together in the context of widowhood.

A culture which is fair and balanced imposes on both women and men the same cultural rituals (Baloyi 2017:4). In traditional African bereavement processes, the process of grieving is distinguished by rituals, such as that the bereaved family members will shave their hair and slaughter a domestic animal (Pietkiewicz 2012:92). Burials are done in many different forms, as determined by the local customs, tradition and the religion of the deceased and his or her immediate family members (Pietkiewicz 2012:292). In many cultures in Africa widowhood practices are designed and regulated for widows, whilst widowers have little or no cultural or traditional requirements that are prescribed to them (Chukwu-Okoronkwo 2015:72). Widowhood practices have been in practice for centuries and are transmitted in cultures from generation to generation (Adeyemo 2016:380). Widowhood practices can be described as the rules or patterns of behaviour which are followed by the widow or widower embedded in the cultural beliefs of the specific ethnic group (George 2010:69). In many African cultures, the elders in a community are responsible to give instructions for women who lost their partners on how to behave and to comply with the societal norms during the period of bereavement (George 2010:69).

Widowhood rites can be described as the rituals or ceremonies performed by the widow or widower to mourn the departed partner as part of culture or custom of the society (Doris 2018:1). In different parts of Africa where widowhood rites still exist, it is believed that every woman should go through certain rituals after the death of her husband, and these widowhood rites differ depending on the culture and belief of a person (Doris 2018:1; Durojaye 2013:179). Women perform different widowhood rites, some of these are meant to impress the dead husband and some are meant to purify or cleanse the women because she was in contact with her late husband before he passed away (Idialu 2012:7). It is further argued that some of the widowhood rites are physically and psychologically violent towards the widow (Idialu 2012:7). For example, some widows have to go through the trauma of being 'inherited' by one of the husbands' relatives, other widows must stay alone indefinitely and are required to

partake in sacrificial rituals, including the swallowing of certain dangerous substances to prove that they did not have a hand in killing their husbands (Idialu 2012:7).

Among the Tsonga speaking people of South Africa, the ancestors play an important role in their lives (Khosa 2009:25). Khosa (2009:25) postulated that in the Tsonga culture death "... is seen as a way of joining the ancestral family tribe." This is symbolised by the way they treat the dead, which will be followed by the performance of certain rituals and rites (Khosa 2009:25). When death occurs among the Tsonga tribe, different rituals and rites are performed. These rituals are symbolic gestures which does not actually represent the actions which are performed but have a hidden significant meaning which is only communicated through the performance or action which does not possess any form of a proper explanation (Khosa 2009:25). In the Tsonga culture a widow needs to adhere to certain rituals like "washing off" bad luck in a river and to be purified the widow may have to be involved in a sexual rite with a male identified by the parents in law (Khosa-Nkatini 2019:53). Widows in Limpopo are subjected to a long period of mourning and they have to wear mourning clothes for that period, whereas widowers mourn for a short period of time and for them to wear mourning clothes is voluntary (Commissioner on Gender Equality 2013:4).

Widowhood practices among the Tsonga speaking people are tied to cultural and traditional beliefs which are oppressive towards widows. Most of the widows undergo such rituals not because they want to, but because they fear to be mocked and ridiculed by other women, if not adhering to the rituals (Baloyi 2017:2). The widows also undergo these rituals to be seen as a woman who respect and honour culture and the ancestors of the family (Baloyi 2017:2). The research findings of Baloyi (2017:2) articulated that "Most women who are Christian see no benefit in such practices, but that they have the effect of denigrating widows to a lower level." Widows who are of opinions that these rituals are not beneficial and who do not adhere to it, may therefore be stigmatised and marginalised in the community.

Widows may not only experience oppression, stigmatisation and marginalisation in their communities, because of not adhering to rituals and cultural practices, but a further threat they may encounter is the risk of contracting HIV. Research studies

documented that the widowhood inheritance custom, where a relative takes the widow as a wife, and cultural practices like the cleansing rituals, pose a high risk for widows to be infected with HIV (Tenkorang 2014:47).

The aim of the mourning or widow rites is to remove "... the bad luck or misfortune or *senyama* that is said to surround the widow, and which makes people discriminate against her or fear her" (Manala 2015:3). Studies documented to explain the benefits of traditional African widowhood rites define the healing abilities of these rituals as follows: "African grief work can be defined as the patterned ways invented in traditional communities for the successful healing of the psychological wounds and pain of bereaved persons. It is a healing system grounded in ecologically sound rituals and ceremonies that facilitate experiential healing". The intentions of widow rituals and practices may be inherently to benefit and assist the widow but are perceived differently through the eyes of the widows who need to adhere to these rituals and practices. Manala (2015:4) rightfully remarked that "widowhood rites rather represent them as defeating their claimed purpose, which is therapy".

According to the Tsonga culture, a widow is expected to be submissive, respectful and avoid arguments with other people until the mourning period which lasted up to twelve months, is over (Machaba 2011:51). When a widow shows this kind of behaviour, it is believed that she is showing respect to her late husband (Machaba 2011:51). According to the study conducted about the symbolism in Xitsonga cultural rituals ceremonies in Limpopo province, by Khosa (2009:32), participants reported that after the death of the husband or the head of the family, they used to remove the cap of the hut (house) and they would take its grass to be a carpet for the widow to sit on. It was believed to be the sign that symbolises that the head of family is now gone, and the widow should take over, it also symbolises the hardship that the widow will encounter in her life because her husband passed away. A widow is also not allowed to use the same gate entrance with all the members of the family, she is supposed to use her own gate or jump the small walls made around the huts or houses which are called *maguva*, to go outside (Khosa 2009:32). The researcher herself, originates from the Tsonga ethnic group, and observed that Tsonga widows sat on the mattress or on the floor because most of the families no longer used hut houses with grass roofs.

2.3 CURRENT INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES AND RITUALS

The following sections provide a snapshot of widowhood practices in some international and national countries, being known for practising dire widowhood rituals, by demonstrating particular differences and similarities in some of their cultural performances of widowhood rituals. Some of these widowhood practices involve activities which are against the general accepted human rights, but they are still practiced under the name of cultural and traditional widowhood rituals.

2.3.1 Widowhood practices and rituals in India

India is a country “with strict gender norms and traditional kinship systems, [and] widowhood is considered to be a dreaded phase of life among some groups” (Perkins, Lee, James, Oh, Krishna, Heo, Lee & Subramanian 2016:2). The main purpose of women in India as described, is to care for their husbands and this purpose falls away with the death of their husbands. Most widows in India live in poverty, beg for money and have a lack of any social support (Perkins et al 2016:2).

In Jammu City, India widows are regarded as the ‘evil eyes’ by the society and her family (Sigh, Subhash & Monan 2018:16). She is not allowed to have a proper meal with the family or wear jewellery, or nice clothes and to participate in social activities in the society. She is forced to sleep on the floor. She will be labelled by all kinds of names like she is unclean, inauspicious and polluting (Sigh et al 2018:16). It is furthermore emphasised that widows in India are discriminated against and the society expects them to mourn their husband for the rest of their lives (Sahoo 2014:45).

To be a woman in India and a widow is seen as a punishment or a curse. It is estimated that around 40 million widows are robbed of their basic dignity by being raped and suspected of witchcraft (Sahoo 2014:45). In the Northern Indian state of Punjab a widow is called a prostitute and a widow is forced to marry her husband’s brother because it is better to be owned by a man to avoid being raped (Sahoo 2014:45).

2.3.2 Widowhood practices and rituals in Cameroon

Prescribed widowhood rituals are also performed in a part of the North Western Region of Cameroon in West Africa. After the death of a husband, a widow must remove her clothes and cry in a loud voice. She will be given a piece of sack or banana leaves to put on her waist. Her sister in law will rub a widow with wooden ash, because it is believed that it will appease the widow's husband's spirit which is believed to be still around the family (Ankiambom 2017:840). She is expected to wake up in the morning to cry in a loud voice until the end of the mourning period. This is the sign that she loved her husband and that she did not have a hand in killing her husband. It is said that a widow's crying is meant for and part of a widow's psychological process of grieving and healing (Ankiambom 2017:840).

In tribes such as those in Baloforchu and Batibo, their traditional belief regarding widowhood includes that a widow has to go to her husband's grave every night for nine days to send her deceased husband's spirit to the spirit world (Ankiambom 2017:840). It is also believed that by the ninth day the deceased's spirit was no longer in the earth but is now in the spirit world (Ankiambom 2017:840). Amongst the Chamba tribes like the Bali Nyongha, widows are confined by their husband's female family members. They are not allowed to bath so that they can be dirty and look unattractive towards the deceased's spirit and to scare the deceased's spirit from coming back to his wife to defile her sexually and spirituality (Ankiambom 2017:840).

2.3.3 Widowhood practices and rituals in Nigeria

Widowhood and mourning practices in Nigeria include a number of cultural expectations which is immoral and unpleasant. This includes situations which expose widows to be disrespected, to feel unworthy and miserable to be alive (Umeh & Jane-Frances 2015:306). Widows in the Eastern part of Nigeria are not allowed to eat and drink until the day of the burial, while other widows were forced to drink the water used to bath their dead husband and forced to sleep with their husband's corpse in the same room until the day for the burial (Durojaye 2013:181).

All this cruel behaviour is justified as being required by the culture and religion of these people (Sahoo 2014:46). Traditional West African societies regard mourning rites as being very important because it possesses cultural values and the behaviour attached in mourning is usually inherently gendered. The purpose of the rituals is to uplift the position of the deceased man rather than to allow a real outlet for the widow's grief (Azumah & Nachinaab 2018:44).

2.3.4 Widowhood practices and rituals in Zimbabwe

In East African countries such as Zimbabwe, widows are the victims of sexual, physical and psychological abuse by their family members-in-law. Widows are physically abused, especially when they refused to move out of their husband's property after they had been ordered to leave. They are also physically abused in instances when they are the suspect of bewitching their deceased husband (Dube 2016:11). Widows are forced into levirate marriage and their husband's properties are forcefully taken by their family in law members which include the parents-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law and some of the relatives of the deceased husband (Dube 2016:11).

2.3.5 Widowhood practices and rituals in Swaziland

According to the Swazi culture and custom of Eswatini (formally known as Swaziland), when a woman gets married, she is also married to her husband's family (Dlamini 2016:39). When a Swazi woman's husband dies, her family in law will take everything from the women including the late husband's property, especially if their marriage was done according to the Swazi tradition (Dlamini 2016:39). A widow is forced to conduct her behaviour according to how the community is expecting her to behave in order for her to avoid being disowned by her family-in-law. During the period of mourning, a widow is not allowed to participate in any activity in the community (Dlamini 2016:39). For example, there is the case of a woman by the name of De Point, who was a politician when her husband became sick and died. During the period of elections, the chief of the community announced to the community that they must not vote for her since she is still mourning her late husband. The chief further said that electing a mourning person will not be culturally correct and will be embarrassing to the kingdom.

Secondly, according to the Swazi law and custom, a mourning woman is not allowed to hold a public post (Dlamini 2016: 47). This example shows that in this country, widows are still oppressed by the culture and traditions.

2.3.6 Widowhood practices and rituals in South Africa

There are various of subcultures in South Africa, including, the Bapedi, Vhavenda, Batswana, Tsongas, Zulus, Swatis, Ndebeles, Xhosas and Ba Sotho, each culture group dealing differently with bereavement and mourning rituals (Itsweni 2018:27).

In South Africa some ethnic groups such as the Zulus, Tswanas and Xhosas perform similar widowhood practices such as the shaving of their hair and the slaughtering of a goat or cow during the funeral, restrictions of movements and the wearing of mourning clothes (Yawa 2010:87).

In many villages in South Africa, widows are expected to behave in a manner that show that they are grieving, and they are expected to wear black clothes (Kotzé , Lishje, & Rajuili-Masilo 2012:754). The Zulu widows have traditional practices called *ukuzila* to perform. During this period a widow is not allowed to do anything or attend to anything in the community such as weddings, and if she participates in those events she will be suspected of witchcraft (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:78-79, Kotzé et al 754). According to the Zulu culture a widow's back should not be seen while wearing black clothes during the period of *ikuzila* because it is associated with bad luck or a bad omen. Therefore, a widow should avoid eye contact with people and give them a way to pass or bend down while they pass (Rosenblatt & Nkosi 2007:78-79). Widows wearing black are expected to sit at the back of the taxi or a bus so that other passengers should not see her back because it is associated with a bad omen (Kotzé et al 2012:754). This kind of behaviour symbolises sorrow which the bereaved widow should display (Manala 2015:2).

According to the Venda culture, a widow is expected to stay in the house with the other widows who have finished their mourning period, she is not allowed to be seen by people until the day of the funeral (Itsweni 2018:71-75). A traditional doctor will be invited to perform a ritual, where roots and water are boiled together with maize-meal

to make soft porridge to feed the widow. After the burial a traditional doctor will burn six stones, add hot water and mix traditional medicine. The widow will be covered by a blanket and has to stoop down to the steam of the mixture. The widow will also be taken to the river early in the morning while it is still dark, there she will take off her clothes to be washed until she is clean. A goat is killed, its faeces are mixed with the medicine and they smear it on the entire body of the widow except on her head (Itsweni 2018:71-75). Widows have to obey the elders by adhering to the widowhood rituals whether they agree with it or not. They have to do it to show respect to their parents in law and the elders (Radzilani 2010:132-133).

The Amakhosa widows, immediately after the death of the spouse, change the way they are wearing their clothes by turning it inside out (Akol 2011:68). Widows will sit behind the door wearing a shawl since they are not allowed to change clothes until the funeral is over. During the funeral a widow is covered with a huge blanket, and after the burial, the widow is taken to the bush to be bathed and to be given new black clothes while the old clothes are burned (Akol 2011:68-70). The black clothes of the Basotho widows are sprinkled with traditional medicines before they can be used for the mourning purposes (Letsosa & Semanya 2011:2). The black clothes convey a message to the people that they are grieving a death of a close family member (Makatu et al 2008:574).

The Bapedi tribe believes that when a husband dies, his widow is not allowed to arrive home after sunset, to visit neighbours, or to attend any activities in the community, and she must wear black clothes. They further point out that the black clothes are a symbol of a dark cloud, because death is linked with a loss and pain (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:236). When death occurs to the Bapedi people, a widow or widower is removed from the public into seclusion because it is believed that they are contaminated by the death. Death should also be contained from spreading to other people and to the animals. Therefore, these certain rituals are performed (Kgatla 2014:84).

Amongst the Tsonga speaking people, women are suspected of having killed their husbands, which contribute to the gender inequality (Baloyi 2018:197). This suspicion

of widows having killed their husbands have negative results among the Tsonga widows, such as a widow being disowned by her husband's family, whilst other widow's end up losing their livelihoods and property (Baloyi 2018:197). Baloyi (2018:202), postulated that these suspicions may be caused by jealous family members towards the widow during the mourning period, which often influence the decision of how they distribute the wealth of the deceased.

Having to wear mourning clothes for a particular period is a common practice followed in various cultures including in the Tsonga culture (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5). Widows also need to sleep on a mattress and not on a bed until the day of the spouse's funeral. These practices are not required from widowers, which accentuates the gender inequalities between men and women in the Tsonga culture. Widows are also restricted to stay indoors before and after the funeral (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5).

Tsonga widows may be forced into levirate marriages to avoid the returning of the bride's wealth or the *lobola* paid by the groom when the couple married (Baloyi 2015:448). Another widowhood practice amongst the Tsonga tribe regarding the cleansing ritual, is that a widow is not allowed to marry or have another man before the cleansing rituals are completed. It is also believed that no cock should crow before the burial and cleansing ceremony is completed. If it happens, the cock will be slaughtered and eaten by the old men. A cock symbolises masculinity and that no other man is allowed in the family since the husband of that family is deceased (Khosa 2009:32).

With reference to the matter of widowhood and cultural practices, the literature confirms that in most cases the prescribed cultural practices relating to widowhood, are against human rights legislation and place a heavy burden on the wellbeing of widows but are still practised in various communities internationally and are also still evident in certain South African communities (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5). These widowhood practices and rituals point out the gender inequalities that women and widows are still experiencing in some cultures. Widowhood practices and

rituals which are detrimental and discriminative to women can be summarised as follows (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5-8):

- Widows' human dignity rights are violated as they are many times treated in a disrespectful manner by their in-laws and the community as a whole, following the death of their husbands, because of certain negative perceptions and beliefs of the community, and the widowhood practices prescribed, as discussed.
- Cultural practices include certain mourning rituals which restrict widows' right to freedom and threaten their security as persons personally, economically and socially.
- Widows' privacy is invaded, and they have no rights to make decisions and choices regarding the widow rituals.
- They have restricted freedom of movement because of certain cultural rules they need to follow.
- They are denied their freedom of expression regarding the adherence and feelings about the cultural rituals.
- The basic needs to have housing are violated with in-laws being allowed to claim the deceased husband's property and livelihoods.
- Children's rights may be violated in the process because of cultural beliefs and rituals performed and the in-laws who may claim the property of the deceased husband.
- Many widows have restricted access to information about their legal rights to oppose the claiming of their property and livelihood.
- Widows' rights to freedom of religion and beliefs are violated because many of them who do not believe in performing the cultural rituals are forced against their wills, to adhere to it.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS OF WIDOWHOOD PRACTICES AND RITUALS FOR WIDOWS

Bereavement and funerals have been a phenomenon practised universally across time and cultures (Pietkiewicz 2012:292). Rituals are practised to accomplish obligations to the deceased, and to adapt to the loss and the ensuing changes. The

significance of these mourning and grieving rituals is to assist the traditional African women to continue with the belief that life continues even after death (Tshoba 2014:60). The type of rituals performed usually depends on who the person that died was and how the person has died (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:236).

The function of performing rituals is to purify the spirit and its transition process from the living realm to the realm of the dead (Pietkiewicz 2012:293). Rituals are performed to bring peace and protection for the community from malicious spirits (Pietkiewicz 2012:293). These ritual practices act as a therapeutic value which is believed to bring healing consolation and meaning after the death of the significant other (Magezi & Keya 2013:3). Some of these rituals and ceremonies may take place for weeks, or months (Appel 2011:23). The performance of rituals is symbolic, and rules prescribe how the rituals should be performed (Makatu 2008:574). When a widow fails to perform the rituals, it is regarded as deviant behaviour towards grieving (Radzilani 2010:9).

A study conducted by Rosenblatt and Nkosi (2007:78-79) regarding rituals applicable to widows in the South African province of Kwazulu Natal, revealed that some of the widowhood rites performed in the black African communities like *ukuzila*, usually takes over a year and may lead to social exclusion because the widow is not allowed to participate in any activities such as empowerment projects. Widowhood rituals many times cause isolation and social exclusion of widows.

In a study that was conducted about the experiences of widowhood and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people, the outcome revealed that widows in the study blamed the community for their isolation, discrimination and stigmatization (Manyedi, Koen & Greeff 2003:78). The widows were not allowed to be part of the community activities, therefore they developed feelings of resentment and bitterness. The community on the other hand, isolates widows because of their cultural beliefs and concomitant to widowhood and mourning practices. The outcome of the same study also revealed that stress was caused by the rituals and mourning practices that Batswana widows had to follow and that it also led to the disruption of family relationships (Manyedi, Koen & Greeff 2003:78).

In a study conducted by Radzilani (2010:131) the findings revealed that the Vavenda widows saw the rituals as therapeutic because it assisted them to heal and to connect them back to the society, but some widows perceived the rituals as depressing and that it promoted oppression and inequality between them and their family members.

Amongst the Tsonga tribe, after the death of a person it is believed that rituals should be performed to remove *xinyama* or bad luck in the family (Baloyi 2015:247). They make fire by the gate of the family's home, and this fire symbolises that the deceased spirit is still around to give them guidance before it joins the ancestors. This fire is not extinguished until the day of the burial (Khosha 2009:79). Some of these rituals are performed by the *ingaka* (traditional doctor) who, during the mourning period prepares the porridge mixed with the medicine to be eaten by the bereaved members to make them strong and to cleanse them from all the sickness and impurities associated with death (Khosha 2009:79). According to the Tsonga culture, all family members including the widow must shave their hair, because it is believed that remaining with hair will bring them bad luck (Khosha 2009:79). According to the study findings of Baloyi (2017) regarding the clashes of cultural rituals with human rights legislation in the Tsonga culture, most of the women experienced the widowhood and mourning rituals as oppressive and undergo the rituals to be accepted and in respect of the cultural practices.

2.5 IMPLICATIONS OF PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES IN WIDOWHOOD

In South Africa, as in other countries, certain customs and traditions are still practiced that fail to address discrimination against women, which results in treating women as subordinates to men (Baloyi & Manala 2019:2). According to the Tsonga tradition, a male child in the family is more important than a female child, which is patriarchal in nature and in contravention of the Constitution of South Africa (Baloyi & Manala 2019:3). For example, the Tsonga speaking people in South Africa become unhappy when only female children are born in a family without a male child (Baloyi & Manala

2019:3). The reason is that a female child was in the past not allowed to inherit property because she was expected to be married and to leave the property for her family (Baloyi & Manala 2019:4). However, it is the view of the researcher and clear from the above, that Tsonga traditions undermine women and regard men to be more important in the family system. The issue of men being regarded to be the only inheritors is part of the value systems of patriarchal societies (Baloyi & Manala 2019:4). In patriarchal societies such as in many African communities, widows are denied ownership of their husband's assets, especially if she does not have a male child, because it's believed that widows can have a share through their sons (Chenube & Omumu 2011:2). In this context, our colonial past contributed in ensuring gender differences especially to black women (Baloyi & Manala 2019:4).

According to the Tsonga cultural belief, men are regarded as the heads of the families. They make decisions on behalf of every person in the family without consulting them (Maluleke 2012:2). Tsonga cultural beliefs prescribe that women should be submissive and be able to bear any pain that she encounters in her marriage (Maluleke 2012:5). It is expected that men in the Tsonga patriarchal belief system, control everyone in the family and that they should be informed about anything that is happening in the family and their decisions are not allowed to be questioned (Maluleke 2012:3). The Tsonga customs also asserted that women are restricted to participate in political, religious and economic activities because they are regarded as subjected to and dominated by men (Ezejiolor 2011:142).

Patriarchy in general is defined as the social system whereby power is not equal between women and men, which automatically oppresses and disadvantages women in society, especially within the family and organisations (Ndlovu 2015:21). The influence of patriarchy in the community is specifically determined by the tasks allocated to the different gender roles (Akol 2011:16). For example, in many cultures in Nigeria, a widower's crying and wailing during the death of his wife is considered abnormal, but a widow is subjected to have to cry and wail for days and months on end at the time after her husband's death (George 2010:31). Gender-based practices violate women's security and human rights and negatively affect their health, physical well-being and social development (Pemunta & Alubafi 2016:2).

A patriarchal system controls the marital relationship which makes women to depend on their spouses, and this position may be likely to be influenced by cultural rules prescribed for men and women (Radzilani 2010:75). Women's position of dependency continues even after the death of the husband because widows turn mostly to their family-law for financial support (Radzilani 2010:77). Vhavenda widows allow persons who are in a position of power to make decisions on their behalf because according to their tradition and culture they are viewed as subordinates without value (Radzilani 2010:75).

Makatu (2008:576) mentioned in his study findings amongst the Vhavenda widows, that there are clear power inequalities between widows and their family-in-law. The in-laws have authority over widows and should behave according to their instructions. Widows are perceived as persons who are unable to make concrete decisions (Itsweni 2018:31). The unequal power balance between widows and their family-in-laws is a significant trend in many African cultures, and in the Tsonga tradition.

The findings on the study of widowhood rites and rights conducted by the Commissioner on Gender Equality (2013:9) revealed that South African societies are patriarchal in nature and culture is used to sustain and maintain widowhood practices. Patriarchy is deeply rooted in the perception of most African males and is difficult to eliminate (Nienaber & Moraka 2016:148). Liberal feminists uphold the fact that gender differences between women and men are not founded on biology, which fundamentally represents generative differences. Subsequently, women and men are not different and thus should not be treated differently under the law (Nienaber & Moraka 2016:145).

2.6 CHALLENGES OF WIDOWHOOD

Widows are among the vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Africa and in other societies around the world. They are vulnerable to socio-economic, religious, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse within their families, communities and also in societies (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Matopi 2013:2). Widowhood in different

communities have different challenges but the common pattern regarding the challenges of widowhood outlined in the literature relates to psychological, social, economic and health challenges (Trivedi, Saree, & Dhyani, 2009:36; Awari, Chimezie & Ihejirika 2019:51; Umeh & Jane-Frances 2015:306).

Widows generally experience psychological, financial, social and health related challenges which respectively entail the following:

2.6.1 Psychological challenges of widowhood

After the death of the spouse, the other partner has to adjust to the loss of the person emotionally close to her and must at the same time be able to manage other important responsibilities which used to be shared among both spouses (Chitralli & Anwar, 2013:148).

Widows in various cultures are many times exposed to sexual abuse after the death of their husbands, expecting to perform cultural activities in the form of 'sexual cleansing', requiring a widow to have unprotected sex with a relative of the deceased. This is done because it is believed that it will remove the bad spirit of the deceased husband (Widows Empowerment Trust 2015 cited in Dube 2016:11). In certain cultures, sex is perceived as an important element in cleansing rituals that are done by an experienced man (Gunga 2009:170). However, a recent study indicates that the practising of the cleansing rituals is declining in African communities because of the high risk associated with HIV infections (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:8).

Nevertheless, these kinds of cultural practices like the cleansing rituals have a direct consequence for the psychological and emotional well-being of widows (Dube 2016:168). According to Dube (2019:99) these acts can be seen as dehumanising conduct towards widows, showing an indifference to these widows' suffering and affecting their well-being by reducing their worth to objects with no voice to object to such treatment. Psychologically these actions destroy the widows' self-esteem, increasing their emotional pain and feelings of powerlessness (Dube 2019:99). Fear to demand their rights as women and limited education regarding the widows' human rights, maintain the social structures of oppression in communities (Dube 2019:99).

The perception of widows that they “should not question culture and tradition but should “do as they are told” is a further barrier for many widows in Africa, to overcome oppression and marginalisation (Khosa-Nkatini et al 2020:3).

Widows experience the traumatic incidents of being inherited by one of their husband’s family members. If they refuse to be the wife of one of the late husband’s family members, they will be prevented from having access to their children (Idialu 2012:7). African beliefs that these levirate marriages are there to protect and take care of widows by forcing them into levirate marriages, are experienced as traumatic and may further cause depression and devastation in this vulnerable group (Dube 2019:99; Baloyi 2015:483). However, although levirate marriages are still a cultural practice, there has been a decline in practising this cultural custom in African countries, because of the high risk of contracting HIV (Djuikom & van de Walle 2018:8).

A study that was done in Switzerland about the gender differences in psychosocial adjustment to later life in widowhood, revealed that widows experience different depressive symptoms such as sadness, fearfulness, anger outbursts over small matters, frustration, and sleep disturbances (Perrig-Chiello, Spahni, Höpflinger, & Carr 2016:766). Widowhood is associated with a multitude of adverse physical and mental health outcomes including psychological distress, physician visits, and higher rates of morbidity and mortality (Hughes & Waite 2009).

A study conducted about the psycho-social plight of widows in Binga District in Zimbabwe, found that psychological stress was one of the psycho-social challenges faced by widows after the death of their spouses (Dube 2016:168). The study findings of Manyedi et al (2003:84) further elaborated on how black widows cope with bereavement and confirm that widows are showing high levels of stress because of the widowhood customs and rituals that they had to perform, and the lack of social support received from their community and the in-laws. Sekgobela’s (2018:82) study regarding the health support needed by widows, concluded that widows may experience symptoms like suicide ideation, intrusive memories, forgetfulness and lack of concentration related to post traumatic stress and depressive disorders during their journey of widowhood.

Social workers rendering services to these widows need to understand the psychological effects of widowhood practices and rituals to be able to empower widows from a strength-based perspective and to render specific rights-based interventions (Dube 2019:98). Social workers need to facilitate interventions for widows to cope with the social injustices by assisting them to recognise and understand these social injustice acts, thereby further realising that they do not deserve these actions from the community members and families.

2.6.2 Financial challenges of widowhood

In most traditional African communities, the husband is regarded as the breadwinner for the family and when the husband passes away, the economic resources will automatically be deteriorating (Dube 2016:34). Study findings of Peterman cited in Djuikom and van de Walle (2018:8) regarding African communities, confirm that “only a small share of widows receives any assets following a husband’s death”. The Limpopo Province in South Africa where the research study is conducted, is predominantly a rural area where women are mostly unemployed and economically dependent on their husbands, leaving the family in an economically disadvantage state when the husband and breadwinner of the family dies (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5). This results in poverty and many times these widows start to experience health challenges associated with poor nutrition, lack of shelter and vulnerability to be exposed to abuse and violence (Cebekhulu 2015:35).

Widows in these communities frequently have low educational levels and are unemployed, because of the traditional perception of a woman needing to be a wife and mother with the husband as the breadwinner. Therefore, widows are not able to find employment and if employment was found, the income is not generating enough financially for the family’s needs (Adonis 2020:47).

Marriage is seen as a status symbol for many traditional African women, with the husband to protect and provide for the family. Therefore, with the husband having passed on, the widow loses her status and is vulnerable to exploitation from family

members and community members regarding her livelihood (Umeh & Jane-Frances 2015:307).

A study conducted at Nzhelele in Venda, found that widows faced severe financial problems after the death of their husbands and they have difficulties in raising their children because they lack finances and emotional support (Itsweni 2018:108). The study findings of Adonis (2020:47) regarding the economic and psycho-social experiences of single mothers whose husbands are deceased, confirmed that at many times widows are not aware of their husbands' debts and have no knowledge regarding budgeting and financial management which are a further disadvantage for widowhood.

Widow's experience different forms of abuse in their communities and this abuse are generally considered to be normal and part of socialisation in patriarchal communities (Dube 2016:34). In the African context, when a husband dies without a son, the widow will be forced to marry one of her husband's brothers by her in-laws in order to protect the wealth of the deceased. By accepting that marriage, she will be protected from eviction or loss of her husband's wealth (Baloyi 2015:487; Ankiambom 2017:842).

Widows often suffer from economic and physical abuse when they refuse to be evicted from their husband's houses and properties by their family-in-laws after the death of their husbands (Dube 2016:10-11). Magudu and Mohlakoana-Matopi (2013:6) asserted that in most of the South African communities, women are accused of killing their husbands and the family-in-laws take control over the deceased's livelihood and property, leaving the widows being abused, mistreated, isolated and evicted out of their houses immediately after the funeral. This act of grabbing property is done by the family-in-laws of the widow and their relatives. Most of the time this harmful behaviour will leave the widow and her children without a home. Widows further do not know their legal rights and how to access the estate of the deceased, which further makes them vulnerable for exploitation (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:5).

Owen, as cited by Manala (2015:4) concurs with the economic deprivation widows are facing by stating that "Widows across a wide spectrum of cultures and religions are

often among the very poorest of the poor, due to discrimination they experience in matters of inheritance, land and property rights.”

Social workers need to educate communities regarding the rights of women and widows and advocate for this vulnerable group regarding the injustices they experience regarding their economic livelihoods. Widows must be further empowered from a social justice perspective to be able to exercise their legal rights to inherit the property of their deceased husbands (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:8).

2.6.3 Social challenges of widowhood

When a woman becomes a widow, there immediately is an unbalanced power structure between the community members and the widow, because of cultural beliefs relating to widowhood (Dube 2019:97). These perceptions of community members of perceiving widows with suspicion, that they may be involved in the death of their husbands, and also the perception that a widow is of a lower status than a married woman, may leave widows feeling isolated and rejected in the community (Dube 2016:27).

The Commission on Gender Equality (2013) conducted a survey in all provinces in South Africa to understand the experiences of widows and widowers, to examine the human rights in cultural and religious mourning practices and how it impacted on both widows and widowers. The findings of the study reported that widows' movements are restricted. For example, widows are supposed to stay in the house or in a dark place before and after the funeral. Widows are also prohibited from socialising and sometimes they are not allowed to see their children, resulting in emotional abuse to widows and their children (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:4). Social exclusion from making decisions for themselves are also evident in the cultural practices where the family-in-laws are taking control and make the decisions regarding the distributing of the estate (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:4).

One of the social challenges experienced, because of the community perceptions and widowhood practices are loneliness and isolation. The cultural practices of widows not

being allowed to visit or talk with other people during the mourning period, as well as being removed from the community activities, result in the social exclusion of widows (Dube 2016; Manyedi et al 2003:78). The widow therefore may experience no social support from community members and may feel rejected and excluded from the community. Associated with their physical and psychological wellbeing, the importance of social support for widows is well-documented (Anusic & Lucas 2013:368). It is pointed out that people, in this instance, widows need social support from community members and families to assist them during their journey of widowhood which also can mitigate the experiencing of the effects of stressors (Anusic & Lucas 2013:368).

2.6.4 Health challenges of widowhood

Most of the time poor socio-economic conditions of widows leave them vulnerable to many different infections and health issues (Dube 2016:28). The Commission on Gender and Equality (2013) found that widows and widowers from Limpopo Province developed health problems after the death of their spouses because of experiencing high levels of stress and that they found it difficult to cope with the loss. The mourning practices performed, financial and social problems also contribute to the widows experiencing health problems. The study findings of Sekgobela (2018:82) regarding the health support needed by widows reported that they experience general fatigue, lack of appetite, loss of weight, feeling a burden, lacking interest in things and disturbed sleeping patterns.

HIV positive widows may have contracted the virus from their husbands prior to their husbands' death, but because of the cultural practice of the widow inheritance system of many African communities, widowhood poses a high risk in contracting and spreading the virus (Tenkorang 2014:47). A coping strategy of desperate widows to engage in high risk sexual behaviours for exchange of the provision of food and livelihoods for the family, may also expose them to be at high risk for contracting and spreading HIV (Itsweni 2018:23; Tenkorang 2014:47). Widows who have or contracted HIV also have to deal further with all the consequences of the health implications of being HIV positive and will require specialised health care services.

The Commission on Gender Equalities (2013:5) argued that widows' health may be negatively affected because of their widowhood because they are distracted from taking care of their health needs due to the strain of adjusting to their new roles and responsibilities after the death of the spouse (Jin & Chrisatakis 2009:607).

Social work services to widows need to include a multi-disciplinary effort and social workers should advocate access and referrals for widows with health issues to clinics and other professionals if necessary (Sekgobela 2018).

2.7 COPING STRATEGIES OF WIDOWS

People react to losses in diverse ways depending on factors like the cultural expectations and customs of the community, availability of support systems and the coping abilities of the bereaved (Mburugu 2020:110). The death of a spouse can be described as a form of a crisis and may make the bereaved unable to solve problems because of the physical, emotional and social impact on the person's well-being (Mburugu 2020:110). Adonis (2020:23) referred to coping strategies in the context of widowhood also as adjustment strategies. The women in widowhood need to cope with various adjustments to various challenges they experience as discussed previously in this chapter.

The coping strategies of many widows in developing countries may include: "exploitative informal segment work, putting children into child labour to earn money for survival, begging for money, food and other things in the streets in town" (Itsweni 2018:23). Young widows are frequently encouraged to remarry as a coping response towards the challenges of widowhood (George, Odukoya, Shaibu & Uche 2016:159). Many times, widows may assume the responsibility of becoming the heads of households and the breadwinners of their families, adjusting to their circumstances by immediately seeking employment to provide for their families (Itsweni 2018:24).

Widows may choose the way of least resistance as a coping strategy and adhere to all cultural rituals in the community, not to be disowned and rejected by family members and community members (Itsweni 2018:32; Manala 2015). Radzilani

(2010:56) rightfully remarked that: “coping with the impact of death is socially constructed.” Itsweni (2018:89) explains that widows who experienced social support from the church, if previously involved in religious activities, and traditional widows from a cultural background who got support from the traditional healer and the rituals performed, were assisted with this in coping with their widowhood (Adonis 2020; Itsweni 2018; Radzilani 2010). Some widows may seek assistance from social welfare feeding schemes as a way of providing for their children and as a way of coping with the challenges of the death of their husbands (Itsweni 2018:95).

Study findings of positive and negative coping strategies of widows in Nigeria (Iruloh & Elsie 2018:87) affirm that widows cope with the challenges of widowhood by making use of problem solving, cognitive restructuring, expressing emotions, seeking social support avoidance, wishful thinking, social withdrawal and self-criticism. Most of the widows in the mentioned study (Iruloh & Elsie 2018:87) made use of self-criticism, blaming themselves because of the challenges they experienced and the least of them used cognitive restructuring as a coping strategy. The coping strategy of cognitive restructuring was assumed to be used the least, because of the traditional belief that something artificial or unnatural may be the cause of their widowhood.

Browning and Kendig cited in Itsweni (2018:24) asserted that many families and widows especially, are left to cope on their own with little formal involvement of governments or other service providers. Specific programmes and interventions to assist this vulnerable population group are limited and social workers need to take cognisance of the needs of widows and the services needed by them.

2.8 INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS FOR PROTECTING WIDOWS IN SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa participated in contributing a number of international and regional frameworks aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls, and the South African government is mandated as the signatory to implement and monitor compliance with these international obligations (Mpani & Nsibandé 2015:32). The rights of women became an issue on the global agenda because women continue to

fight for their rights socially, economically and politically (Cebekhulu 2015:40). In the Twentieth century, with the drafting of internationally and regional human rights conventions where the women's rights movement emerged, the political and legal atmosphere started to change, hence discrimination based on sex and gender became a human right concern (Hellum & Aasen 2013:1)

There are many international instruments that articulate measures to protect women and widows around the world. However, for the purpose of this study, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948 the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa 1996) are discussed.

2.8.1 Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1981

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) of 1981 was promulgated with the intention of fighting for and promoting the rights of women around the world. Discrimination against women continues to exist around the world (Šimonovic 2014:591). This discrimination is described in article 1 of the CEDAW as the distinction, exclusion or restriction of woman on the bases of sex, political, economic, social, culture and civil rights(Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women).

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), functions under the United Nations to be responsible to ensure the implementation and monitoring of women's human rights (Cusack & Pusey 2013:1). Articles 1-5 and 24 of the CEDAW outlines the obligations of state parties to eliminate all forms of discrimination and inequality against women (Cusack & Pusey 2013:4). It protects women's rights to non-discrimination and equality in politics, public life, economic and social matters in legal and civil issues. The primary concern of the CEDAW is to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and to achieve gender equality (Cusack & Pusey 2013:4). The CEDAW outlined three theories about equality namely

formal equality, substantive equality and transformative equality (Cusack & Pusey 2013:10).

Formal equality maintains that women and men should be treated the same or as equals (Cusack & Pusey 2013:10). *Substantive equality* means that women should be given equal opportunities to men and should be empowered by an enabling environment to achieve equality of results (Cusack & Pusey 2013:11). *Transformative equality* outlines two things, redistribution of power and resources between men and women and the adoption of measures to enable the transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems to ensure that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns (Cusack & Pusey 2013:11). Transformative equality is the transformation of harmful norms, prejudices and stereotypes that violate women's rights (Cusack & Pusey 2013:11).

2.8.2 The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 1948

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, was one of the first international instruments that articulates human rights. The preamble of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) declares that every human being should be treated with dignity and equality, and that they also have the rights to freedom, justice, and peace (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). Article 2 of the UDHR states that every individual is entitled to rights and freedom regardless of a person's kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, national, social origin or any other status (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). In Article 1 the UDHR also declares that every individual is born free and equal in dignity and rights (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). In Article 17 relating to property, the UDHR further declares the equality of owning properties and that no one shall be unfairly deprived his or her property (Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948). This means that widows have the freedom and right to own their husband's (inherited) property and they must be treated with dignity.

2.8.3 Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's rights of Women in Africa (2003)

In drawing up the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003), the participating African states made a solemn commitment to eliminate all forms of discrimination and harmful practices against women in Africa. The protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on Women in Africa (2003) had made progress in protecting women in Africa, despite the fact that women in Africa still continue to be the victims of discrimination and harmful practices. People used culture to justify why they violate human rights especially for women, however such practices cannot be justified on the ground of culture or tradition (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:12).

Article 2(1)(b) of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa prohibits all forms of discrimination, especially harmful practices that put the wellbeing and health of a women in danger. It declares that the state should protect all woman from all forms of violence such as sexual and verbal violence. It also accentuates the rights to dignity, life, integrity and security of women. The convention mandates the state to address the problems of widows with regard to grabbing and repossession of their husbands' properties after the death of their husbands. Millions of widows around the world are still victims of property grabbing, poverty, being chased out of their homes, and they continue to be marginalised (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:17). Article 21(1) of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa states that widows are entitled to an equitable share of the inheritance of the property of her husband and that she has the right to continue to stay in the matrimonial house. The root behind the disinheritance is associated with cultural beliefs and cosmology, because widows are the suspects of the cause of their husband death. Therefore, they will not claim their husband's assets from their husband's family to prove that they are innocent (Ndlovu 2015:5).

Article 20 of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003) focuses on the specific issues of widows, declaring the following:

- Widows are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating or degrading treatment.
- Widows shall automatically become the guardian and custodian of her children, after the death of her husband unless this contrary to the best interest of the children
- A Widow has the right to marry a person of her choice.

2.8.4 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996)

South Africa has progressive and comprehensive laws and legislation that promote gender equality and to protect the rights of women (Mpani & Nsibandé 2015:30). The aim of these laws and policies is to foster full participation of women in all spheres of life. The Constitution of South Africa is the central guiding document declaring the rights to equality of all individuals, promoting the breakdown of patriarchal ideologies that continue to oppress women under the name of culture and religion (Mpani & Nsibandé 2015:30). However, in South Africa, widows still continue to be exposed to strong social rites, practices and taboos associated with widowhood in many social and cultural groups. These practices violate widows' rights and freedom in contravention of the South African Constitution that prohibits all forms of discrimination to any individual on the basis of his or her gender (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Topika 2013:5). In addition, the study conducted by the Commission on Gender Equality, revealed that it is unfortunate that a lot of widows from rural areas bear discriminatory practices because of the ignorance of the law and a high illiteracy (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:13).

Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996, the Bill of Rights has several provisions that relate to the protection of women. The Constitution provides for the right to equality and prohibits all discrimination based on gender, sex, marital status, sexual orientation and culture (South Africa 1996: section 9). It further states that everyone has the right to belong to a cultural and religious community and to enjoy and practice their culture (South Africa 1996: section 9(2)). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 also states that every person has the right to human dignity, and their dignity should be protected and in addition to other legislation protecting women against all forms of abuse. However, in South Africa violence and

abuse against women respected (South Africa 1996: section 10). The Constitution further states that everyone has the right to freedom and security are still a problem, particularly in respect of widows and widowhood practices (Cebekhulu 2015:41).

2.8.5 The Commission on Gender Equality

The Commission on Gender Equality is one of the institutions that were developed in terms of the Constitution of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, Chapter 9 (South Africa 1996: Chapter 9). The purpose of the Commission on Gender Equality is to protect gender equality amongst all people and to make recommendation to Parliament in relation to any law or issue that concerns gender inequality and the status of women (Commissioner on Gender Equality 2013:1) Gender equality means that both men and women's aspirations and needs should be treated equally. This means that their rights and responsibilities should not be based on their gender differences (Commissioner on Gender Equality 2013:2). Despite these measures, widows further continue to experience exploitation and abuse because of the cultural widowhood customs, rites and practices. This exploitation and abuse of widows are justified through the socio-cultural system such as the patriarchal system (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:9).

2.9 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter provides an overview of widowhood as offered by different scholars. The purpose is to give a better understanding about it to the reader. Also discussed are the challenges and coping strategies experienced by widows as the result of widowhood. The overview of widowhood rituals and rites that are practised in different parts of the world, Africa and South Africa are discussed. It emerged from the literature that widowhood rituals and practices violate and abuse the rights of widows during the performance of the widowhood rituals. These widowhood rituals are undergone by widows following the death of their husbands seem to be practised throughout African countries. The literature has shown that in African societies such as South Africa, the patriarchal system due to cultural principles still responsible for the subordination of women. The South African government has made significant strides towards ensuring

that women's rights are not continued to be violated. However, due to cultural and traditional practices widows continue to suffer in the name of culture and tradition.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of this chapter is on the provision of detailed information on how the research was carried out in collecting and analysing the data for this study. The research goal, questions and objectives are revisited, followed by an exposition of the research methodology, research methods, data collection, method of data analysis, data verification, application of ethical considerations and the limitation of the qualitative research process, as summarised in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Research protocol for this study

RESEARCH QUESTION, RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES
APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research approach<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Qualitative approach• Research design<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Phenomenological research design○ Descriptive research design○ Exploratory research design○ Contextual research design
RESEARCH METHOD
DATA COLLECTION: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Preparation of data collection• Application of the methods of data collecting• Pilot testing
DATA ANALYSIS
DATA VERIFICATION: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Credibility• Transferability• Dependability• Confirmability
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Informed consent• Confidentiality• Beneficence• Privacy• Anonymity• Debriefing• Management of info

3.2. RESEARCH QUESTION, RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

In summary, the research question, research goal and research objectives entail the following:

3.2.1 Research question

Formulated as follows, the research questions addressed in this research study aimed at providing answers through the collection, analysing and verification of data (Jansen 2016:3; Engel & Schutt 2012:28):

- What are the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province regarding widowhood?
- What suggestions are to be made for social work practice in rendering services to widows in the Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province?

3.2.2 Research goal

The research goal as the overarching focus of the research study, in specific and brief terms (Thomas & Hodges 2010: 38), entailed the following:

- To develop an in-depth understanding on the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province regarding widowhood.
- To proffer suggestions for social work practice in rendering services to women regarding widowhood in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo Province.

3.2.3 Research objectives

The following research objectives comprised the steps taken by the researcher to achieve and accomplish the research goal of this study (Fouché & de Vos 2011:95):

- To explore and describe the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood among the women of Mavalani village in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province.
- To describe the findings relating to the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood among women of Mavalani village in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province.
- To draw conclusions and make recommendations about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood in order to proffer suggestions for social work practice.

3.3 APPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology provides the researcher with some theoretical or philosophical foundation to conduct a study (Nieuwenhuis 2016b:51). Research methodology describes different methods which include the principles of ontology and epistemology which influences how the research is going to be conducted (Sarantakos 2013:29). In addition, the research methodology provides the researcher with the procedures to be followed in addressing the research problems or how to get answers to the research question (Kumar 2019:4). As applied in this research, the research methodology comprising of the research approach and the research design entailed the following:

3.3.1 The qualitative research approach

The researcher chose the qualitative research approach for this research because its focal point is to explore and understand the women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood (Creswell & Creswell 2018:4). A qualitative research study describes and enhances the understanding of a phenomenon by using words and images to better understand people's lives. Applying the qualitative researcher collects data from participants about their everyday life by discussing open ended questions contained in an interview guide with them (Ivankova, Creswell & PianoClark 2016:309). The qualitative research approach enabled this

researcher to collect data from the participants by using semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions contained in an interview guide. Through the use of a gate keeper (royal authority) data were collected about women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood. During the collection of data, the researcher inter alia applied the interviewing skill of probing to allow participants to share their widowhood experiences, challenges and coping strategies in depth. The data were collected in a natural setting where participants are living their daily lives.

In applying the qualitative research approach, the researcher took cognisance of and applied the following characteristics of qualitative research as proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018:181-182):

- The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with a total of 13 participants at their homes where they experience the phenomenon under investigation. For confidentiality purposes three participants were interviewed at a venue arranged prior to the interviews which underlined safety and confidentiality. The researcher used semi structured interviews with the assistance of an interview guide to collect the data from the participants.
- The researcher was the main research instrument, meaning that she personally collected the data. Participants were the predominant sources of data contribution in this study.
- The researcher did not use face-to-face semi structured interviews as the only source of collecting data. She also observed and noted the participants' behaviour during the interviews, which included observing their non-verbal communication and facial expressions when they answered some of the questions. Semi structured interviews with an interview guide were used to allow participants to share their widowhood experiences, challenges and coping strategies. Open-ended questions were asked to obtain in depth data concerning the matter at hand.
- Qualitative research allows obtaining information from various data sources rather than from only from one data source. In this study, the researcher did not rely on one data source to gather the required information. She interviewed 13 participants as her data sources (excluding the participants for pilot testing) and applied the communication skills of probing and listening to obtain a

detailed understanding of the participants' experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood.

- The inductive data analysis process was used by the researcher to organise the data to develop themes, subthemes and categories. The researcher worked back and forth to develop comprehensive themes (Creswell & Creswell 2018:181-182).
- The researcher collected data from participants, analysed and then interpreted the data in order to understand the meaning of the participants' experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood for them.
- The researcher ensured that she reported on the multiple perspectives by using themes, sub-themes and categories that represented the views of the participants as reported on in the research findings (see Chapter 4). As the literature control of the study, existing literature and research of other researchers about the topic, were studied and taken into consideration to support, confirm and/or contrast the themes and the storylines.
- The qualitative research design is not rigid and can be changed and adapted during the data collecting process. The researcher made an amendment by adding one research question to the interview guide after she conducted a pilot test. The researcher engaged in the best practices with participants and encouraged them to be experts in sharing their experiences, challenges and coping strategies about their widowhood. Throughout the study, the researcher's focus was to learn from the participants about their everyday life experiences.
- Qualitative research allows reflexivity or a form of inquiry. This means that researchers should be involved in self-reflection of how it influences their interpretations on the study findings. The researcher made sure that her ideas and thoughts did not influence the process of the study or the study findings. She kept a journal where she noted every aspect about the study. This assisted the researcher to always remind herself that the study is not about the researcher's interests, but about the participants' experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood. This also assisted the researcher to keep in mind her personal impression and to avoid biased research findings.

- Qualitative researchers report their research findings from a holistic view. Hence, the researcher holistically reported the study findings (see Chapter 4) about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows in Mavalani in the Mopani district in depth.

The application of the research design is discussed next.

3.3.2 Research design

As mentioned in Chapter One, the researcher decided to employ a phenomenological design, complemented by an explorative, descriptive and contextual strategy of inquiry to achieve the objectives of the study which is discussed as follows:

3.3.2.1 Phenomenological research design

According to Delport, Fouché and Schurink (2011:305) a phenomenological research design aims at describing and understanding individuals' perceptions about a certain phenomenon. A phenomenological research design was applied in this study to allow the researcher to fully describe and understand women's perceptions about their widowhood experiences, challenges and coping strategies. The phenomenological research design enabled the researcher to understand the participants lived experiences about the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Creswell 2018:13).

3.3.2.2 Descriptive research design

The descriptive research design was introduced as one of the strategies of inquiry adopted for this study (see section 1.7.2). According to Kumar (2019:96), the goal of a descriptive research design is to provide a description of a phenomenon in its natural setting, situation and in relation to its problems, based on the data provided about the phenomenon under study. In this study, applying the descriptive research design allowed the researcher to describe women's experiences and challenges with regards to their widowhood, their coping strategies employed to cope with their widowhood

challenges and how they would like to be assisted by social workers. The researcher further enhanced the descriptive research design by supporting her interpretation of the research findings with direct quotations from participants' conversation during the face-to-face interviews and with a literature control.

3.3.2.3 Exploratory research design

Selecting an exploratory research design was necessary because little was known about the women's experiences, challenges, and coping strategies regarding their widowhood. Therefore, it was necessary for the researcher to familiarise herself with the phenomenon under investigation by exploring it (Babbie 2016:90). Using an exploratory research design assisted the researcher to obtain a new insight and better understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women living in Limpopo Province, Mopani district Mavalani village regarding their widowhood.

In exploring women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood, the researcher approached participants in their homes or at venues where they felt comfortable and where confidentiality was ensured for the study to be conducted properly. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews, listened attentively to the participant's responses and asked follow-up questions when necessary. During the discussion of the interview questions, participants were encouraged to explain and describe their experiences, challenges and coping strategies in detail. Employing the exploratory research design helped the researcher to explore and to gain in depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

3.3.2.4 Contextual research design

The qualitative researcher seeks to describe and to understand the events and actions studied within the natural context in which they occur (Babbie & Mouton 2014:272). Employing a contextual research design enabled the researcher to better understand women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood in their environment within their context. As part of the contextual research design the necessary attention also falls on the participants' context profile which is discussed

(see 4.2). The researcher similarly observed the cultural context of the participants by obtaining information about their experiences with regard to the traditional rituals they had to follow and perform after the death of their husbands. The participants narrated their belief and the behaviour expected from them in this regard until they completed their mourning periods.

3.4 RESEARCH METHOD

Research methods are described as the strategies employed by the researcher in the process of collecting the data, analysing the data and the interpretation of data in a research study (Creswell & Creswell 2018:16). The research methods applied in this study comprised of identifying the research population, sampling and applying sampling techniques, collection the data, pilot testing the data collecting instrument, data analysis and data verification.

A research population is described as the total number of subjects the researcher is interested to include in the study (Babbie 2016:116) The population of a study “is the totality of persons, events, organisation units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned” (Strydom 2011C:223). The population of this study consists of women living in Mavalani village, Limpopo Province, who lost their husbands due to the death of the husbands.

Sampling is the procedure used by the researcher to select a group of people or units from which to get the information needed to represent the research population (Brink et al 2018:115). Maree and Pietersen (2016:192) asserted that because of the time and cost involved, it makes it not possible for the researcher to include the whole population in the research study, therefore sampling is required. The researcher made use of sampling to save time and costs. By applying the principle of data saturation, a sample consisting of thirteen widows, living in Mavalani village were interviewed in the study. All 13 women selected met the criteria for inclusion discussed in Chapter 1 (see 1.8.3). In terms of these criteria, widows who were included in the study had to be between the ages of 18 to 65 years, widows for at least one year, and stayed with their husbands before their husbands’ decease. Widows had to be able to comfortably

express themselves in English or Tsonga and could be from different cultural population groups, to be included in the sample. Participants had to be widows who were available and willing to participate in the study, and able to fully understand the nature of the study and the process of giving their informed consent to participate.

The participants of this study were selected by using purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to select only women who had knowledge and experience about widowhood, from whom in depth information could be obtained. Pascoe (2014:142) explains that in order for participants to be selected by using purposive sampling, the researcher should first determine and compile a list of characteristics that participants should meet, before selecting the sample. Therefore, the researcher formulated and followed the set criteria of inclusion in selecting the participants. The criteria of inclusion enabled the researcher to select participants who provided relevant information about their experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood.

Babbie (2016:188) described snowball sampling as the procedure through which the researcher selected a number of participants of the target population and then request them to refer her to other persons with the same characteristics. In the case of this study, the researcher first approached the village authorities, namely the headman of Mavalani and informed him about the intended study. Subsequently a letter of request to conduct the study and explaining the purpose of the study was submitted to the headman (Addendum A). The headman referred the first participant to the researcher, after which the researcher made use of the snowballing technique by asking the participant to refer her to other suitable prospective participants that she knew. Although not every prospective participant that the researcher was referred to in this manner were willing to be part of the study, eventually a sufficient number of participants were recruited by means of snowball sampling.

Due to the vulnerability of the research population resulting from their widowship, observant attention was given to maintaining the necessary ethical considerations aimed at vulnerable populations during the research. Emphasis was placed on the process of informed consent, self-determination and autonomous decision making,

ensuring privacy and confidentiality concerns, respect for the participants, and the selection methods of participants (Shivayogi 2016:53). In applying the snowball sampling technique to obtain participants, cognisance was taken of and provision was made for the possibility that snowball sampling can be problematic in vulnerable populations, because of the referral to the researcher by participants of other prospective participants, which challenges the ethical considerations of anonymity and confidentiality (Ellard-Gray, Jeffrey, Choubak & Crann 2015:3). It was also noted that limited anonymity and confidentiality may also exist in small communities where community members know one another (Ellard-Gray et al 2015:3). Nevertheless, the ethical consideration of confidentiality had to be assured to limit any impact it may have on the relationships of the participants who were acquainted with one another (Ellard-Gray et al 2015:3).

Bracken-Roche et al (2017:18) asserted that researchers are mandated by the principle of autonomy and respect for people to allow prospective participants to have freedom in making their own choices after having been fully informed about the purpose of the study, its risks and benefits. Therefore, it was of utmost importance that the researcher ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and respected the autonomous decision making of prospective participants. The researcher allowed participants to exercise their freedom of autonomous decision making by emphasising that they could volunteer to be part of the study or not after they were informed about the study's purpose, its possible risks and benefits. The researcher made sure that she included only participants who were fully briefed, had given consent and were willing to participate in the study.

In qualitative research the sample size cannot be pre-determined before the study commences. Therefore, in qualitative research the sample size is determined by means of applying the principle of data saturation (Bless et al 2013:179). Data saturation is defined as the stage of data collection where no new information, themes and categories are obtained or generated in the interviews (Creswell & Creswell 2018:84). As required, in this study the researcher did not determine the sample size in advance, and she was guided by the principle of data saturation to determine when the number of participants was sufficient. In applying the principle of data saturation,

the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 participants. She also took notes during the interviews and recorded the interviews on an audio recorder before transcribing the interviews. She read the transcripts several times and when it appeared that the information and the themes became repetitive, and that there was no new information coming forward, the researcher was satisfied that she had reached the point of data saturation with a sufficient number of participants contributing information.

With the the roles and nature of the research population, the sample, sampling methods and selection criteria explained, the attention now falls on the data collection method applied.

3.5 DATA COLLECTION

In this section the researcher explains the process and methods of data collection that were applied in this study. Discussed are aspects of the preparations taken before data collection, the methods employed to collect data, and the pilot testing conducted.

3.5.1 Preparation for data collection

In preparation for data collection, it is important for the researcher to get the permission to conduct the study from the necessary authorities and to be granted access to conduct the study to the participants and to the site(Creswell&Creswell 2018:92). The researcher received ethical clearance from the Department of Social Work's Social Work Research Committee (SWREC) at the University of South Africa to conduct the research study, on 20 February 2020. To obtain the necessary permission from authorities for access to the research site, the use of formal written letters stating how, when and where the study will be conducted were included in the initial contact making (Creswell & Creswell 2018:92). Singh and Wassenaar (2016:42) postulated that in South African research studies the permission of a designated traditional leader in a rural community is many times needed This was also applicable to this research study.

The headman Mavalani is the leader and authority figure in the Mavalani village and obtaining permission from him to access the village for research purposes was crucial.

Gaining the trust from the community leaders, building positive relationships and, recruiting them as gatekeepers is a recommended strategy which improves obtaining permission to access the research site and improving the recruitment of participants (Sutherland & Fantasia 2012:384). A gatekeeper is described as “someone who controls access to an institution or an organisation such as a school principal, managing director or administrator” (Singh & Wassenaar 2016:42). The gatekeeper of the identified research site in the context of this study was the headman of the village Mavalani. The researcher firstly made telephonically contact with the headman and arranged an appointment with him to introduce herself and explains the content of the research study. During the appointment with the headman, and adhering to the Covid-19 regulations, the researcher explained the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and asked for permission to conduct the study in the village. The researcher presented an official letter requesting permission to conduct the study and the ethical clearance certificate to the headman (see Addenda A and E). The researcher explained to the headman the purpose, benefits and risks of the research to be conducted. The headman verbally gave permission for the study to be conducted in his village, and he also agreed to be the gatekeeper to assist the researcher in identifying the first potential participant for the study (Addendum B).

On the 25th of May 2020 the headman of the Mavalani village informed the researcher telephonically of a prospective participant who was willing to participate in the study and provided her contact details. The researcher contacted this first prospective participant telephonically, keeping in mind the inclusion criteria, and arranged an appointment with her, to explain the purpose, benefits, risks and content of the study to her and to get her consent in writing to participate in the study (see Addenda B, and C). On request, the participant referred the researcher to other prospective participants and the recruited participants subsequently referred the researcher to others, thereby using the snowball sampling technique. All the prospective participants recruited through snowball sampling, were contacted in the same manner by firstly making telephonic contact with them to introduce the researcher and explain the purpose of

contact making. When the prospective participants were willing to schedule a personal appointment with the researcher, she explained the nature of the study with the including documentation.

All participants were informed that with their permission the researcher would record their interviews and be making notes during the interviews. The interviews were coded on the audio records to disguise any identifying information and ensure anonymity of the participants. The researcher made follow-up calls to find out if prospective participants were still willing to participate in the study. Appointments were made with the participants who were willing to participate, and arrangements were made regarding the venues and times suitable to interview them. During these appointments, the informed consent forms were completed before the interviews commenced.

The researcher followed Covid-19 protocol to ensure that participants were safe and free to participate (Unisa: 2020). The following protocols were adhered to during the face-to-face interviews with the participants:

- The researcher conducted a telephonic pre-screening test with participants before visiting them and ensured participants of the researcher's adherence to the Covid-19 guidelines for research interviewing.
- The researcher followed the prescribed protocol of screening and sanitising, before meeting the participants

The researcher was mindful of the following Covid-19 protocols before and during the interviewing of participants:

- The researcher wore a cloth mask and she also requested the participants to wear their cloth masks.
- A pre-screening test was done by measuring the participants' temperatures.
- Participants who did not have cloth masks, were issued a cloth mask.
- The researcher ensured that participants used hand sanitizer with a 70% alcohol content before commencing the interviews.
- All the surfaces in the venue were sanitised before and after the interviews.
- A physical distance of two meters were kept between the researcher and the participants.

- No food and drinks were shared,
- In managing the hard copies of documents, a disposable glove was used, such as during the exchange of the consent forms between the researcher and the participants.

3.5.2 Application of the method of data collection

Due to the 2020 national Covid-19 lockdown in South-Africa, the researcher had to postpone her data collection phase until she was able to conduct the data collection under the strict prescribed research protocols of the University of South Africa (Unisa 2020). The researcher obtained ethical clearance on 20 February 2020, from the University of South Africa to conduct the study (Addendum E).

As this is a qualitative study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews assisted with an interview guide consisting of open ended questions, as the data collection method (see Addendum I). The interview guide was translated from English into Tsonga to enable participants to conduct participate in the interviews in the language that they were comfortable with. The researcher understands Tsonga because it is her mother tongue and her first language. An interview guide gives guidance for researchers to cover all the issues on the topic they want to investigate, during the interviews (Greeff 2011:352). The researcher made use of the interview guide to keep her focussed, keeping flexibility in mind and assisting her in collecting rich and thorough data. The advantages of semi-structured interviews are that the researcher can explore and understand the participants' views, experiences and perspectives in-depth with regards to the research topic (Zahle 2017:146).

In order to obtain a biographical profile of the participants, the following questions were directed to the participants:

- How old are you?
- Do you have children? If yes, how many?
- What is your highest school or educational qualification?
- Are you currently employed? If yes, what type of employment do you have?
- When did your husband pass away?

During data collection the researcher asked the following questions related to the topic under investigation:

- Please explain your experiences of being a widow.
- What are the day to day challenges you encounter due to the death of your husband?
- Describe the nature of your family relationships before and after the death of your husband.
- What kind of support did you receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?
- What kind of support did you not receive from people such as relatives and friends that would have assisted you more effectively?
- What are the coping strategies that you use to deal with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband?
- What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges that widows face and to assist other widows?
- What do you think about the traditional rituals that have to be followed by widows after the death their husband?
- How can social workers assist women in widowhood?

All 13 participants recruited were interviewed using semi-structured interviews assisted with an interview guide with open-ended questions. During the interviews, the researcher ensured that she applied the necessary interviewing skills to ensure that the interviewing process was productive. This included clarification skills, active listening skills and probing which were implemented during the interviews. To obtain clear statements from participants, the asking of follow-up questions during the interviews is regarded as important and was applied throughout the interviews conducted in this research (Greeff 2011:345). Any statements of participants which needed clarification were followed up with additional questions. Bryman and Bell (2011:230) asserted that the researcher should pay attention and listen actively to the interviewee by maintaining eye contact during the interviews. Applying active listening skills assisted the researcher to pay attention during the interviews by maintaining eye

contact. Probing allowed the researcher to further ask questions and motivate participants to elaborate their answers (Babbie 2016:269; Creswell & Creswell 2018:191). The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder with the permission of the participants. Interviews were approximately conducted in 45 minutes to an hour per interview. When transcribing the interviews, the audio recorder assisted and enabled the researcher to go back and listen to the interviews rather than to rely on what was captured in the notes.

3.5.3 Pilot testing

Pilot testing is important as it allows the researcher to test how a research instrument will perform when applied in the study and how effective it would be. It further assists the researcher in identifying potential problems and areas where the research instrument needs to be adjusted or adapted (Dikko 2016:523). Bryman and Bell (2011:209) assert that the purpose of pilot testing is to administer the research instrument to a number of people from whom the information obtained will not be included in the study, and to further test and make necessary adjustments to the interview guide. As prescribed, pilot testing was administered in this research to a small number of people who did not form part of the study sample. The purpose of pilot testing the interview guide is to practise using it and to make any changes to it if necessary. Prior to the beginning of the study, the researcher identified and recruited two voluntary widows with whom to conduct the necessary pilot testing. The two participants were informed that their interviews would not form part of the study and that it was a pilot test of the research instrument. The semi-structured interview guide was pre-tested on the two widows who met the set criteria of inclusion in the sample. In this case the researcher also ensured that they observed the Covid-19 protocol in terms of which participants had to wear face masks, sanitized their hands before starting with the interviews and maintain a physical distancing of two meters between each participant and the researcher. The researcher conducted the pilot testing also to assess, practise and perfect using her interviewing skills in collecting data and to estimate the duration of an interview. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The transcripts were sent to the supervisor for further guidance. The researcher and her supervisor discovered that widows repeatedly mentioned their

experiences and challenges with regard to the traditional rituals which they had performed after the death of their husbands. The researcher and her supervisor agreed that a question about the traditional rituals should be included in the interview guide. This was duly done. The pilot testing enabled the researcher to test the performance and effectivity of the research instrument when applied in the study. It further assisted the researcher in identifying potential problems and areas where the research instrument needed to be adjusted.

The amended interview guide translated from English into the Tsonga language is attached to this report (see Addendum I). The researcher was satisfied that the amended interview guide produced the rich data required about the women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood.

The attention now moves to explaining how the researcher analysed and interpreted the data.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The process of data analysis in qualitative research includes the understanding of the phenomenon under study by the use of classification, interconnections and descriptions to enable the researcher to interpret, explain and understand the data collected (Graue 2015:8).

As indicated in Chapter 1 (see 1.10), the researcher adopted the classic eight steps of qualitative data analysis as proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:196) as follows:

- The researcher transcribed all the interviews word by word by listening to the audio recorder. She then read through the entire transcripts to familiarize herself with the data, organised the interview data obtained by sorting the information into different files.
- The researcher selected one interview transcript and read through it again to get the meaning of the transcript. She then re-read the transcript, making notes

of her ideas as they came to her mind, based on what she read in the transcript. She continued to do the same with all the other interviews.

- After the researcher had completed the reading and making of notes for all 13 interviews, she compiled a list of all the topics identified in the transcriptions, grouped them together according to their similarities and differences and listed them in a labelled column.
- At this stage, the researcher abbreviated and categorized the topics. For example, the topic *coping strategies adopted by women*. This topic was abbreviated as C. Then the researcher went back to the transcribed interviews and selected data relevant to the topic and cut and pasted it next to the topic.
- The researcher then established the most describing wording for the topics and grouped similar topics together into themes.
- The researcher next made a final decision on the abbreviation and alphabetical codes for each of the themes, subthemes and categories.
- At this stage, the researcher assembled the data material for each category in one place and performed a preliminary analysis.
- The researcher lastly recoded the existing data where necessary.

The researcher obtained the assistance of an independent coder. After the independent coder completed his analyses of the data, the researcher, independent decoder and the supervisor discussed the preliminary themes and compared it with the researcher's analyses. After consensus was reached about it, the themes, subthemes and the categories were finalised. The results of the study were then compiled in Chapter 4. The following five themes were identified with their subthemes and categories.

- The **first theme** is the participants' experiences of their widowhood and four sub-themes were identified in this regard. The first sub-theme is the participants' experiences of their losses because of widowhood. Under this theme two categories were identified which are loss of status as a married woman and financial losses because of widowhood. The second sub-theme is participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood. In this regard, two categories were identified, which are changes experienced in

the relationship with the family-in-law and changes experienced regarding friendships in the community. The third sub-theme is participants' experiences of social support structures and three categories were identified namely, participants' experiences of social support from the family, participants' experiences of social support from significant others and participants' experiences of social support from religious groups. The fourth sub-theme under this theme, is the participants' experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals and two categories are identified namely experiences of participants in adhering to traditional rituals and experiences of participants for non-adherence to traditional rituals.

- **Theme two** is participants' accounts of the challenges associated with their widowhood. Under this theme, three sub-themes are identified namely, participants' accounts of challenges regarding the community's perceptions of widowhood, participants' accounts of challenges regarding financial independence and participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships. Under this sub-theme two categories were identified, challenges in adopting a disciplinary role in the relationships with their children and challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships.
- **Theme three** is participants' accounts of their coping strategies in dealing with the challenges of their widowhood. Four sub-themes are identified, namely participants' accounts on religion and spirituality as coping strategies, participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy, participants' accounts of support received from family members and others as a coping strategy and the participants' accounts on self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied as a coping strategy
- **Theme four** is participants' accounts of advice given to other widows on how to deal with challenges of widowhood. From this theme, two sub-themes were identified. The first sub-theme is participants' accounts of advice given to other widows about the acceptance of their loss and the second sub-theme is participants' accounts regarding advice given about the managing of relationships. From the second sub-theme participants' advice about the managing of relationships, two categories are identified, namely participants

advice about how to manage relationships with other male partners and participants' advice about how to manage relationships with their children.

- **Theme five** is participants' suggestions regarding social work practice about widowhood. Three sub-themes were identified which are participants' suggestions on counselling and rendering support to widows, participants' recommendations for community education about the rights of women and participants' recommendations regarding financial aid to support widows.

3.7 DATA VERIFICATION

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (see 1.11) the assessment of the trustworthiness of a study in qualitative research is crucial and it is embedded in the test value of the findings, conclusions and data analysis (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:123). It is emphasised that the quality of a qualitative research project is determined by its credibility and dependability (Babbie 2016:405). The trustworthiness of this study is based on the model of Lincoln and Guba (in Lietz & Zayas 2010:190), which addresses its credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Addressing these four aspects ensured the trustworthiness of this study and entails the following:

3.7.1 Credibility

Credibility includes how accurate the researcher interpreted the data provided by the participants (Koonin 2014:258). Credibility can be ensured by implementing strategies like ensuring an audit trail, prolonged engagement in the field, peer debriefing, and member checking (Strydom 2021:395-397).

To ensure that there is credibility in the study, member checking was used to determine the accuracy of the findings. The researcher had face-to-face meetings with each participant to discuss the correctness of the collected data. The participants were given the opportunity to go through the transcripts and written notes that were compiled by the researcher to confirm if it is a true reflexion of what participants said during the interviews. The researcher also made use of prolonged engagement during interviews to ensure that she gained an in-depth understanding of the experiences,

challenges and coping strategies of the participants. The researcher further used persistent observation of the participants' non-verbal and verbal clues and the surroundings, during the collection of data about their experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood, to ensure accuracy of the data collected.

Peer debriefing involves using peers as a sounding board for developing new insights in the research process (Strydom 2021:397). The researcher ensured that she continuously communicated with her supervisor in each and every step about the study to ensure the accuracy of the study findings. She also regularly interacted with other peers to refine and discuss the research study and its progress, which contributed to the credibility of the study.

3.7.2 Transferability

Transferability can be described as a process where the research findings can be applied in other contexts or to other participants (Babbie & Mouton 2014:277). The researcher can ensure transferability by responsibly providing detailed information of the context to give the reader the opportunity to recognise if the research findings can be transferred to another context (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:124). The generalisation of the study findings was not an aim of the researcher, because of the nature of contextualised qualitative research which do not focus on generalising study findings.

The transferability of a research study is embedded in the use of good research designs, thorough planning and action as well as critical reflection (Strydom 2021:393). The researcher used well-designed and applicable research designs, was involved in thorough planning of the research study and used thick and detailed descriptions of the data obtained from the participants to enable readers to decide if the data could be familiarised to their specific contexts.

3.7.3 Dependability

The researcher can ensure the dependability of a study by thoroughly describing the research process, ensuring an audit trail and making the necessary documentation

available (Strydom 2021:394; Bless et al 2013:237). The researcher clearly described the qualitative research procedures and diligently applied the research design, keeping detailed documentation of the process. The importance of ensuring dependability of a study means that all facets of the research process should be transparent (Yin 2011:19). The researcher ensured that the research process was duly documented and transparent to ensure the quality of the process. The participants were exposed to the same process of data collection by means of semi-structured interviewing assisted with an interview guide, contributing to the dependability of the research findings. An independent coder was appointed to analyse the raw data by identifying themes, subthemes and categories which strengthened the presented themes. The researcher also ensured that dependability was achieved by making use of the independent coder's services to analyse the transcripts to enhance and strengthen dependability.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Confirmability can be defined as the degree that the study findings are a true reflection of the participants' views (Hays & Sign 2012:201). Confirmability is associated with the objectivity of the study without being influenced by the researcher's interest (Strydom 2011a:125). In this study, the researcher ensured that her personal interests and motivation did not shape or influence the data collection, analysis of the data and the findings and the interpretation of the findings. In compiling the presentation of the study findings (Chapter 4), she used participants' verbal quotes to represent participants' ideas, feelings and thoughts, rather than the researchers' perceptions.

The researcher described the research process in detail for other researchers to evaluate the findings and be able to draw the same conclusions. Confirmability can be increased by an audit trail ensuring that all the procedures and decisions should be traceable step by step (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:125). By keeping detailed documentation of the research process, the researcher ensured that with an audit trail other researchers would be able to come to the same conclusions. Making use of an independent coder to check the consistency of the findings was another strategy applied to increase confirmability in the study.

3.8 APPLICATION OF ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics can be described as a code of principles which places a responsibility on the researchers to adhere to the professional standards of their professions and include a code of conduct which protects the rights of participants and the community (Strydom & Roestenburg 2021:119). The general aim of research ethics is to promote the moral principles that provide rules to protect the behaviour expected when conducting a study involving sponsors, participants, employers, other researchers, assistants and students (Strydom 2011a:129).

The first important aspect regarding ethics and a research study is obtaining ethical clearance to conduct the study, which was done for this study by the Scientific Review Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (see Addendum E). Important when taking ethics into consideration in this study, widows are recognised as a vulnerable population group. Therefore, the researcher made sure that she proceeded from an ethical perspective with extra caution to protect participants from any harm or exploitation in this research, by applying the guidelines suggested for ethical considerations for vulnerable populations as described in Chapter 1 (see 1.12).

According to Shivayogi (2016:53) the principles used to safeguard the interests of vulnerable research populations such as widows, include the process of informed consent, authorised substitute decision makers (if necessary), addressing privacy and confidentiality concerns, respect for persons and their autonomous decision making, justice and the choice in the type of selection methods of prospective participants. The researcher strictly applied the principles of anonymity and confidentiality in dealing with this vulnerable population group and ensured that they were able to make an autonomous decision to voluntarily participate or to decline to participate in the research study.

To ensure that the ethical principles were diligently followed, the researcher scheduled supervision sessions with the supervisor to discuss the application of the ethical

considerations and ensure that all safety measures were taken to safeguard the participants against any possible harm and exploitation. The researcher considered the issue of confidentiality and privacy before the venue was secured. She inquired from the participants about the appropriate venues and times where and when the interviews were to be conducted. Ten participants preferred to do the interviews at their homes, while three were not comfortable to conduct the interviews at their homes. The researcher organised a secured venue in her home where these three participants felt more comfortable and freer to share their experiences. The application of the ethical principles of privacy and confidentiality are discussed below in more detail (see 3.8.2 and 3.8.4).

In applying the ethical considerations in general, the benefit of this study was explained to the participants, namely to make suggestions for rendering more effective social welfare services to the widows in the Mavalani village. The researcher ensured that she adhered to the selection methods planned and set out in Chapter 1 and as discussed in the preparation for data collection (see 1.9.1) and the method of data collection (see 1.9.2). In applying the purposive sampling and snowball sampling methods to obtain suitable participants, by adhering to the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, the researcher was cautious to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

After the researcher completed conducting the interviews, she inquired from the participants if sharing the personal facts and emotions relating to their widowhood during their interviews as part of the study, had emotionally affected them and confirmed that a social worker was available to assist them if necessary. She informed them that the social worker would provide support to them through debriefing sessions which were available free of charge (see Addendum G). None of the participants indicated that they wanted to make use of debriefing sessions after the interviews, so no debriefing sessions were held.

The researcher adhered to the ethical considerations of informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, debriefing and managing and protecting the data obtained.

3.8.1 Informed consent

The Presidential Commission for the Study of Bioethical Issues (2016:13) described informed consent as the cornerstone of the ethical principles of research, especially with research with vulnerable populations, like widows. The researcher ensured that she treated potential participants with respect and recognised their right to autonomous choices and their decisions to participate or not in the study, without any forceful actions to convince them to participate.

After the researcher was granted permission from the gatekeeper, the headman at Mavalani, to conduct the study, she made telephonic contact with the first prospective participant who was informed about the planned research and then referred to her by the headman as the gatekeeper. The researcher introduced herself and explained the purpose of her contact making. The prospective participant was willing to engage further in the research, and the researcher made an appointment with her at a place and time of her choice, where safety, confidentiality and anonymity were ensured, to further explain the nature of the research study and to make an appointment to conduct the interview. Using the snowball sampling technique, the researcher followed the same procedure of contact making with and recruiting the other prospective participants after being referred to them by participants with whom she conducted interviews.

During personal contact making at the first appointment, the researcher provided a clear explanation about the purpose and the nature of the study by using the language that participants could understand. The ethical issues, like the benefits, risks, anonymity and confidentiality of the study were also fully explained. The researcher presented the approval letter from the University's Department of Social Work Ethics Committee to the participants to confirm that she was granted permission to conduct the study at Mavalani. The researcher explained the process of informed consent to the participants before they signed the necessary document (Addendum C). She further emphasised that participation was voluntarily and that the prospective participants had the option to participate or not in the research, and to withdraw from

the research process at any time. During the first face-to-face contact making with the prospective participants, they were provided with the opportunity to ask any questions to gain clarity about any issues related to the study and the necessary answers were provided to them. After the researcher ensured that participants understood the nature of the study, its procedures and potential benefits and risks (Addendum B), she commenced with securing an appointment for the interviews to be conducted.

3.8.2 Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality in research, according to Babbie (2016:65) entails that only the researcher should know the identity of the participants and needs further to ensure that participants' information is not identifiable or linked to individual participants involved in the study. Confidentiality also includes the controlling and protecting of the access to the data obtained through the interviews (Delpont & Roestenburg 2011:119). In this study, the researcher ensured that confidentiality of the participants was maintained, by allocating codes to the data collected and pseudonyms to the participants that contributed the information. No identifying information was disclosed about the participants. To maintain confidentiality, the researcher keeps all the information obtained safe in a lockable cabinet in her home, where no one will be able to access it. After five years of safe keeping like this, the data will be destroyed. The researcher also ensured that all the information provided by participants could not be linked to them in any way by substituting real names with codes and pseudonyms before she submitted the transcripts to the independent coder.

3.8.3 Beneficence

It is not allowed in social research to physically cause any form of injury or harm to participants even though they have volunteered themselves to be part of the study (Babbie & Mouton 2014:22). Strydom (2011a:115) asserted that it is not as easy to determine emotional harm experienced by participants, as it is to identify physical harm they might have experienced, but due to the negative consequences of any form of harm to participants, it is the responsibility of the researcher to protect participants from any form of harm.

The researcher ensured that she protected participants from any harm by giving them the opportunity to decide to what extent they were willing to share their widowhood experiences, challenges and coping strategies. Participants were also given the opportunity to avoid starting the interviews with questions they felt uncomfortable with. To ensure that participants were not exposed to emotional distress, participants were asked during the interviews how they felt, so that the researcher could refer them to the social worker who was on stand-by to assist them by providing support through debriefing sessions after the study (Addendum G). All of the participants reported that they did not need any debriefing services.

3.8.4 Privacy

To ensure that the participants' privacy was maintained in this study, the researcher ensured that she kept the participants' data that were not meant to be observed or analysed by other persons to herself. Every individual person "has the right to privacy ... and to decide when, where, to whom and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour will be revealed." (Strydom 2011a:119). The researcher ensured that participants' privacy was respected, and no information identifiable to any participant, was disclosed to or shared with a third party.

According to Bryman and Bell (2011:127) maintaining privacy also includes that participants have the right to refuse responding to certain information unwillingly during the interviewing process. The researcher achieved this by ensuring that participating in the study was voluntary and that no participant was forced to respond to the questions posed to them during the interviews. The researcher was flexible during the interviews by allowing participants to select the questions they wanted to answer first. Brink et al (2018:30) contend that participants have the right to determine to which extent they are prepared to share their private information, such as their opinions, behaviour or beliefs. The researcher ensured that all interviews were private and confidential when conducted at participants' homes except in the cases of three participants who felt that they would not have privacy in their home. The researcher

made prior arrangements for them to secure a venue where interviews were conducted in privacy.

3.8.5 Anonymity

Anonymity can be described as refraining from exposing participants' identity and their privacy (Strydom 2011a:120). Bless et al (2013:33) asserted that anonymity should be applied throughout the research process from the beginning of the study until the publication of the research report. For the purpose of this research, the researcher ensured that all information obtained cannot be linked to a specific participant's response. Participants' names were replaced by pseudonyms on all recorded data to ensure that no data could be linked to any individual participant's responses or matched with any participant's name and identity.

3.8.6 Debriefing

In this study, the researcher organised the availability of a social worker to conduct debriefing sessions with participants after the interviews if necessary. The researcher adhered to the process of debriefing highlighted by Fouché & Delport (2011:122) as follows:

- After the interviews, the researcher gave participants an opportunity to evaluate the extent of their emotional involvement in the study to give support and refer them if needed, for debriefing sessions to the social worker with whom arrangements were made to assist with debriefing sessions if required. To ensure that any harmful effect on participants as a result of the study was being dealt with, a letter requesting debriefing services and confirmation to offer such services is attached (Addendum G). It turned out that none of the participants were in need of the debriefing services. .
- The researcher was willing to correct any misunderstanding that emerged during and as a result of the interviews between her and the participants, by giving the participants opportunity to raise questions and obtain clarity anytime they felt to. All questions were answered and clarified by the researcher.

- Although no participants were in need of debriefing, cognisance was taken that after conclusion of the interviews debriefing should be done with care, especially where participants benefited in some of the research aspects.

3.8.7 Management of information

The researcher ensured that the process of data collection was carried out in a proper and ethical way. She explained to the participants that all the interview notes, digital recordings and transcripts would be strictly confidential, participant's names and details would not be revealed, and that it was substituted with codes and pseudonyms. The researcher also explained to the participants that the recordings and the interview notes might be submitted to the researcher's supervisor for the purpose of guiding the researcher in conducting the research, and that codes and pseudonyms would be used to protect their anonymity and confidentiality. In managing the data collected from the participants, the researcher ensured that all hard copy recordings of the notes and transcripts of interviews were kept in a secure and lockable place at her home. Access to collected data stored on the researcher's computer is protected and secured by the use of a password to prevent unauthorised access. Joshi and Krag (2010:743) emphasised the importance of handling data with care, especially data that concern human participants. Upon the approval of the research, the researcher will safely keep the recordings and transcripts for the prescribed period of five years according to the University's research regulations (UNISA 2016:17), before it will be destroyed.

3.9 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The following are limitations inherent in this study:

Non-generalisation of the findings: In view of the fact that qualitative research is inherently ungeneralisable (Delpont, Fouché & Schurink, 2011:322). The study was conducted from a qualitative approach, it is acknowledged that the participants interviewed was a small sample rather than large sample, therefore their views and perceptions did not represent all the views of widows residing in Mavalani village,

Mopani District in Limpopo province. The limitation is that the findings cannot be generalised to other populations in a broader context.

Limitations in relation to the demographic profile of the participants: The demographic profile of the participants revealed that all participants were all black females, their responses might have been biased in regard with sharing similar features such as race and geographical area, and however the researcher ensured that she asked questions and probes to obtain the rich data without any bias. It must be highlighted as a limitation.

3.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

In this chapter, the researcher presented the application of the research methodology that was followed in conducting the study. The research approach chosen for the study was qualitative approach which was the best approach for this study to explore and described the women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding to their widowhood. The phenomenological research design with the explorative, descriptive and contextual strategy of inquiry was implemented. The sample of 13 women from Limpopo province, Mopani district in Mavalani village was selected through snowball and purposive sampling. Semi-structured interviews assisted with an interview guide were used to collect data from the women. The researcher further presented how the process of data verification was done as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (in Loh, 2013) and the required research ethics were considered throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 3 explained the research methodology and methods used and applied in conducting the study. In this chapter, the data obtained from widows in Mavalani in the Mopani district of Limpopo province regarding their experiences, challenges and coping strategies as widows, are presented as the research findings of the study.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews assisted with an interview guide with open ended questions, were utilised to collect data from the participants to explore and described the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood among women living in Mavalani village in the Mopani district. The discussion starts by providing a biographical information profile of the participants. This is followed by the presentation of the themes and sub-themes relating to the topic of investigation identified when analysing the data.

The data obtained were analysed by following the classic eight steps for qualitative data analysis as proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:196). Data were coded and analysed by the independent coder and the researcher. In processing and analysing the data, the following five themes emerged whilst sorting out the raw data collected from the interviewees:

- The participants' specific experiences of the phenomenon of widowhood.
- The participants' descriptions of the challenges associated with widowhood.
- The participants' coping strategies adopted in coping with the challenges of widowhood.
- The participants' advice to other widows on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood.
- The participants' suggestions regarding social work practice to women in widowhood.

A discussion of these themes and sub-themes is provided based on verbal extracts from the interviews with a literature control to support or confirm and/or contrast the

themes and the storylines. Each participant has been assigned an identifying pseudonym (Nieuwenhuis 2016a:115) to insure the privacy and anonymity of participants (Strydom 2011a:120). When referring to individual participants, these pseudonyms are used.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS' BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILES

This section presents the biographical information of participants interviewed (recorded according to their pseudonyms). The summary of the demographic data is presented in Table 4.1 below. The information obtained in the study came from participants who all lived in Mavalani village, hence they provided rich information for analysing the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women after the deaths of their husbands, in the district of Mopani district in Limpopo province. All the participants were Tsonga speaking. Mavalani is a rural village in the Mopani district, of the greater Giyani municipality and the residents are mostly Tsonga speaking people with a rich Tsonga cultural background (Maluleke 2013:44). The biographical profile of the participants reflects the participants' age, number in years of widowhood, the highest educational qualification, employment status and number of children.

Table 4.1 Participants' biographical profile

	Pseudonym	Age	Number of children	Highest Qualification	Employment status	Years a widow
1.	Cate	52	6	Grade 4	Employed (Domestic worker)	31 years
2.	Daphney	44	1	Grade 10	Employed (Domestic worker)	19 years
3.	Khensani	52	4	Grade 7	Unemployed (EPW volunteer)	5 years
4.	Lizzy	65	5	Diploma in teaching	Retired	8 years
5.	Lucia	59	4	Grade 11	Unemployed	15 years
6.	Lucy	55	3	B A in nursing	Employed (Nurse)	3 years
7.	Lydia	57	2	Grade 12	Employed (Lay counsellor)	3 years
8.	Pertunia	64	3	B A Teaching	Retired	21 years

9.	Rose	48	4	Grade 12	Unemployed	6 years
10.	Salvah	56	7	Grade 3	Unemployed	8 years
11.	Tintswalo	49	2	Grade 12	Employed (Teller at shop)	21 years
12.	Tinyiko	57	1	BA Nursing	Employed (Nurse)	10 years
13.	Velly	33	2	Grade 11	Unemployed	6 years

4.2.1 Ages of the widows

The participants were aged from 33 to 65 years. Four participants were between 33 and 50 years, seven were between 50 and 60 years, and two were older than 60, aged 64 and 65 years. Across the African continent is 3% of all women aged 15-49 years widows at any point of time and more than 5% of ever-widowed women are under the age of 49 (Djuikom and Van de Walle 2018:6). Most of the participants in this study were between the 50 and 60 years of age when becoming widows.

The ages of the widows informed the researcher of their psychological stage of development by the period they experienced widowhood. According to Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages, the sixth stage (19-40 years) is called the phase of intimacy versus isolation (Muller & Stroud 2014:11). During this stage, adults begin to share themselves more intimately with others, exploring relationships leading towards longer-term commitments with a partner. Intimacy is defined as the developmental achievement that includes commitment to a relationship (Knight 2017:1053). Once a person failed to acquire this objective, it may lead to isolation and alienation (Corey & Corey 2015:68). When this developmental stage is ended by the death of a partner, it may cause fear for further intimate relationships and results in loneliness and isolation. One participant in this research study was between the age of 19 and 40 when she became a widow, therefore in the developmental stage according to Erickson of intimacy versus isolation (Muller & Stroud 2014:11).

Twelve participants were between the ages of 40 and 65 when they became widows. This developmental stage (40-65 years old) is called the middle adulthood stage

(generativity versus stagnation) according to the stages of psychosocial developmental stages of Erik Erikson (McLeod 2013:4). During this phase persons start to establish their careers and to focus on settling down into their relationships, they start their own families (McLeod 2013:4). According to Crain (2014:301) middle adult development is defined as the steps by which people broaden and deepen their capacities to love and to care for others. In this stage people see a need to go beyond their self and family by reaching and giving back to the society. In the middle adult stage persons establish themselves in certain roles and functions in their households as well as in the larger community. Failure to achieve these objectives may cause persons to become stagnant and feel worthless (McLeod 2013:4). In relation to this study, most of the participants had settled down into their relationships and started their own families, but death came and disrupted this achievement. As a result, (as discussed further in the themes presented), participants felt they have lost their status, their securities and roles they have fulfilled in their households and communities, struggling to accept the changes and to look for new opportunities or to build new relationships. This middle adult developmental stage of Erikson describes as the generativity versus stagnation stage, indicate that when a life challenge such as death occurs, the persons in this developmental stage may feel frustrated and unable to raise their family successfully and succeed in their careers.

Applying the strength-based perspective, one of the theoretical perspectives underlining this study, assisted the researcher in viewing the study participants from a perspective of being resourceful and resilient persons in the face of their challenges, able to overcome the challenges of the applicable developmental stages they are experiencing, as described by Erickson's.

4.2.2 Employment status of the widows

As indicated in Table 4.1 above, the biographical data also indicate the employment status of the participants. It is important to distinguish formal and informal employment.

“Informal employment is work that is conducted beyond the boundaries of effective regulation. People engaged in informal work lack access to the basic regulatory protections, and benefits extended to those in formal employment such as, paid sick leave, holidays and basic wages entitlements” (Coles, Macdonald, & Delaney 2018: 93) . Formal employment are highly formalised jobs with benefits such as longterm contracts, paid leave and pensions (Gutierrez,Kumar & Mahmud 2019:2). Three participants had informal jobs, two participants of these three widows were domestic workers and one a teller at a shop. Three participants had formal jobs, two participants being professional nurses and one a lay counsellor at a clinic. In South Africa wages and income remains unequal between the formal and informal jobs, with poverty and inequality assuming racial, gender and age dimensions (Moodley &Cohen 2012:9).

Five participates were unemployed and two participants were on retirement. The unemployment rate in South Africa is continuously higher amongst women than men (approximately 34.3% for women), while the unemployment rate for men are 31% (Statistics South Africa 2020). According to Msimanga (2013:20), in the past African women were prohibited to participate in the labour market or to seek employment because of the traditional barriers. Once a woman is married, she was expected to focus on her marriage, such as taking care of children and being responsible of the household duties, therefore it was not possible for the women to be economical active (Msimanga 2013:20). This sentiment is similarly described by Idialu (2013:6),that historically in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asian countries, education was meant for men, this disadvantaged women to have access to formal employment since employment is based on the obtainment of education and skills.

Djuikom and Van De Walle (2018:26) further stated that: “Across African countries, ever-widowed women are found to live in wealth-poorer households on average”. Widows who are sole bread winners for their families are more vulnerable to economic deprivation and poverty. The study findings of widows’ challenges in South Africa by Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013:10) revealed that the socio-economic status of widows deteriorates considerably after the death of their spouses and during the period of mourning, leading to poverty and deprivation. Raniga and Ngcobo (2014:517) added that “because of the historical, institutional and systemic challenges

of patriarchy, women lack the skills and education to enter the formal economy while those who are in the formal economy, are less likely to achieve work satisfaction and self-growth because of institutionalised, patriarchal views, attitudes and tendencies that discriminate against them.” The findings of this study support the challenges these participants experienced being unemployed and being fulltime mother and wife, being part of the informal economy, resulting in low income generation, with only three participants having being part of the formal economy.

4.2.3 Number of children of the widows

With reference to the number of children participants had, all 13 participants had children, with the number of children varying from one to seven per participant. The majority of participants still had dependents or children who still needed to be taken care of. This was one of the burdens they faced since the death of their husbands. However, two participants who were pensioners pointed out that their children were adults, and they were able to support themselves. The findings also revealed that participants who were unemployed or had informal jobs, had more children compared to the participants who had formal jobs. Two participants who were domestic workers had four to six children, while three participants who were unemployed had two to seven children. Islam, Mondal, Khatun, Rahman, Islam, Mostofa and Hoque (2016:92), conducted a study to determine the factors that influence contraceptive use among women who were employed and those who are unemployed. The study findings revealed that the use of contraceptives was higher among the women who were employed compared to those who were unemployed (Islam et al 2016:92). The above authors also revealed that age, education, religion and lack of education about contraceptive among the unemployed women contributed to the number of children they had (Islam et al 2016:92).

4.2.4 Educational levels of the widows

Regarding their highest educational qualifications, from the 13 participants in this research, three completed matric, two retired participants had a diploma and a degree,

two other participants had degrees and six participants dropped out of school by not completing their grade 12.

According to Chitali and Anwar (2013:149) widows with a low educational level struggle to cope with their everyday stressors which may have also negative effects on their health. The study findings of Sekgobela, Peu and Van der Wath (2018:2) postulated that widows with low educational levels experience a high rate of chronic conditions and health problems, for example, cardiovascular problems and chronic pain, which influence, their employment opportunities. South Africa a developing country, is characterised by high unemployment and inequality, both of which affect widows negatively, especially if they also have low educational levels (Adonis 2020:7). Because of low educational levels widows many times only find low-income jobs and the opportunities to gain a productive livelihood remains low (Adonis 2020:8).

A study done by Lloyd-Sherlock, Corso and Minicuci (2015:1781) regarding widowhood, socio-economic status, health and wellbeing in low and middle-income countries, including South Africa, indicated that widowhood was associated significantly with no educational levels. According to Chitali and Anwar (2013:149) better adjustment into widowhood is associated with the age of a person, educational level and economic resources that are available. The educational level of the widows therefore had an influence on their adjustment abilities, and in this study 46,15% of the participants had low educational qualifications.

In a study about the human treatment of widows in African communities, Idialu (2013:7) indicated that the majority of women who performed the dehumanising widowhood rites were not educated, had a low-income and mostly were from rural communities. These women were unable to exercise their rights over their parents-in-law and they lacked courage and self-confidence. This is different with women who are educated and sophisticated. Dube's (2016:155) study findings regarding widowhood in the Binga district of Zimbabwe, assert that education has an important influence on how widows cope with grief and loss, lack of formal education has significant impact on positive coping mechanism. Education is seen as one of the fundamental means to empower women with skills, knowledge and self-confidence

that will enable them to fully participate in the development needed for the survival and growth of the society (George & Onyekachi 2013:2-3). Education improves widows parenting skills, and problems solving strategies (Chitrali & Anwar 2013:149).

4.2.5 Years of widowhood

When interviewed, one participant had been a widow for 31 years, two had been widowed for 21 years, seven between 6 to 20 years and three between 3 to 5 years.

Djuikom and Van De Walle (2018:2) stated that in Sub-Saharan Africa “at the age 65, there are as many widows as there are married women; by age 80, 80% of women are living in widowhood”. Therefore, it is clear that with the increase of the ageing population, there are significantly more widows in the African population than widowers.

A study done by Lloyd-Sherlock et al (2015:1781) regarding widowhood, socio-economic status, health and wellbeing in low and middle-income countries, including South Africa, indicated that “the majority of older women had been widowed since the age of 50 or more, but there are significant variations in the rate of widowhood at younger ages and a significant proportion had been widowed under the age of 40.” These findings contrast with the current study findings, in which nine participants (the majority) have been widowed from the age of 40 and four had been widowed when under the age of 30. Various studies indicated that the majority of widows are inclined not to marry again which may also have economic implications for these families (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Motopi 2013:3).

The following section presents the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews

4.3 PRESENTATION OF THEMES AND LITERATURE CONTROL

Themes in research are logically and meaningful patterns found in the data set significant to the research questions (Guest 2012:12). Themes may have sub-themes as subdivisions to get a comprehensive view of participant's data (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen & Snelgrove 2016:101), which may be further categorised if necessary. Coding of the data obtained or the process whereby the researcher transforms raw data into a standardized form (Babbie 2016:328), is an important structural operation in qualitative research. Coding allows the collected data to be assembled, categorised and thematically sorted in order to provide an organised construction of the meaning of the information obtained (Williams & Moser 2019:45).

It is pointed out that researchers should provide the reader with raw data from participants' voices by using many quotes from the participants (Drisko 2005:592). Data pertaining to the research findings, which are expressed as themes are to be accentuated by the storylines or verbatim quotations from the transcribed interviews (Creswell & Creswell 2018:194). In this research the research findings emerged from answers to the following topic-related questions discussed with participants during the semi-structured interviews that were digitally recorded by the researcher after she was granted permission by the participants:

- Please explain your experiences of being a widow.
- What is the day to day challenges you encounter due to the death of your husband?
- Describe the nature of your family relationships before and after the death of your husband.
- What kind of support did you receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?
- What kind of support did you not receive from people such as relatives and friends that would have assisted you more effectively?
- What are the coping strategies that you use to deal with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband?
- What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges for widows and to assist other widows?
- How can social workers assist women in widowhood?

- How do you feel about the traditional rituals that widows are expected to perform after the death of your husband?

The themes divided into sub-themes, and categories that emerged from the information provided by the widowed women are listed in Table 4.2. A discussion of the themes, sub-themes and categories is presented, using extracts taken from the participants' storylines to illustrate them, with the necessary literature control.

Table 4.2 Themes, subthemes and categories developed from the data analysis

Themes	Sub-themes	Categories
Theme1: Participants' experiences of widowhood	Sub-theme 1: Participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The loss of social status as a married woman • Financial losses because of widowhood
	Sub-theme 2: Participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes experienced in the relationship with the family-in-laws • Changes experienced regarding friendships in the community
	Sub-theme 3: Participants' experiences of social support structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' experiences of social support from the family • Participants' experiences of social support from significant others • Participants' experiences of social support from religious groups
	Sub-theme 4: Participants' experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences of participants adhering to traditional rituals. • Experiences of participants for non-adherence to traditional rituals

Theme 2: Participants' accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood	Sub-theme 1: Participants' accounts of challenges regarding the community perceptions of widowhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges to adopt a disciplinary role in the relationships with the children • Challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships
	Sub-theme 2: Participants' accounts of challenges regarding financial independence	
	Sub-theme 3: Participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships	
Theme 3: Participants' accounts of their coping strategies to deal with the challenges of widowhood	Sub-theme 1: Participants' accounts on religion and spirituality as coping strategies	
	Sub-theme 2: Participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy	
	Sub-theme 3: Participants' accounts of support from families and others as a coping strategy. Subtheme 4: Participants' accounts on self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied as a coping strategy	
Theme 4: Participants' accounts of advice to other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood	Sub-theme 1: Participants' accounts of advices to other widows about the acceptance of their loss	

	Sub-theme 2: Participants' accounts regarding advice about managing relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with other male partners • Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with their children
Theme 5: Participants' suggestions regarding social work practice regarding widowhood	Sub-theme 1: Participants' suggestions on counselling and support to widows	
	Sub-theme 2: Participants' suggestions for community education about the rights of women	
	Sub-theme 3: Participants' suggestions regarding financial aid to support to widows.	

In the following sections, themes, sub-themes and categories are introduced and presented. Themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from data analysis are substantiated by the storylines, compared and contrasted with existing literature and research that other researchers have documented, by means of a literature control.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Participants' experiences of widowhood

The theme "participants' experiences of widowhood" originated from the responses provided by participants in relation to the following question posed to them: *"Please explain your experiences of being a widow"*. The participants narrated various experiences of widowhood and this theme was further analysed and gave rise to the following five sub-themes with different categories. The sub-themes discussed are the participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood, participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood, participants' experiences of social

support structures and participants' experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals.

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood.

When the participants were asked to talk about their experiences after the death of their husbands, the participants expressed their experiences of pain, loss and grief and being separated from their loved one, as well as other losses like their status as a married woman and financial losses. Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015:71) postulated the following regarding losing a spouse through death: "However, the death of a spouse may be the most extreme of life's crisis as this severs most of the deepest emotional bonds established in a lifetime." The author further postulated that many African cultures and societies have the belief that a "husband constitutes honour and dignity to womanhood" (Chukwu-Okoronkwo 2015:72). Therefore, the widows experienced various losses as discussed in the categories that follow.

a. The loss of social status as a married woman

The study findings indicated that the death of the husband brought a loss of marital status in the lives of widows. According to Lowe and McClement (2010:127) and Somhlaba and Wait (2009:197), the death of a spouse is a painful and traumatic life event that brings different challenges to the surviving spouse, one of which is the loss of the social status of being married. Durojyae (2013:176) postulated that due to cultural and religious beliefs, women are assigned different roles in society which include the belief that being married is a status symbol, opposed to being widowed. The loss experienced by widows includes the loss of their marital status as married women. In many African cultures these woman's new identity of widowhood, is perceived as being on a lower status level than being married.

Some of the participants narrated that it was very difficult at the beginning to accept and to live with their new lower status of being a widow. According to Umeh and Jane-Frances (2015:307), marriage is experienced as an accomplishment by women. Therefore, when widowed, the widow may experience that she also lost her status in

the community, which could negatively influence her self-esteem and may create feelings of depression and stress. Lowe and McClement's (2010:127) research findings regarding the experiences of Canadian widows, revealed that widows struggle with the transition from being part of a couple to be a single person after the death of their husbands. This experiences of the challenges of widows with the transition of their status and identity as widows, are not only experienced in Western cultures as indicated by Lowe and McClement (2010:127) but are like the experiences of the current study's participants' in an African culture. The study findings of Dube (2019:98) regarding the experiences of widows in the Binga district of Zimbabwe stated the following: "Immediately a woman becomes a widow, unbalanced power between other community members and the widow exists."

In the present study **Rose, Pertunia, Velly** and **Lucy** pointed out the experiences of the loss of their status as married woman because of their widowhood, as follows:

Rose described her loss as painful and difficult to accept, especially her new title or status as a widow: *"It is not good to be a widow especially at the younger age like me. The process of accepting the new status as the widow was difficult, but I have to accept it because I don't have a choice"*.

Pertunia stated that *"It was very difficult to wake up every day and realised that I am no longer Mrs Baloyi, but I am a widow. To know that my status as Mrs has changed in the community it is not easy, but this is how life it is"*.

"To be a widow in our community it looks like a curse to other people because they will start to undermine you because you don't have a husband." (**Velly**)

"It is very difficult to be a widow in the village because you will feel that all the people you were related to before the passing of your husband, they start to distance themselves from you because they think you killed him." (**Lucy**)

The findings of this study concur with Radzilani's (2010:130) findings which investigated the discourses of traditional African and African Christian women

regarding bereavement in a Tshivenda speaking community, that some widows find it difficult to continue with life without their husbands, and to deal with the change of their status or position in the society from being a wife to be a widow. This change of the widows' status to widowhood and communities' traditional negative perceptions regarding widowhood, cause further emotional pain, adding to the grieving process. Widows are faced with the loss of their long, established identity as a wife, and they are facing new roles and new responsibilities together with certain negative labels and connotations due to the perceptions and attitudes of the community towards widowhood (Soulsby & Bennett 2017:6; DuBois & Miley 2014:137). The injustices that communities may impose on widows are defined as "prejudicial attitudes directed against groups that society identifies as less capable, less productive and less normal" (DuBois & Miley 2014:137). The community's attitudes and perceptions of widowhood are imbedded in long historical and cultural traditions, perceiving widowhood as of a lesser status than that of a married woman and including certain cultural beliefs that widows may have been part of the reasons for the death of their husband. These traditional beliefs cause widows to experience discrimination and oppression, which add feelings of disempowerment and alienation in their communities to their grief (Dube 2019:97-98). Dube (2019:97) rightfully noted that "*Widowism* as a social injustice can be explained as a practice which dehumanises, devalues, discriminates and views widows with suspicion resulting in exclusion in socio-economically beneficial activities and exposing them to socially harmful practices."

From a social justice theoretical framework, the social worker assisting the widow needs to empower her to understand and recognise that what she is experiencing being a widow, is not what she deserves (Dube 2019:98). Culture is acknowledged as not an absolute construct and therefore it is possible to be modified and may the cultural practices of a community be questioned when it disregards human dignity and rights (Baloyi 2017:3). The strength-based perspective also called the empowerment approach it is crucial in intervening to the psychosocial problems of widows (Dube 2019:101).

The strength-based perspective and the social justice theoretical framework compliments each other by supporting the principles of empowerment, believing in

human potential and human dignity, respecting humans, the belief that people are part of a social system where they feel they belong, and collaboration with the client to be able to participate in decision-making, regarding their experiences and challenges of widowhood (Hassim & Herbst 2016:212-216; Dube 2019:98-99). The social worker intervening from a strength-based perspective will allow the widow to narrate her life story and her perceptions of widowhood by facilitating further self-discovery questions to describe how she managed to survive these losses, how she adapted to the changes and how she thinks she can overcome these losses (Hassim & Herbst 2016:216-217). Further interventions from a strength-based perspective will focus on “instilling hope and encourage the widow to celebrate survival rather than be a victim of circumstances” (Hassim & Herbst 2016:217). The social worker will also promote the sense of belonging for widows, a concept in the strength-based perspective, by organising support groups for widows to be members and experience a sense of belonging.

With the death of their husbands, the participants also experienced the loss of financial security. Women in history have encountered economically greater challenges than men. Research findings consistently indicated that widows’ financial status deteriorates after the death of the husband (Adonis 2020:23). The financial losses due to widowhood will be discussed in the following category.

b. Financial losses because of widowhood

The study findings indicated that widows experienced a loss of financial support resulting from the death of their husbands. The research findings of Dube (2016:170), regarding widows’ challenges in the Binga district of Zimbabwe, confirm the findings of the present study that many widows are dependent on their husbands for resources and financial support for their children. Cultural and societal expectations of the traditional roles of women being homemakers and child bearers, are still evident in many cultures, therefore, widows can be left with no financial support after the death of their husbands (Duroyaje 2013:176).

Eight of the participants were experiencing financial burdens, because five participants were unemployed, and three participants had informal employment positions and were previously depending on their husbands for financial assistance. Many times, the widows had to learn to adjust financially, without the help from the deceased husbands (Adeyemo 2014:48). The first financial change widows experience is the lack of income previously provided by the deceased husband (Adonis 2020:46). The following excerpts of what **Cate**, **Rose** and **Velly** said underline the storyline of widows experiencing a lack of income because of the death of their spouses:

“He used to give me monthly allowance to buy food and other things for the family and I was used to it.” (Cate)

“The challenge I faced it was to give my lastborn pocket money when he goes to school. It is difficult to see your child going to school without even a cent in his pocket. I wanted my lastborn child to undergo every school trip because I regard school as very important, but I didn’t have money to pay for it.” (Rose)

“The first challenge that I had was financial. Before my husband passed away, he was working for another company for three years. I didn’t receive a lot of money from his work.” (Velly)

Rose also referred to a loss of the provider in the family. Since she is unemployed, she is unable to provide in the basic needs of her children *“I am alone and sometimes I failed to provide everything for my children. When I look at them, I feel pain in my heart because I know that their father if he was still alive he will ensure that they have everything they want.”*

Eight (61,5%) of the participants in the present study were experiencing financial difficulties with the death of their husbands. According to Gunga (2009:173), a husband is considered to be the breadwinner and the protector or helper of the family in many African cultures. The findings of this present study are also consistent with the findings of Holden, Kim & Novak (2010:5) regarding the psychological challenges of widowhood which support the notion that widowhood brings the loss of resources

to the family household. According to Soulsby and Bennett (2017:5), the loss of financial and practical resources causes important changes in widowhood, which imply significant adjustments to be made by widows to reconstruct their everyday lives to ensure survival.

The spouses of the widows may have made financial provision for their wives, but due to claims of the family-in-laws on the inheritance of the deceased and the costs of funding a funeral, widows are frequently left with no economic resources to provide for themselves and their children (Adonis 2020:220). Finalising payments from the deceased's employer may also be time consuming and insufficient to assist the widows financially (Adonis 2020:220). In social work practice the social worker therefore often needs to engage in providing financial advice and education in this regard to assist the widows. Empowerment of widows through facilitating their strengths from a strength-based perspective and involving them in decision making of how to access resources and options available for them to improve their financial status, is an important intervention (Dube 2019:101). From a social justice theoretical framework, the responsibility of the social worker is also to encourage widows to make their own choices regarding their financial wellbeing and not being oppressed and forced into choices they do not really want to adhere to, because of traditional and cultural rituals, attitudes and perceptions of communities and families (Dube 2019:101).

Widows who experienced a decline in income or a lack of finances due to the loss, may also experience more emotional disturbances like anger, depressive symptoms and emotional loneliness (Sekgobela 2018:82). According to Radzilani (2010:127) widows who were financially depended on their husbands before their death, experience increased stress which adds to their experiences of loss and grief.

The following sub-theme describes the participants' experiences of changes in their relationships due to widowhood.

4.3.1.2. Sub-theme 1.2: Participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood

The death of the husband includes changes in relationships with family and community members of the participants. During the period of mourning their husbands, widows have to learn to live without their husbands and at the same time they have to deal with the experiences of changes in their relationships with family members, especially with their parents-in-law (Radzilani 2010:148). Participants pointed out various issues which lead to a change in their relationships with their in-laws, of which the dispute regarding the deceased's property is one of the key issues experienced. Changes are also experienced in relationships with friends in the community because of certain traditional beliefs. These changes in relationships are discussed in the categories that follow.

a. Changes experienced in the relationship with the family-in-law

The participants' experiences of bereavement and mourning were worsened by negative experiences of changes in the relationship they had with their parents-in-law, like property disputes and accusations of killing their spouses.

Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015:73) postulated that in most cultures, the inheritance system which excludes women from inheriting the property of their natal families extends to widows "as they are precluded from inheriting their deceased husband's property, especially landed property." The issues mentioned by participants regarding the disputes over the inheritance of the deceased husbands' property are supported in various research findings in the literature as a common issue which widows encounter with their parents-in-law after the death of their husbands (Adonis 2020:23; Dube 2016:164; Pemunta & Alubafi 2016:3; Magudu & Mohlakoana-Motopi 2013:6). These conflicts in the family contribute to some of the participants being evicted from their homes, especially those participants who were still staying with the parents-in-law. This kind of disputes is often motivated by the parents-in-law who believe they have the authority and the right to be the beneficiaries of the deceased's assets.

Salvah, Rose and **Cate** mentioned the following in this regard:

“As I have indicated that I was admitted at the hospital, the day I was discharged from the hospital, I was told by my family in-law that I am not welcome in their family. I ask myself how they can say I am not welcome to the house that I and my husband have built. It took us many years to complete the house.” (Salvah)

“After the death of my husband, I was told by my mother in law that I should find my own place like other widows rather than to stay with her. I was frustrated because I don’t have parents, my siblings are also struggling.” (Rose)

“I started to experience a lot of challenges when my father in law chased me away in his home in 2000. I asked him where I am going to start finding my own place because I don’t have a good job. The situation became worse until I accept that I am no longer wanted in his family.” (Cate)

The abovementioned excerpts are consistent with the findings of other research studies, relating to widows experiencing disputes over property ownership and sharing of assets after the death of their husbands (Cebekhulu 2015:75; Itsweni 2018:87). Some widows ended up going back to the natal family to avoid conflicts between them and the parents-in-law (Itsweni 2018:88). Some research findings indicated that family disputes can go as far as causing widows to suffer economic and physical abuse when they refuse to be evicted from their husbands’ houses and properties by their in-laws after the death of their husbands (Dube 2016 :10-11).

Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015:73) postulated the following: “One of the horrendous nightmares that may confront a woman at the death of her husband in various African cultures is the oftentimes scandalous accusation from the deceased husband’s relations of having a hand in the man’s death.” Amongst the Tsonga speaking people, women are still suspected of killing their husbands, and this contributes to gender inequality (Baloyi 2017:197). The suspicion of the participants having killed their husbands, resulted in the Tsonga widows to be disowned by their husband’s family and ending up losing their property (Baloyi 2017:197). Widows often bore the accusations of being responsible for the death of their husbands. These accusations

develop conflicts between the widows and their husband's family, these conflicts steal widow's moment to mourn their loss.

Participants **Lucy, Khensani, Lydia, Petunia** and **Tinyiko**, responded as follows in this regard:

"To my surprise, after the death of my husband, she (mother-in-law) spread the rumours that I killed my husband." (**Lucy**)

"They told my biological brothers that they want to know how he died. I know that I did not kill my husband. He had a heart attack. When they said that I killed my husband it is emotional blackmail because they are trying to take everything from me."

My family in-law went to my husband's work to claim his money." (**Khensani**)

"I was sitting in my bedroom, but I could hear some voices of my family in-law saying that she must also die because she killed him." (**Lydia**)

"Things started to change after the death of my husband. I no longer have a relationship with my family in-law. The cause of the conflict between me and my family in-law was that they suspected me of killing my husband." (**Petunia**)

"I think us black people we have a problem, every time a man dies they believe the wife was the cause of his death. Even if a man was killed in an accident or by a gun shot, still the wife will be the suspect." (**Tinyiko**)

The research findings of Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013:6) determined that in most of the South African African communities, women are accused of killing their husbands for material possession purposes, and widows will end up being abused, mistreated, isolated and evicted out of the houses immediately after the funeral. This act of grabbing property is done by the widow's in-laws and their relatives. Most of the time this harmful behaviour will leave the widow and her children without a home. Baloyi cited in Baloyi (2018:202), argued that these suspicions about the widows are

caused by jealous family members during the mourning period, which often influence the decision of how they will distribute the possessions and wealth of the deceased. From a social justice theoretical framework, a social worker may intervene in this regard by assisting widows to understand the consequences of social injustice acts towards them and strengthen their understanding of their abilities and skills from a strength-based perspective to cope with such injustice actions. Families and communities can be further empowered and educated through community interventions regarding the principles of human rights, dignity and respect for widows (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:94).

Dube (2016:79) asserted that social workers are assigned to avert or prevent human suffering or address the social injustice among widows. Some of the participants in this study were treated unfairly and experienced discrimination based on their status as widows. Social workers assisting widows should empower them from a social justice framework, with the necessary knowledge about their rights and assist them where necessary in accessing the necessary legal structures to support them where the grabbing of property is involved (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:94).

The participants reported that after the death of their husbands, the good relationship they had with the in-laws has deteriorated, partly because of the suspicions of them killing their husbands and the belief that the husbands' property belongs to them. Because of the absence of the husband it seems that the relationships changed regarding interactions and care for one another. The relationships they built with their in-laws while their husbands were still alive, have changed to the extent that the participants reported that their in-laws are no longer talking to them or visiting them.

Lucia, Rose, Daphney and **Salvah** described their changes in relationships with their in-laws as follows:

Lucia mentioned the change in the relationship with her in-laws. She no longer has the same relationship she had with her family in law while her husband was still alive. The good relationship she had with her family in-law changed. She said: "*We had a*

good relationship before the death of my husband but after the funeral of my husband, all of my family in law stopped coming to my home.”

Like **Lucia, Rose** described change in relationship with her in-laws. *“My in-laws are people who do not visit each other, and everyone is busy with his or her life. Since the passing of my husband they never came to my house, their last visit was after the funeral.”*

Similar experiences were narrated by **Daphney** *“My family in-law does not have a good relationship with me. Since the death of my husband they never talked to me.”*

Salvah articulated the following: *“We had a good relationship before the death of my husband but after the funeral of my husband, all of my family in-law stopped coming to my home. Every family member was told not speak to me and we are neighbours.”*

The study findings of Adonis (2020:54) regarding the economic and psychosocial experiences of widowed mothers stated that widows often lose touch with their in-laws after the death of their spouses. The study findings of Dube (2019:98) regarding widows' experiences in Zimbabwe in the Binga district, stated that “women’s social networks and friends dwindle as soon as the status of widowhood sets in their lives.”

Various reasons for this may include the stigma attached to the perceptions of family and communities regarding widowhood as described in sub-themes 1.1 and 1.2 regarding the participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood and changes experienced in maintaining their relationships, especially with their in-laws.

Segev, Regev, Hochman, Zafrany, Sherfi and Elkayam (2020:12), conducted a study to examine the perception of the relationship between the widows and mothers-in-law after the death of a husband or a son. The findings revealed that a history of a good relationship between mothers-in-law and widows was one of the factors that supports changes or blocks future relationships. The way widows and their mothers-in-law in the past accepted each other, contributed to how they relate with each other after the loss of the widow's partner and the mothers-in-law's son (Segev et al 2020:12).

The present study findings indicated the opposite of the findings of Segev et al (2020:12) that most of the participants were disappointed in the reactions of their in-laws towards them, and the deterioration of the relationship, because they thought they had positive relationships with them before their husbands' death but were proven wrong. The findings of Dube (2016:166) regarding widowhood experiences amongst Zimbabwean women in the Binga district, supported the present study's findings that the relationships between the widows and their in-laws deteriorated after the death of their husbands, regardless of the status of the relationships before the death of the husband.

b. Changes experienced regarding friendships in the community

Loss of friends and people close to the participants, after the passing of their husbands was mentioned by participants as one of the changes they encountered in their everyday life. According to the study findings of Keister and Destro cited in Dube (2016:171) and Radzilani (2010:149) regarding widowhood, widows experience the loss of friends, especially friends who were married, due to perceptions of the community that widows have a lesser status than married women and because they are single, they may pose a threat to their husbands. From the 13 participants in the study, five participants indicated that they have lost their friends and people close to them after the death of their husbands.

Rose, Tinyiko, Salvah, Lizzy and Velly testified as follows to the loss of friendship and people close to them because of their widowhood status that concurs with the literature referred to above:

“My friends that were trusted, started to avoid me and I was left alone. I remember some of them I tried to phone them, but they ignored my calls.” (Rose)

“Another challenge is that the people I used to walk with or some I used to call my friends, they are now far from me. They are no longer close to me after the death of my husband.” (Tinyiko)

“To be a widow is not easy because you have to deal with your personal problems at the same time you have to deal with how community view you as the widow. It is very difficult to be a widow in the village because you will feel that all the people you were related to before the passing of your husband, they start to distance themselves from you because they think you will kill them.” (Salvah)

“My friends who are married, they are no longer my friends because I am afraid to I may cause conflict between them and their husband. Some of the women they don’t even feel for other women, when they see you with her husband talking, she will say she want to take my husband.” (Lizzy)

“I remember I had a friend that I trust to share everything with her. I took her as my blood sister. To my surprise, after the death of my husband, she spread the rumours that I killed my husband so that I can have freedom to date men. The people in this community believed her because it was from the person who was very close to me. I started to distance myself from her and we are no longer friends.” (Velly)

It is evident that the community where the participants are residing in, has certain perceptions and traditional beliefs which influenced friendships when a woman lost her husband. Radzilani (2010:149) commented that widows are considered as threats to those who are married, “contributing to the marginalisation of widows as single women at a time when their need for support from society was increased.” It is pointed out that this discriminating attitude and practices against women need to be addressed in the field of social work (Adonis 2020:21).

The third sub-theme, participants’ experiences of social support structures is presented next.

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1.3: Participants’ experiences of social support structures

The participants expressed the support received from their family and other people in several ways. The support they received differs amongst the participants. Some of the participants received emotional and instrumental support from their families and they

appreciated the support as it assisted them to cope with the mourning process. Social workers operating from the strength-based perspectives should also encourage the family of the widows to use their available resources to support widows to cope with their challenges and experiences of widowhood.

One potential factor that may play a role in the adjustment challenges widows are experiencing “is the extent to which people have strong and supportive social relationships in their lives” (Anusic & Lucas 2014:368). Social support has long been associated with physical and psychological wellbeing and social supportive networks may assist widows in coping with the stressors of widowhood (Anusic & Lucas 2014:368).

The categories dealt with here, are participants’ experiences of support from the family, significant others and religious groups.

a. Participants’ experiences of social support from the family

In this category, 10 (76,9%) participants reported various supportive measures, they received from their biological family members. Participants reported that their biological family members provided financial support to provide in their day-to-day necessities and emotional support by encouraging them not to lose hope because of the loss of their husbands. The biological family members of the participants also assisted them financially after the death of their husbands. The study also finds that participants felt that sharing their problems with biological family members made the family to understand their present circumstances better and gave them the necessary support.

The following excerpts from what **Khensani, Cate, Velly, Rose** and **Salvah** said describe the emotional and financial support given to the participants by their families:

“My younger brother gives me emotional support and he understands my situation. He is the one who I share my problems with.” (Khensani)

“I also have the good relationship with biological family. My sisters are always there for me and they encouraged me not to give up, maybe one day I will be successful.”

(Cate)

“No person gave me anything except my biological family because they have contributed a small amount of money towards the funeral. My in laws did not give me anything to show support. They didn’t support me during my husband’s sickness until his death.” **(Velly)**

“My biological family was also there for me. They supported me and encouraged me to pray and they were available for me at any time to assist me with anything I needed.”

(Rose)

“My biological family was there for me especially my mother. She supported me since day one when I came back from Johannesburg until today. She assists me with money she is the one who bought windows for my house.” **(Salvah)**

The participants’ excerpts indicated that the support they have received from their biological families assisted them emotionally and that it encouraged them to cope with their circumstances. Study findings indicated that widows who received instrumental and emotional support were associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms (Kim & Kim 2016:165). Sekgobela’s (2018:67) study findings postulated further that the spiritual, emotional and physical functioning of widows who experienced support from friends and family members, improved during their adjustment phase to widowhood. The participants appreciated, and valued the emotional, instrumental and spiritual support they received in this regard. These findings are also similar to the findings of Scott, Bergeman, Verney, Longenbaker, Markey and Bisconti (2007:9), who stated that widows who received emotional support and instrumental support from different people such as friends, family, neighbours and relatives, viewed the support received as blessed, which also motivated them to provide support to other people in their grieving periods.

Participants reported that some of their family members accepted responsibility to support them and their children by providing food parcels, clothes and other important things that they needed. This implies that family responsibilities previously provided for by the deceased husband, such as buying food and essential things for the family, now shifted to some of the family members. One participant, who returned to her biological family after the death of her husband, reported that her biological parent supported her financially and procured building materials for her to build a house. According to Itsweni's (2018:92) findings regarding the bereavement experiences of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province, the widows who received financial and emotional support from their biological family during their mourning period, adjusted better to their circumstances than widows without any support systems. The participants made the following comments about the support they received:

"My biological family was there for me especially my mother. She supported me since day one when I came back from Johannesburg until today and she assists me with money, she is the one who bought windows for my house." (Daphney)

"My son is old, he has his own family and he stay in Johannesburg. He always visits me and buy food for us, he does not give me any problems." (Lucy)

"I also receive support from my family members biological sisters. They always assist me with food and clothes. The clothes that I am wearing now I was given by my elder sister. Sometimes she calls me at her home and gives me blankets for my grandchildren, clothes and other important things. My other sister who was working at Cape Town, she used to buy clothes for my children. I can say she is the one who played an important role in my life to raise my children." (Salvah)

"My biological family supported me by buying us food and other things for my children. They help me a lot by doing the things I was failing to do for my children", they also contributed money to help with funeral arrangement." (Khensani)

Two participants indicated that after the death of their husbands, their in-laws provided support during the funeral. The in-laws ensured that the funeral arrangements were

done and contributed financially towards the arrangements. The participants did not mention any other form of support from the in-laws except arranging the funeral. Therefore, it is evident that most of the participants' in-laws did not support them after their husbands' deaths. A research study conducted by Sekgobela (2018:68) about the experiences of widows in terms of primary health care services provided to them, comprising of 12 widows between the ages of 25 to 65 years residing in the Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality, revealed that widows felt a need for support from the in-laws, and that they further considered themselves fortunate if they received any support from the in-laws. The two participants, who received support from their in-laws had the following to share about the support received from them:

"I will first talk about the relationship I have with my family in law. I can say we had a good relationship. After the death of my husband, during funeral preparation they were good to me and supported me until the burial." (Lizzy).

"My family in law were there for me, they prepared everything for the funeral and everything went well". (Rose)

The study findings indicate that most of the participants experienced their biological families as a support system emotionally and financially, with the relationships of most of the participants with their in-laws as problematic and not sustainable after the death of their husbands. These study findings are also supported by the findings of Dube (2016:166) regarding the experiences of widowhood in the Binga district in Zimbabwe, where most of the widows in the study returned to their families of origin and experienced a breakdown in the relationships with the in-laws. The study findings of Radzilani (2010:148) regarding a discourse analysis of bereavement rituals in a Tshivenda speaking community, stated that when married, women acquired a position in the family and that this position disappeared when the husband died. The conclusion in the presented study, supported by the study findings of Radzilani (2010:148) is that a woman's position in her husband's family is entirely dependent on his presence and her relationship with her husband, and with the death of the husband this relationship gets terminated (Radzilani 2010:148)

b. Participants' experiences of social support from significant others

Participants indicated in this category, that they received different support from other significant others around and close to them. The participants mentioned that they received support from friends and colleagues, neighbours, and church members. Adonis (2020:23) defined social support in the context of widowhood “as the structure of family, friends and the broader community that is available for the widow.” The experience of social support can be seen as a key component of psychological wellbeing and may decrease stress levels and increase emotional stability (Adonis 2020:23).

According to Radzilani (2010:129) widows seek social support from different people around, such as friends, family and community members. Four participants indicated that after the death of their husbands, their neighbours were very helpful to them and their families. They assisted them by sharing and lending them articles that they needed. **Daphney, Cate** and **Lucy** pointed out the support they received from the neighbours as follows:

“My neighbours support me, for example when I don't have enough money to buy a bag of maize meal, they lent me a bucket of maize meal when I buy then I will return their maize meal. I can say my neighbours assist me every time I need something.”
(Daphney)

“My neighbours were very supportive after the death of my husband. I used to borrow a bucket of maize meal and return back when I have bought mine.” **(Cate)**

“My neighbours and young women that are close to my home and they came and cook on Saturday. My colleagues and friends they were very supportive”. **(Lucy)**

The study conducted by Dube (2016:41) regarding the experiences of widows in the Binga district in Zimbabwe, revealed that widows who have good relationships with their neighbours, were usually helped and comforted by their neighbours. According to Dube (2016:41) neighbours may be willing to support widows, but at the same time they may not have the resources to assist them. This study findings also indicated that

neighbours have practised the principle of *ubuntu* which is sharing and showing compassion to the widows through lending them food when they are in need (Magumbate & Nyanguru 2013:85). Ubuntu can be described as caring for each other's wellbeing and also promoting the spirit of mutual support. Ubuntu entails that each person's humanity is ideally conveyed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn. Ubuntu can further be articulated as "people are people through other people" (Magumbate & Nyanguru 2013:85). Ubuntu shares in common the strengths-based perspectives principle as postulated by Saleebey (2013:20), which is about caring and taking care of others.

c. Participants' experiences of social support from religious groups

The participants also experienced receiving support from their religious groups and church members where they were part of a religious community.

The study findings revealed that participants received support from their church members through their prayers, financial contributions and the reading of the Scriptures from the Bible. Spiritual support is a significant element of the wellbeing of widows which helps widows to cope better with their everyday challenges after the death of their husbands (Dube 2016:176). Eight participants in the study valued the spiritual support received because it comforted and helped them to heal from their loss. Excerpts from what participants **Lydia, Rose, Tintswalo, Tinyiko** and **Velly** describe the spiritual support they received as follows:

"I received the support from my church members. They used to come every day to conduct prayers. Some they gave me money as offerings to help with the funeral arrangement. My friends were very supportive." (**Lydia**)

"The support I received is from the church. They prayed for me and encouraged me to be strong." (**Rose**)

"Church members came to pray with us for the whole week until Saturday morning of the funeral." (**Tinyiko**)

“People came to pray for us as the family.” (Velly)

The findings revealed that the participants emphasised the value of the spiritual support received from their church members. The participants’ spiritual wellbeing was promoted through the support from church members and highlighted and confirmed as an important support system in the study findings of Sekgobela (2018:69) regarding widow’s needs in the Tshwane district. Religion and spirituality seemed to be a supportive structure for the participants and can be used as a coping mechanism to assist them through the mourning process (Sekgobela 2018:69). The present study findings are further supported by the findings of Lowe and McClement (2010:138) that widows who received support in their spiritual faith assist them to cope with their grief. One of the principles of the strength-based perspective is that environments have resources which can be utilised (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:28). In this study spiritual support from the church members as part of the community, is considered as one of the resources that community members could utilise in helping widows to cope with their challenges. The findings revealed that participants received emotional and financial support from their friends and colleagues. The support participants received from friends and colleagues were considered helpful to enable the participants to cope with the challenges of the death of their husbands. Seven participants in this study received social support from their friends and colleagues. These findings are confirmed by the findings of Itsweni (2018:95) of the experiences of death and bereavement by Vhavenda women in Limpopo province, who reported that having friends to support them were beneficial to their healing process.

The participants in this research said the following about the support they received from friends and colleagues:

“I received a big support from my friends from the shooting of my husband until to his death. My friends supported me emotional and financial.” (Pertunia)

“My friends and colleagues came to support me through their prayers and money.” (Tinyiko)

“My colleagues also contributed money and some people asked if I need something.”
(Velly)

“I don’t have friends, but I will talk about my colleagues because I regard them as my friends. My colleagues gave me money as their offerings. They supported me emotional and I was able to cope at work because of their support.” (Rose)

One of the strength-based perspective’s key elements a social worker uses in interventions is the construction of powerful words which include the concept of membership or belonging (Hassim & Herbst 2016:209). People’s identities are formed in relation to their sense of belonging and the strength-based perspective accentuates the receiving of dignity, respect and support from other in close relationships as a means of such membership (Hassim & Herbst 2016:219).

From the strength-based perspective the participants’ experiences of widowhood can be reconstructed by not focusing on the problems they experience by being widowed, but by focussing on the strengths that they find to resolve their challenges (van Breda 2019:245). In this context the support the participants have received from family, friends, colleagues and church members, as part of the wider community, mobilised their inner strengths to cope with the experiences of widowhood.

The last sub theme to be identified under the theme participants’ experiences of widowhood, is the participants’ experiences about traditional rituals.

4.3.1.4 Subtheme 1.4: Participants’ experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals

In the Tsonga culture the community and relatives are expected to play particular roles, and the widows are expected to follow certain specific rituals for widows. For example, they are expected to wear black clothes for a period of twelve months. Not adhering to the rituals may be seen as a sign of disrespect towards the family-in-law and the community (Khosa-Nkatini, et al 2020:3). Khosa-Nkatini et al (2020:3) mention that in the Tsonga culture “most of these rituals widows have to undergo are done by

other women to widows.” The implication of the statement is that the rituals are many times performed by other women who may then be perceived as the persons who continue to ensure the continuation of oppressive practices towards widows.

The participants in the study shared their experiences about the traditional rituals that widows have to perform after the death of their husbands. Some of the participants in the study revealed that traditional rituals had to be performed to show respect to the elders of the family and to honor their deceased husbands. According to Baloyi (2017:2) practices among the Tsonga speaking people are tied to cultural and traditional beliefs which are oppressive towards widows. The study findings of Baloyi (2017:2) state that most of the widows undergo such rituals, not because they want to, but to be seen as women who respect and honour their culture and the ancestors of the family. Women perform different widowhood rites, some of which are meant to impress the dead husband, and some are meant to purify or cleanse the women because she was in contact with her late husband before he passed away (Idialu 2012:7).

Some of the participants viewed traditional rituals as not important and perceived them as being oppressive and abusive towards women. From the 13 participants in the study, only five participants adhered to the traditional rituals. The traditional rituals are further discussed under the categories about the experiences of participants who adhered to rituals and the experiences of participants who did not adhere to the rituals.

a. Experiences of participants adhering to traditional rituals

Adhering to the prescribed Tsonga rules, a few (five) participants in the study performed the traditional rituals after the death of their husbands. This included having to sit on a mattress as part of the mourning rites and wearing mourning clothes for a period of 6 or 12 months (Khosa-Nkatini et al 2020:2). In many villages in South Africa, widows are expected to behave in manners that show that they are grieving (Kotzé et al 2012:754).

In the Tsonga culture it is believed that if these rituals are not adhered to, bad luck will follow the family (Khosa-Nkatini et al 2020:2). According to tradition, widows should

not get involved in intimate relationship until they complete their mourning period, are not allowed to be in a public place or attend any event, and always need to bend their fingers and look down when speaking to people. When they complete their mourning period, a cleansing ritual has to be performed to remove the bad luck. Khosa-Nkatini et al (2020:2) describe that the Tsonga people, believe that rituals must be done “so [that] the ancestors can welcome a new member to the ancestral tribe. Failure to do so means the spirit of that person will fly around the house and there will be no peace in the family.” Therefore, many times widows adhere to the prescribed rituals for the mourning period. The ritual practices are also a way of determining if she was not involved in causing her husband’s death (Durojaye 2013:182). The Tsonga people’s traditional and cultural beliefs are closely connected with the widowhood rituals (Baloyi 2017:2).

These study findings also indicated that the older women of the family and family members have an influence on the widows’ decision to follow the traditional rituals after the death of their husbands (Pemunta & Alubafi 2016:12). The findings regarding older women who want to continue with the traditional rituals for the widows, are supported in the literature and are seen as having been psychological conditioning in their cultural beliefs for generations, with people believing that they are acting in the interest of the widow and her family (Dube 2016:36; Pemunta & Alubafi 2016:12). The widows frequently have no strength to oppose the decisions made for them, which are in contravention with their human rights (Khosa-Nkatini et al 2020:8). Khosa-Nkatini (2020:6) concluded that the violation of the widows’ human rights is unfortunately also caused by “women who participate in upholding forms of patriarchy by means of rituals.”

The social justice theory implies that individuals have the right to participate in making decisions which affect their lives, such as concerning the performance of the rituals and they also have the right to appeal such decisions if they feel that they are unfair (Kam 2014:724). **Tinyiko, Lucia, Daphney, Pertunia and Tintswalo’s** excerpts from their interviews, highlight their experiences of adhering to the traditional rituals as follows:

“After the death of my husband, I was told to wear black clothes for a period of 6 months. I did not have a problem with it because I told myself that I have to listen to the elders. They also told me that I should not be in a relationship for a period of 12 month until the cleansing ritual is performed. I stayed for a period of three years not having a relationship.” (Tinyiko)

Lucia mentioned: *“I was told a lot of rules by the elders which I had to follow, such as sitting on the mattress. They also told me that I am not allowed to date any men.”*

Daphney articulated: *“The traditional ritual that I have done was to wear black clothes for a period of twelve months. After 12 month my family organised a cleansing ceremony where I had to remove the black clothes and burned it and start to wear my old clothes again.”*

Pertunia stated: *“Secondly I was told not to talk to people and to laugh because when I laugh it means that I don’t feel the pain of losing a husband. In my understanding people come to talk to you and laugh to make you forget about death but the old people want to see you bend your head or close your eyes. According to them it is a symbol that you are really mourning your husband.”*

Tintswalo wore mourning clothes for a period of 12 months and made sure that she did not attend to any activities until the completion of her mourning period *“They said to me I have to continue wearing those clothes because I was taking care of him wearing it. I wore those clothes for 12 month every day. I used to wash it when I go to sleep in order to wear it in the morning until it was torn apart. I was afraid to visit people’s homes because they will say I have brought them my bad luck (xinyama). I had to wait to be cleansed first before attending people’s events or visiting their families.”*

According to Khosa-Nkatini et al (2020:2) widows in the Tsonga culture are expected to wear black clothes to express their grief about the loss of their husbands. If the widow fails to wear black clothes for the period of twelve months, it will be interpreted that she is disrespecting her late husband, her in-laws and the people in the community

and she may be seen as a 'loose' person or be suspected of having a new relationship with another man. The Commission on Gender Equality (2013:4) found that widows in Limpopo are subjected to a long period of mourning and they must wear mourning clothes for that period, whereas widowers mourn for a short period of time and the wearing mourning clothes are optional to them. It is pointed out that black clothes are a representation of a symbolical dark cloud because death is linked with loss and pain (Baloyi & Makombe-Rabothata 2014:236).

Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013:8) conducted a study regarding the effects of widowhood on women in South Africa and ways of combating the widowhood effects. The study comprised of widows and widowers from black, coloured and Indian communities from all nine provinces in South Africa. The findings of that study revealed that during their mourning period, widows are forced to always be accompanied by someone wherever they go (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Motopi 2013:8). They are also not allowed to participate in community gatherings. The researchers argued that the fact that widows are not allowed to speak in public, means that their democratic freedom is been violated (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Motopi 2013:8). Magudu and Mohlakoana-Matopi (2013:5) further argued that these cultural beliefs to restrict widows during the mourning period, are seen as discrimination. The present study findings are supported by the mentioned research findings discussed regarding the discrimination and isolation of widows due to their status of widowhood (Khosa-Nkatini et al 2020:7; Magudu & Mohlakoana-Matopi 2013: 8).

It is evident in this study that participants were treated differently from other people because of the stigma attached to their widowhood status. Social workers should empower widows to be able to make their own decisions and to refuse the practices of injustice which are contributing to the discrimination and oppression of widows. This is borne out by the fact that one of the goals of social justice is to ensure that people reach their potential and to remove oppressive environmental barriers (Lewis, Ratts, Paladino & Toporek 2011:7).

b. Experiences of participants for non-adherence to traditional rituals

Most of the participants (eight) did not follow the traditional rituals and indicated various reasons for not adhering to them. Some of the participants mentioned that they did not believe in the traditional rituals, and some participants were of opinion that rituals were a waste of time, without any benefits. The traditional rituals were perceived as a way to increase stress and depression in the lives of widows, while some of the participants are of opinion that it is a form of abuse. **Tinyiko, Lucy, Salvah. Lydia, Velly** and **Mamayila** reported the following reasons for not following the rituals:

“My family in-law had a problem because I did not allow the traditional healer into my bedroom to perform the ritual. It made me realise that to be a widow it is difficult because people expect you as widow to do what they tell you to do and if you refused, it causes unnecessary conflict in the family”.(**Tinyiko**)

“I didn’t perform the ritual after the death of my husband. In my understanding the traditional rituals are not helpful. They increase the stress and depression of the widow. Some of the depressing rituals they will tell you that you don’t have to sit on a chair, you must sit on the floor.” (**Lucy**)

“I told them I am not going to do it because I am not going to benefit anything out of it.” (**Salvah**)

“I don’t believe in traditional rituals. The traditional rituals were supposed to help widows to accept the death of their husband, but they are meant to abuse women.” (**Lydia**)

“The traditional rituals I don’t see any important things they bring to the life of the widow rather than stress and to abuse them.” (**Velly**)

“Some of the community members felt pity for me but some they laugh. In our community if a widow who is very active or talkative person, they will say she behave like this because she didn’t go to the river for cleansing ritual. This means that they undermine you because you did not perform the traditional ritual after the death of your

husband. The community expect a widow to be a very shy person or they will give you names that matches your behaviour to humiliate you.” (Mamayila)

The findings revealed that some participants perceived rituals as depressing and promoting oppression and inequality between them and their family members (Makatu 2008:573). From the viewpoint of community members, supporting the traditional rituals as experienced by some of the participants, may lead to exclusion or stigmatisation, or confirming the belief that the widow may be guilty of killing her husband (Baloyi 2017:2). Nyangweso (2017:374) states the following regarding cultural or traditional rituals: “A culture that undermines one’s health, freedom of choice and general welfare is a violation of basic human rights and it should be considered problematic”.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 (see 1.5.2) one of the mandates of social justice for social workers is to make their clients aware of the oppression among clients (widows in this study), which hinders them to identify their abilities to reach their full potential (Lewis et al 2011:7). Furthermore, it is the responsibility of social workers to remove any inequalities by engaging in social and political action, to promote the respect and wellbeing of people (in this case, the widows) (Chu, Tsui & Yin 2009:288).

Several participants in the study mentioned that their religious beliefs, for example Christianity, let them decide not to adhere to the traditional rituals because it is against their spiritual beliefs. Widows who did not follow the traditional rituals may be seen as disrespectful towards the family-in-law and the community and therefore widows feel compelled to adhere to the traditional rituals (Baloyi 2017:2). When widows, like some of the participants, do not follow the traditional rituals because of their religious beliefs like Christianity, the question arises of how to accommodate the conflicting views of Christianity and African ritual practices. Baloyi (2017:2) postulates that “Many people believe that Christianity is not above African culture and that Christian widows should undergo such rituals.” The behaviour of most of the participants not to adhere to the traditional rituals, may indicate that widows in some communities are in a process to embrace their rights to be seen as equal to men and not to be subjected to oppressive rituals.

At the same time, they had to make their families or parents understand or be aware of their decision not to adhere to the traditional rituals. The following excerpts of what participants said in this regard, supports this storyline:

“At the end my parents also understand that I have to make my own decision regarding the performance of the traditional rituals and I don’t remember anyone influencing me not to do the rituals, but it was my choice and my spiritual believe”. (Velly)

“I am a Christian, as Christian I do not believe in the traditional rituals. My family knows that I do not believe in rituals, none of my family members told me to go through with it. I feel that those traditional rituals frustrate widows more.” (Lydia)

“I am a Christian, as Christian I do not believe in the traditional rituals.” (Rose)

“I am a Christian and I feel that the traditional rituals are not important because I don’t believe on it.” (Pertunia)

“I did not follow the traditional rituals because I am member of Presbyterian Church. I followed the rules of our church with regard to widowhood issues. I don’t believe in traditional rituals.” (Lucy)

Most of the participants did not adhere to the traditional rituals because of their spiritual belief systems. The study findings highlight the following statement by Khosa-Nkatini et al (2020:6) that “Promoting women’s human rights involves making changes in areas of life usually considered to be private and the issue around women’s rights and cultural practices remain a debate.” From a social justice framework, social workers need to address areas of injustice experienced by vulnerable persons like widows (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:25). Practising social justice principles for widows can include advocacy for human rights, dignity and fairness in communities, empowerment of widows to address unfair practices, community awareness-raising and education regarding unfair traditional practices and media activism.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Participants accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood

This theme originated from the responses provided by the participants in relation to the following question: “*What are the day to day challenges you encounter due to the death of your husband?*” Three sub-themes emerged out of the process of data analysis in this regard. The three sub-themes are the participants’ accounts of the challenges regarding the community perceptions of widowhood; participants’ accounts of challenges in relations to financial independence; and participants’ accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships. Using the strength-based perspective, widows should be supported to use their inner abilities to cope and to deal with their widowhood challenges. Each of these sub-themes is presented in the discussion that follows.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1: Participants accounts of challenges regarding the community perceptions of widowhood

The participants experienced various challenges in the community regarding community members’ perceptions of widowhood. Participants mentioned that some of the community members started to show disrespect towards them and their families. Radzilani (2010:148) stated the following in this regard: “The transition from being a wife to be a widow appeared to position the participants as ‘outsiders’, which was problematic for people who had cultivated an interdependent self that promoted collective cultural voices.” The kind of disrespecting behaviour from the community members include changing the manner in which they used to communicate with participants before their husbands passed away, and some community members started to steal from the widows’ families knowing that they no longer have the protection from their husbands. The study findings are consistent with that of Dube (2016:171) regarding the experiences of widows in the Binga district in Zimbabwe, that reported that before their husbands passed away, community members used to respect them and their families, but since the death of their husbands, they felt they have lost respect and dignity among community members.

Lydia, Lizzy, Velly, Lucy and Salvah made the following comments with regard to the loss of respect and dignity among community members:

Lydia said that she has lost respect and dignity since the death of her husband and that Community members are now disrespecting her and the family, by stating that - *“The people who used to respect me before my husband died, some they started to disrespect me. This shows that people respect a woman and her family while her husband is still alive. When he passes away, they start to disrespect the woman and the family.”*

Lizzy mentioned that *“The people who use to respect me before my husband died, some they started to disrespect me. I can give you the example, another man used to call me Mrs Mabuza, but now he calls me by my name.”*

Velly stated the following: *People will respect you when your husband is still alive, but the day he passed on, they start to disrespect you and your children without any reason of such behaviour. You will feel that you are no longer safe in the community and you no longer have the same dignity you used to have while your husband was still alive.”*

“In most of the time, we Tsonga speaking people, we call the family by the surname of the husband. My family was also called by my husband’s surname. After the death of my husband, some of my community members are now calling my family using my maiden name. This shows that people respect a woman and her family while her husband is still alive. When he passes away, they start to disrespect the woman and the family.” (**Lucy**)

“If you are a widow in my community, you are enemy to many different people because you are regarded as unfaithful women. It is believed that as a woman, you need a man or a boyfriend in your life, without a man, you are not complete. The women in the community they protect their men from us, they create negative stories about us so that we can be seen as the bad people in the community.” (**Salvah**)

The findings of Radzilani (2010:148) support the utterances of the participants, that widows felt that losing their husbands was a huge loss, because having a husband gave them a sense of dignity. Since the death of their husbands, they felt inadequate, insecure and unprotected and the dignity they earned while their husbands were still alive has vanished. It was further revealed that widows suffered rejection, being stigmatised and disrespected by the members of the community resulting that they felt uncomfortable to live in their communities (Sekgobela 2018:64).

The community's perceived attitudes towards widows are one of the challenges the participants faced after the death of their husbands. Seven participants indicated that it was difficult to live in the community due to the negative perceptions towards widows such as being labelled as unfaithful, or the perceived threat that widows may 'steal' another women's husband. Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013:4) stated that "There are strong social rites, practices and taboos associated with widowhood in many social and cultural groups in South Africa which are influenced and shaped by strong patriarchal systems and religious beliefs in society." The authors' findings regarding widowhood and gender equality in South African communities stated that in many communities' widows are often perceived to have less value in society and are also perceived as a threat by other women, implying that widows are 'weak' and needed a man to provide for them (Magudu & Mohlakoana-Motopi 2013:5).

There is a social stereotype that women who are single through divorce or bereavement are a threat to married women in the community regarding their husbands (Radzilani 2010:149). The liberal egalitarian perspective of the social justice theory advocates for free social cooperation in which all citizens are equal, having equal advantages, fairness and protection of individual rights (Gasker & Fischer 2014:48). Social workers need to advocate for widows regarding their needs and all injustices practices towards them, through educating the community members to accept widows and to create a better living environment for them without any discrimination, oppression and dehumanising behaviour towards them.

In support of this category, Dube (2016:207) postulated that widows who lost respect from community members may experience psychological problems to the extent

where their self-esteem is affected, and depressive symptoms may be experienced. Sekgobela's (2018:83) study findings regarding the health care needs of widows in Tshwane, further concluded that widows who are psychologically affected, suffer from symptoms like a lack of concentration, forgetfulness, suicidal ideation and recurrent traumatic memories. Therefore, social workers rendering services to widows should apply the strength-based perspective theoretical framework in assisting widows to understand that they have the capacity to cope with their challenges by developing their potential and facilitate their strengths to stabilise and ground them (Hassim & Herbst 2016:209). The strength-based perspective principles for intervention rely on the assumption that inner strengths can act as a shield that protects the individual in times of struggle, trauma and distress.

Cognisance should be taken of Adonis' (2020:21) emphasis of the fact that widows should be treated with fairness and the dignity they deserve. Social workers should advocate for the dignity and protection of widows and empower the community to confront their negative perceptions regarding widowhood and empowering the community to be a positive and resourceful support system for widows (Hassim & Herbst 2016:209).

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2: Participants' accounts of challenges regarding financial independence

Lack of job opportunities is one of the challenges faced by the participants in the study. In sub-theme 1.1 regarding the participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood (see 4.3.1.1), eight of the participants described their experiences of financial devastation, five of the participants were unemployed and three participants had limited informal employment, which did not provide substantially for the families. Five of the participants mentioned experiencing challenges in finding employment to be financially independent, however their efforts were unsuccessful. Some of the participants resorted to work as domestic workers or sometimes as volunteers without any income. Certain participants mentioned that the lack of job opportunities led them to get engaged in sexual relationships with men for financial benefits, putting them at risk to contract HIV and AIDS. The research report of Itsweni (2018:18) regarding

experiences of death and bereavement of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo, stated that "... widows' of all ages are more commonly living below the poverty edge, and more often require social programme assistance." It is pointed out that South African widows do not receive any financial provision from the government for being widows and have to meet specific criteria with which they frequently do not comply with, to receive a child support grant, disability grant or an old age pension (Woolard & Leibbrandt 2010).

Dlukulu's (2010:61) study that focused on the experiences and coping mechanisms of bereavement of black urban widows in a transitional society, revealed that widows may engage in sexual relationships for financial assistance in order to survive financially every day. It is evident that the widows of this study were facing financial challenges, and that some have resorted to prostitution to gain an income for their households. In many developing countries, the desperation of earning an income may force widows to get involved in exploitative informal work, putting their children into child labour to earn money for survival, begging for money and food, and encourage their children to engage in commercial sex (Itsweni 2018:23).

Thoka and Geyer (2019:316) conducted a study about the factors influencing the labour force participation of internal migrants in Gauteng, and their findings showed that the possibility of finding employment increases for persons with a higher educational level. The researchers state that 60% of the unemployed individuals who obtained their educational level below secondary level or grade 12, had a reduced chance of being employed (Thoka & Geyer 2019:320). Six participants in this study did not complete their matric or grade twelve. Therefore, participants' educational level also played a key role being unemployed.

The participants, **Khensani**, **Daphney**, **Tintswalo** and **Salvah** stated the following about this:

"I went through a lot after the death of my husband. I looked for jobs at many different places without success". (Khensani)

Daphney mentioned this *“I struggle a lot to get the job in the village. I worked as a domestic worker for different families. I also worked as a volunteer at a crèche without any salary.”*

Tintswalo stated *“I don’t ask from my children they help me at their own will. I hate to ask things from people. I also have a problem with my leg which makes it difficult for me to work but I go to work every day despite my leg problem”.*

Salvah stated *“I am now taking the treatment of HIV and AIDS, before my husband died we were both negative. But after his death, I was forced by the situation to try some other means to provide for my children until I got the sickness [HIV]”.*

These utterances made by participants are supported by the study of Cebekhulu (2015:70) who found that one of the challenges of widows is the need of employment to sustain their livelihood. Cebekhulu (2015:70) further argued that in amplifying economic needs of the widows, it is very important for them to meet subsistence needs after losing their husbands as breadwinners. The widows found it difficult to maintain their standard of living since they used to rely on their husbands’ income for shelter and finances. According to the study findings of Itsweni (2018:83), regarding the experiences of death and bereavement of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province, some widows looked for employment, while other started small businesses to provide for their children.

The findings of this study regarding the involvement in sexual risky behaviour, as shared by the participant with a positive HIV status (Salvah) who referred to it as a means to provide for her family, are supported in the literature from different study findings (Lopman, Nyamukapa, Hallett, Mushati, Spark-du Preez, Kurwa, Wambe & Gregson (2009; Tenkorang 2014; Kudo 2018:2). Study findings of Lopman et al (2009: 41) regarding the role of widows in the heterosexual transmission of HIV in Manicaland, Zimbabwe, found that the prevalence of HIV was exceptionally high among both widows and widowers. Lopman et al (2009:41) further stated that “AIDS as the leading cause of death among adults in southern Africa is the major driver of early widowhood.” One of the causes of widowhood is HIV and AIDS, and because of

widowhood the risk of being infected resulting from risky sexual behaviour to earn an income and the influence of traditional rituals, like widow inheritance, create a vicious cycle, keeping HIV and AIDS prevalent (Tenkorang 2014:47).

Social workers operating from the strength-based perspective should encourage widows to reconstruct their challenges in opportunities to realise their potential by developing new skills that will assist them to be financial independent and be able to support their children. Social workers need not only to focus from the strength perspective on what was lost, but also in terms of “what is left and how that can be used to instil healing and growth” (Hassim & Herbst 2016:206)

4.3.2.3 Sub-theme 2.3: Participants’ accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships

The sub-theme regarding the challenges of the participants maintaining relationships are divided into two categories that entail the challenges regarding adopting a disciplinary role in the relationship with the children and the challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships.

a. Challenges to adopt a disciplinary role in the relationships with the children

The participants reported that it was difficult for them to maintain their relationships with their children after the death of their husbands, especially regarding disciplining and guiding children in the absence of their fathers. According to Radzilani (2010:126) the religious–cultural heritage of men and the perception that the husband is the head of the household and the primary figure in disciplining the children, cause a challenge for widowhood to discipline the children without the deceased father. The participants were challenged by having to perform additional family roles and to accept extra responsibilities, like having to take on the role and responsibility of disciplining the children.

Lydia, Velly, Rose and **Lucy** highlighted their challenges regarding disciplining of their children in the following extracts:

“Sometimes you don’t know how to reprimand your children, you don’t know whether they are going to listen to you because it helps when both parents are there in the family, it makes children to have a fear to misbehave.” (Lydia)

“The challenge that I have is when children sometimes they don’t listen to me. When I talk to them I feel they don’t want to understand. That is the moment I start to think about my husband that maybe if he was still alive they will listen to him because he is the men of the house.” (Velly)

“My son started to show uncontrollable behaviour after the death of his father. People come to report his cases every day, but I don’t know how I can talk to him because he does not listen to me. Maybe if his father was still alive he would listen to him. Maybe is because I am a woman that is why he doesn’t listen to me. I have serious problem with him and I think maybe if his father was still alive we would have assisted each other and see how we can help him.” (Rose)

“The challenge that I saw is to raise the children alone. I and my husband used to assist one another on how best we can raise them, because now he is gone that responsibility is left with me alone. It is also difficult to reprimand children about their behaviour without their father.” (Lucy)

The challenges of the participants to discipline their children in the present study, are supported in various other research studies’ findings regarding the struggles of disciplining children due to widowhood in (Radzilani 2010; Glazer, Clark, Thomas & Haxton 2010; Edwards, Yopp, Park, Deal, Bieseckerd & Rosenstein 2018). The findings of the bereavement rituals in Tshivenda speaking communities of Radzilani (2010:128) confirmed this study findings as follows: “Raising children without a husband was reported to be much more difficult and added further stress and pain to the experience of grief. It is possible that the religious-cultural heritage that gave men authority over the family made it easier for fathers to discipline the children.”

Adonis (2020:44) mentioned that after the death of the father the children are forced to accept the mother as the head of the family and they may find it difficult to

understand the change in roles. Excerpts of what the participants said support the perception that they regarded their deceased husband as a figure of authority which made it easier to discipline the children and that they are now forced to adjust to new roles in their family life.

Glazer et al (2010:97) investigated parenting practices after the death of a spouse and revealed that widowed parents reported feeling overwhelmed by the great pressure required to be a sole parent. Widowed parents also reported that maintaining discipline within their home or with their children is one of the challenges they experienced (Glazer et al 2010:97). The authors also revealed that the surviving partners reported that they were missing their deceased partner's opinion with regards to taking parenting decisions (Glazer et al 2010:97). Edwards et al (2018:4) asserted that maintaining discipline within the home is something that the surviving parent may struggle to achieve. The researchers conducted a study to investigate the parenting self-efficacy for recently widowed parents with dependent children, the findings of which revealed that widowed parents are struggling to adjust to be the only parent to promote the healthy psychological functioning in their children (Edwards et al 2018:6).

b. Challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships

Several participants in the study struggled to engage in intimate relationships after the death of their husbands. The study findings revealed that most of the widows were not interested in starting new relationship with other men due to various reasons. Participants in this research specifically cited their challenges in engaging in new relationships as follows:

Rose explained: *“Another challenge is to start a new relationship. A lot of men propose love to me not because they love me, but because they want to have share in my inheritance.”*

Khensani described her challenges in managing her intimate relationship: *“Since my husband passed away, I tried to be in relationship with other men, but they never treated me with respect.”*

Velly reported that she experienced abuse in her marriage and that she did not want to be in a situation repeating the pattern of abuse. Therefore, she decided not to engage in a relationship because she believes that all men are the same. *“I don’t think I will ever be in another relationship with any men because of the experience I had in my marriage. I struggled a lot and he never assisted me with anything in my life. I will never be in a relationship or married again because men are the same according to my understanding. I was unhappy in my marriage until I developed hatred towards men. I don’t want to be abused by men any more in my life. I decided to focus on myself and my family rather to think of a new relationship or marriage.”*

Lydia articulated the following regarding the engagement in a new relationship: *“After the death of my husband, I started a relationship with another man to forget my husband. In that relationship I experienced a lot of challenges. I felt that maybe I was not ready to be in a relationship.”*

Some of the reasons provided by the participants were that they did not feel ready to start a new relationship with another male, some of the reasons were based on their previous relationships wherein the widows experienced abuse from their husbands who died. The widows feared experiencing a similar situation if they engaged in a new relationship. These study findings are supported by the findings of Itsweni (2018:88) regarding bereavement rituals amongst Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province. Itsweni’s (2018:88) findings also support the present study findings that some of the participants were afraid to engage in a new relationship because they feared that maybe the men had other motives to get involved with them because of money or property left to them by their deceased husband. Two participants in the study reported that they started to engage in new relationships and that they perceived they were not treated with respect by their new partners.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Participants’ accounts of their coping strategies to deal with the challenges of widowhood

The theme originated from the responses provided by the participants in relation to the following question posed to them: *“What are the coping strategies that you use to deal*

with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband”? The participants narrated various coping strategies that enabled them to survive and cope after the death of their husbands. Coping strategies are described as the adjustment strategies or behaviour which are used by people (in this case widows) to deal with, or overcome the effects of stressful situations (Iruloh & Elsie 2018:77). From the participants’ accounts the researcher identified four coping strategies that they used, namely religion and spirituality; counselling; support from family and others; and self-motivation and keeping themselves busy. As sub-themes, these strategies respectively entailed the following:

4.4.3.1 Sub-theme 3.1: Participants’ accounts on religion and spirituality as a coping strategy

The study findings revealed that out of 13 participants, ten participants indicated that they rely on their spirituality and religion as a coping strategy. Religion is one of the most important coping strategies employed by widows to cope with the challenges of widowhood by empowering and supporting them to face their challenges after their husbands’ death (George 2010:61). Widows should be empowered to realize and to use their abilities to identify their best coping strategies to cope or control widowhood challenges. The participants indicated that they relied on prayer, reading of the Scriptures from the Bible and the spiritual support from fellow church members in order to cope with the loss of their husbands and making the adjustment of being widowed. Itsweni’s (2018:89) findings regarding bereavement experiences of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province, support this sub-theme that widows relied on prayers and the reading of the Scriptures by their church members and pastors to be comforted and supported. Some of the participants reported that they used prayer to communicate with God with regards to their problems and that after praying, they felt more content and comforted.

The following excerpts of **Daphney**, **Khensani**, **Lucia**, **Lydia** and **Tinyiko**, underline this sub-theme:

“I used to pray that I should get a job to help me to provide for my family. Prayer is my coping strategy that I use every day.” (Daphney)

“I sometimes cry alone and tell God my problems. I also asked my church members to pray for me about the problem I am experiencing”. (Khensani)

“When I am alone in the house and start to think about my problems especially when I am stressed. I usually sing a song and pray. I can say prayer comfort me.” (Lucia)

“I can say one of my coping strategies was prayer. I used to pray every day. After praying I felt much better”. (Lydia)

Prayer, bible and my pastors were my coping strategies. My pastors were always at my home providing prayers day and night”. (Tinyiko)

Religion and spirituality as coping strategies fulfil important roles for the bereaved widows. Firstly, religion and spirituality provide comfort and refuge, secondly, it assists the widows to adjust to the bereavement distress and lastly, it provides meaningfulness to the loss of the beloved (Kokou-Kpolou, Tremblay, Moukouta, Baugnet & Menick 2017:766). The study findings revealed that widows regard their religious involvement and the church as a powerful institution, of great use for them, because it assists them to get support and comfort to cope with their adjustments as widows. The study findings are consistent with that of Cebekhulu (2015:76) that some of the widows received spiritual strength from God to help them to adjust to the psychological trauma they suffered when their husbands passed away. Dube’s (2011:109) study findings revealed that church members together with their pastors are instrumental in providing help to widows to enable them to cope with their challenges. An example of the assistance provided by pastors to widows was to intervene in the crisis when property grabbing occurred (Dube 2011:109).

4.4.3.2 Sub-theme 3.2: Participants’ accounts of counselling as a coping strategy

The participants indicated that counselling from social workers and psychologists were helpful because it assisted them to cope with the challenges and adjustments they faced after the death of their husbands. Sekgobela (2018:92), argued that there is a need for widows to be referred for counselling and that counselling plays a valuable role in supporting widows to cope with widowhood. Some of the participants reported that counselling brought hope and strength in their lives and enabled them to face their new challenges as widows. It was also reported that counselling sessions with social workers and psychologists made them to understand and to accept the concept of bereavement.

The study findings by Mburungu (2020:113) regarding loss and grief counselling as a coping mechanism of widowhood in Kenya, confirm the findings of the present study that widows seek counselling services to assist them to cope better with their challenges of widowhood. The participants **Lydia**, **Lucy** and **Rose** pointed out to the following in this regard:

“They used to encourage me to stay positive and that things will be fine one day. The counselling I received from the social workers was very helpful. During the sessions with social workers I felt that they understand what I am going through, they gave me hope to face my challenges and to be strong.” (Lydia)

“The sessions with the psychologist helped me to cope with the situation. Talking to people and sharing your challenges also helps a lot. I always discuss my challenges with colleagues and it helps me a lot.” (Lucy)

“My cousin is a social worker and I had counselling sessions with her. She made me to understand that death can happen anytime to everyone. After the sessions we had I felt that I was starting to be okay and I started to accept the death of my husband.” (Rose)

The value of counselling sessions for widows were discussed in a comparative study of widowers and widows in Kenya, about loss and grief counselling as a coping mechanism of widowhood, by Mburugu (2020:110). Mburugu (2020:110) asserts that

the clients should first acknowledge their grief and seek counselling, and that the role of the therapist is to remain focused and assist the (widows) clients to understand themselves and able to solve their own challenges (Mburugu 2020:110). As noted by Dube (2016:85) the role of social workers is to assist widows to understand their inner strength and explore ways that could help them to cope in their situation rather than to surrender to their distressed situations.

One of the principles of the strength-based perspective includes care and caretaking in a specific context (Hassim & Herbst 2016:214). The social worker must assist the widow not to only identify her strengths, but but must encourage the widow of her worth, acknowledge the positive step taken to seek professional assistance and that emphasise that she has the capacity and the inner strength to heal (Hassim & Herbst 2016:214).

4.4.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3: Participants' accounts of support from family and others as a coping strategy

The study findings revealed that participants resort to seeking support from their family members, friends and colleagues by sharing and discussing their problems with them.

Sub-theme 1.3 of the experiences of participants regarding social support discussed earlier, also are confirms this sub-theme of the utilisation of family and other support systems as a coping strategy. Participants reported that through sharing their problems with their family members and others like friends and colleagues, assisted them to cope with being a widow and the challenges experienced in this regard. Social workers should encourage the widow's family and other people to give support to the widow, such as sharing their challenges and experiences. This will assist them to cope with and manage their new life demands regarding widowhood. As confirmed by Chenebu and Omumu (2011:3616) widows manage to cope well in their situations when they are given the opportunity to share their internal pain. The findings in the presented study indicate that one participant mentioned that if she did not share her challenges with other people she would have committed suicide. Sekgobela's (2018:60) findings revealed that the emotional impact experienced by widows of losing

their husbands included feelings of sadness, anger, hurt and worrying, which many times require professional intervention and support.

Five participants in the present study resorted to seeking support from family and others by sharing their challenges encountered after the death of their husbands as one of their coping strategies. It is evident that support from family and others were limited, taking in consideration the number of participants who reported that they received support from friends and family. Dube's (2016:186) study findings about the psycho-social challenges experienced by widows in Binga District, in Zimbabwe emphasised the importance of social work intervention and the support of family members to assist widows to cope with the challenges of widowhood. Social workers need to motivate family members by educating them about the needs of widows and the support they need. The following excerpts from participants underline this sub-theme:

"I always talk about what I have been through in my relationship with my friends or people who are experiencing the difficulty moments in their life." (**Pertunia**)

"I also used to talk to the people [family] that are very close to me and share my problems with them". (**Titswalo**)

"Sharing my problems with my colleagues at work helps me a lot because they gave me comforting words." (**Lucy**)

"I used to always talk about my challenges at work because I knew that when I kept quiet, it will hurt me. I wanted the people that are close to me to understand what I was going through. I also realized that when I speak about my problems, I feel very relief. If I didn't share my challenges with other people, I would have committed suicide long time ago." (**Cate**)

Dube (2016:172) concluded that letting clients share or ventilate about their problems or challenges has a healing effect on the client and it also helps them with the healing process. This means that when widows are given the opportunity to share their

experiences, it facilitates their coping with widowhood experiences (Dube 2016:172). According to Sue, Jackson, Rasheed and Rasheed (2016:194) emotional release gives relief to individuals who experienced hardships. It is believed that emotional venting dissolves the emotional impact and assists widows in coping more constructively with their loss and adjustment (Nils & Rimé 2012:2).

4.4.3.4 Sub-theme 3.4: Participants' accounts on self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied as their coping strategies

Coping strategies can be described as strategies consciously used by people to handle or control the effects anticipated or experienced by individuals in stressful situations (Iruloh & Elsie 2018:77). Regarding widowhood coping strategies researchers assert that some of the coping strategies employed by widows to alleviate widowhood stress, include self-talk, positive thinking, faith strategy, seeking counsellor's help and support (Iruloh & Elsie 2018:77). The bereaved spouses who adopted a positive outlook and use strategies like positive self-talk, are less affected by issues like depression and anger symptoms (Carr 2020:296).

The study findings revealed that participants utilise various chores to keep themselves busy as their coping mechanisms. Some of the participants reported that they do farming and sell vegetables to keep themselves busy in order to cope with the challenges of widowhood. Some participants keep themselves busy to avoid stress associated with widowhood while other participants resort in working hard at the workplace as a coping strategy. Carr's (2020:296) research study support this present study's findings and postulated that the coping strategies of older widows and widowers are by keeping themselves busy through involvement in various activities.

The use of self-motivation to cope with widowhood challenges was mentioned by some of the participants in the study. Participants said that they encouraged themselves to be strong and to be positive despite all the challenges and experiences they have been through after the death of their spouses. **Velly, Cate and Lucia** mentioned the following as their coping strategies in this regard:

Velly relied on encouraging herself to be strong and to face all her fears to cope with widowhood challenges: *“I started to think what people are going to say about me at work. I started to tell myself that I don’t care. I had to face the world again after three weeks of the death of my husband. I had to face my fears and be strong.”*

Cate stated that she used to do self-talk to motivate herself: *“I always say to myself I need to be strong and hope that one day I will be success. I also keep myself busy in order to forget all my problems. I tried everything to find myself busy to avoid stressing about my problems”*.

Lucia shared that she looked at the mirror and used self-talk to encourage herself: *“Sometimes I look at the mirror, talk to myself about anything that is happening in my life, encourage myself and I will start to feel much better”*.

Six participants in the current study reported that they keep themselves busy with various activities and chores, to cope with their challenges of widowhood, **Rose**, **Tintswalo** and **Pertunia** mentioned the following:

“Another coping strategy is to keep myself busy. I always do house chores or go to town and come back. I try everything to keep myself busy because if I don’t do it, I will be stressed when I think about my challenges.” (**Rose**)

“During the rainy seasons, I used to go early in the morning to plant maize, peanuts and vegetables. I used to sell some of the vegetable to my community members. It kept me busy.” (**Tintswalo**)

“I kept myself busy at school and most of the time I attend my friends’ events such as their children’s wedding’s, parties and stock fell groups just to keep myself busy.” (**Pertunia**)

It is believed that females cope much better than males when losing their partners, because women have domestic skills, express their emotions more easily and they socialise more than men (Bennett & Soulsby 2012:329). Ogweno (2010:60) who conducted a study to examine widowed persons experiences and their coping strategies, revealed that widows prefer to keep themselves busy by doing business as a means of coping with widowhood.

4.4.4 Theme 4: participants' accounts of advice to other widows on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood

One of the questions posed to the participants was "*What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges widows face and to assist other widows?*" The responses to this question were analysed and gave rise to the theme "participants' advice to other widows on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood". The theme was further filtered and generated two sub-themes, namely participants' accounts to other widows about the acceptance of their loss and participants' accounts about managing relationships.

4.4.4.1 Subtheme 4.1: Participants' accounts of advice to other widows about the acceptance of their loss

Participants' accounts on advice to be given to other widows to address their challenges in their everyday life include dealing with the acceptance of their loss. During the grieving process, widows may remove or shut down all their future expectations and the future they planned to have or had with their deceased husbands (Dube 2016:31). Four participants in the study's advice for widows in this regard was to first accept the death of their husband to be able to continue with their own lives. The study findings revealed that widows who accepted the death of their husbands were often able to search for meaning by using the past to assist them to face their present and their future (Chan & Chan 2011:155). According to Tomarken, Roth, Holland, Ganz, Schachter, Kose, Ramirez, Allen, & Nelson (2012:775), it is important to accept the loss of a partner or husband, in order to overcome the emotional pain of the loss.

Lydia, Tinyiko, and Velly mentioned the following in this regard:

“Another advice is that they need to accept that the person is gone. I know from my experience that if you fail to accept you end up being sick like me.” (Lydia)

“The advice that I can give widows is to accept the death and to tell themselves that they are not the only one to lose a husband. Death happens every day to anyone, but the most important thing is to accept the situation.” (Tinyiko)

“My suggestion that I can give to other widows is that they must accept that their husband is gone, and he will never come back to them.” (Velly)

According to the five stages of grief and dying of Kubler-Ross, the last stage of grief and dying, is called the acceptance stage (Rivas & Jones 2014:8). In this stage, the widow starts to experience the objectivity of the situation and begins to detach herself from the loss (Rivas & Jones 2014:8). The participants' advice is supported by the findings of Cebekhulu (2015:19) postulated that in this stage, widows start to readjust to their changed circumstances in order to adopt new roles. Widows also need to learn new behaviour and to set their new goals (Cebekhulu 2015:19).

4.4.4.2 Sub theme 4.2: Participant's accounts regarding advice about the managing of relationships

The sub-theme of the importance of managing relationships was seen as one of the recommendations from the participants to other widows. Under this sub-theme, two categories emerged which are managing relationships with other male partners and managing relationships with their children. One of the principles of the strength-based perspectives identified by Saleebey (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:28), is that the upper limits of individuals, groups and communities are unknown and should not be underestimated. The ability of Individuals (in this case widows), groups and communities in setting goals for themselves to achieve, must not be underestimated (Birkenmaier & Berg-Weger 2017:28). This implies that widows should be empowered

to realise that they possess unlimited potential in setting their goals such as the goals of how they could best manage their relationships with other men, children and how to achieve their goals.

a. Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with other male partners

According to the participants' accounts regarding relationships with male partners, their advice is that it should be considered carefully. According to Fisher as cited in Carr and Boerner (2013:488) widowed people may have a desire to be in an intimate relationship, but they struggle to integrate the new partner into their family lives. Lowe and McClement (2010:134), conducted a study to understand the lived experiences of young widows of which the findings revealed that widows have desires to be in intimate relationships, but that they have a lot of uncertainties about the new relationships, such as how they are going to adjust with a new partner and the motives of a male to get involved with them.

Some of the participants in this research recommended that widows firstly need to complete the grieving and adjustment process before getting engaged in a relationship. **Cate, Tintswalo, Pertunia** and **Rose** asserted the following:

"I will also advise that they should be very careful to men who proposed love to them because some of them they don't come with the good intentions to the life of widows, but to abuse them emotional and physically." (Cate)

"My advice is that they must stay where their husband had left them. If they want to be in a relationship they should do it but not in their home because we don't know how their new relationship would be. Second, they should also protect their children from their new partners because men but not all men are not faithful, they can abuse their children when they are not at home." (Tintswalo)

"I tried to advise my sister in law after my brother passed away. I said to her in a polite manner that she needs to be very careful if she wants to start a relationship maybe in

the future because men of these days they come to steal widow's inheritance and disappear.” (Pertunia)

“I will also advise fellow widows that we must not rush to be in relationship, we must first heal because if not we will make a lot of mistakes that will also affect our children.”
(Rose)

In some cultures, a widow is forced to marry a relative so that they can benefit from their late husband's estate (Adonis 2020:8). In the Tsonga culture there is a cultural belief that the widow must be remarried into the same family, preferably to one of her brothers-in-law and this sometimes still is a practice adhered to at present (Khoza-Nkatini 2019:31). The participants in this study did not indicate in their excerpts that marrying a relative after the period of mourning as part of the cultural and traditional requirements is an issue. Article 20 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights (2003) clearly recommends governments to be prudent in observing laws that protect widows and to ensure that a widow shall have the right to remarry, to a person of her choice.

Itsweni's (2018:83) study revealed that widows may encounter male partners who may be abusive towards them and or their children. Therefore, the advice from the participants of the present study that widows need to be careful not to get involved in abusive relationships or with partners that may negatively affect their children, is supported by the findings of Itsweni (2018:83). One participant also referred that the motives of men engaging in a relationship with a widow, may be because of the expectation that she may inherit from her deceased husband. He may therefore have ulterior motives to be in the relationship involved. The study findings of Itsweni (2018:88) regarding the bereavement experiences of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province, support the study findings that widows are careful to engage again in relationships due to the risk for themselves or their children being abused, as well as the possible ulterior motives of men to acquire some of the widow's inheritance, or not being able to build a positive relationship with their children.

Thomas' (2008:7) study findings regarding the implications of remarriage after a spouse's death rightly noted the following: "Given the challenges faced by widows it is perhaps surprising that relatively few remarry". Widows frequently do not want to adjust to a life style with another husband, which may include having to relocate to another village and therefore they do not remarry (Thomas 2008:7). The widows who participated in the study of Thomas (2008:8) indicated that they enjoyed greater independence and leadership roles which they may lose if they remarry. Research also indicated that because it is not culturally acceptable for widows to initiate relationships and the fear of potential husbands that the widows' husband may have died because of AIDS, make the starting of new relationships complex (Thomas 2008:7). Lopman et al (2009:41) support the fear of men for engaging in a relationship with a widow because of the chance of getting infected with HIV, in the light that AIDS is the main cause of widowhood in Sub-Saharan Africa.

b. Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with their children

Two participants in the study mentioned that widows have to learn the skills to have open communication with their children regarding issues or challenges. Velentzas and Broni (2014:117) defined communication as the activity of conveying information through various forms such as exchange of thoughts, messages, behaviour and writing. According to Romero-Abrio, Martinez-Ferrer, Musitu-Ferrer, Leon-Morene, Villarreal-Gonzalez and Callejas-Jeronino (2019:2) open communication in the family strengthens the child-parent relationship.

The death of a family member affects the relationships and interactions among family members (Jiao, Chow, & Chen 2020:1). Jiao et al (2020:1) investigated the parent-child relationships in widowed families. Their findings revealed that a good parent-child relationship plays an important role in ensuring that children adjust well from their loss. This includes the manner in which the widowed parents communicate with the children. Participants further advise widows to support their children financially and emotionally.

Salvah, Lucia, Cate, Lizzy and Tinyiko mentioned the following in this regard:

“My advice to other widows is that they should make sure that they informed their children about anything that is happening in their life, for example, if they have found a new partner they should discuss it with their children to avoid the necessary fights in the family.” (Salvah)

“They should learn to discuss their challenges with their children to strengthen and to build a healthy good relationship with their children.” (Lucia)

“My advice to widows is that they must look for jobs and work for themselves and their children especially the young widows.” (Cate)

“Another advice is that widows like me we need to stand and be strong for our children, work for them than to think that our families will support us.” (Lizzy)

“They need to tell themselves to stand up and work for their children rather than to wait for help from relatives.” (Tinyiko)

Some of the participants articulated the importance of widows to become financially independent in order to provide for their children by seeking employment. Adonis (2020:47) rightly noted the following: “Financially, most widows suffer immediately after the death of their husband, forcing them to quickly lower their standard of living. It is not always easy to make these changes, especially when there are children involved.”

The findings of Itsweni (2018:84) support the participants’ advice that because of a lower or no income after the death of their husbands and with few resources available, widows are forced to seek employment to provide for their families. Therefore, gaining financial independence should be a goal they need to strive towards. Radzilani (2010:76) stated that: “In cultural contexts where women have been socialised into dependent social roles, some losses may act as a means to remove social constraints to growth and independence.” After they have come to terms with the death of their spouses, widows may experience the loss of their husbands as liberating with moving from being dependent to being independent.

Some of the participants also mentioned that widows need to ensure that if they get engaged in a relationship again, the children would also be involved in the process to build a positive relationship with the new partner. Gierveld and Merz (2013:1110) investigated the role of children or step children on their divorced and widowed parents' decision about the living arrangement after engaging in a new relationship. The study findings revealed that some of the children experienced their parents starting new relationships, in a negative manner, which results in destroying the good relationships the widowed parents had with their children. La Valley and Guerrero (2012:49) postulated that knowing how to manage conflict is a key instrument to assist in managing parent child relationships. Applying the strength-based perspective, widows should be empowered through educational programmes, like parenting skills programmes to enhance them to be able to manage their relationships with their children.

4.4.5 Theme 5: participants' suggestions for social work practice regarding widowhood

Participants were also asked "*How can social workers assist women in widowhood*"? It emerged during the interviews that one of the issues that motivated their responses to the above question posed to them, was a lack of receiving adequate support and social services from social workers. Their responses are presented below as three sub-themes, namely participants' suggestions on counselling and support to women in widowhood; participants' recommendations for community education about the rights of women; and participants' recommendations regarding financial support to widows.

4.4.5.1 Sub-theme 5.1: Participants suggestions on counselling and support to widows

Participants reported having had a lack of sufficient support and services from social workers, suggesting that social workers should provide widows with counselling, support and debriefing sessions on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood. As

noted by Knight and Gitterman (2013:3), when conducting individual counselling, the social worker should ensure that she or he understands the widow's feelings, thoughts and experiences of loss. Seven participants in the study suggested that it is crucial for widows to receive counselling after the death of their husbands and during the grieving process, because it assists them to express their feelings about their loss and the challenges they experienced as widows. During the counselling session of the social worker with the widow, social workers should empower widows to use their inner abilities and strengths to cope with their everyday widowhood challenges.

Daphney, Lucy, Lydia, Lizzy and **Rose** articulated the following regarding suggestions on counselling and support during widowhood:

"I think social workers can assist widows by having sessions with them and allow them to talk about their experiences and challenges that they encounter every day. This will help us to express the things that are bothering us." (**Daphney**)

"The reason I say social workers should visit them is because some of the widows they don't have any person to share their challenges. I also think that counselling will help a lot of widows to cope in their situation. I had sessions with the psychologist after passing of my husband and I realised that counselling is very important." (**Lucy**)

"I also wish that social workers should provide enough support and counselling to widows because it helps to heal the person." (**Lydia**)

"Counselling could help a lot of widows like me because you will have a professional person that you can trust with your problem." (**Lizzy**)

"I think it is very crucial that widows undergo counselling sessions because some of the things is difficult to discuss it with any person because of confidentiality issues." (**Rose**)

Hassim and Herbst (2016:228) support the underlined storylines of the participants, that professional support can assist widows to understand the mourning process.

Applying the strength-based perspective can create a foundation for the widow to allow her to grow as a person after the traumatic experience. In the devastating times of widowhood social workers can foster hope and empowerment in their clients through the strength-based perspective. The strength-based perspective does not encourage the avoidance of difficulties but assists the widow and social worker to collaborate and facilitate growth and resilience (Hassim & Herbst 2016:228).

The value of support groups as noted by Sekgobela, Peu and van der Wath (2018:7), is that social workers should provide support to widows through the establishment of support groups. Some of the participants reported that being part of support groups would be helpful to them because they will then have the opportunity to meet and share their experiences and challenges with other widows. This was confirmed by the research of Dlamini (2016:94) wherein widows revealed that sharing their experiences and challenges with other widows were beneficial to their adjustment and grieving process. These study findings are also consistent with that of Dlukulu (2010:242) about black urban widows in South Africa, and their experiences and coping with bereavement in a transitional society. The findings revealed that participants in the study found being part of a support group helpful, as it assisted them in becoming empowered and allowed them to experience and express empathy with other widows who are also struggling with widowhood challenges (Dlukulu 2010:242).

In their comments, **Tinyiko, Lydia** and **Velly** mentioned that the value of establishing and implementing support groups for widows is as follows:

‘I think there is need in our community to have support group where widows will be able to communicate with other widows, ask each other how they overcome their challenges. This will help them (widows) to face their challenges and to know that they are not the only ones who experiences challenges.’ (Tinyiko)

“I think social workers should facilitate the process to start support groups for widows. In our community I heard about the support for people with HIV and AIDS, but we don’t have support group.” (Lydia)

“Widows must socialize with other people to keep their minds out of the problems. I can also advise them to join support groups for widows where they will meet people who are in their similar situation. I think social workers should assist the community to start support group for us.” (Velly)

Support groups provide a safe environment for grieving members to share challenges, pains and loneliness and coping mechanisms (Knight & Gitterman 2013:4). On joining support groups, the bereaved members (widows) immediately find that they are not alone in their loss, it decreases their sense of isolation and helps them to work through the bereavement process (Knight & Gitterman 2013:3). Research findings suggested that one of the crucial matters in group work participation is to assist widows in reducing their social isolation and also to help the bereaved group members to proceed more quickly through the bereavement process (Knight & Gitterman 2013:3). Through sharing their challenges, they discover and become aware that they are not alone in their situations and further learn from each other (Knight & Gitterman 2013:3; Dube 2016:95). From the strength-based perspective, establishing support groups is a social work intervention which can ensure that widows experience their membership and belonging to a social group in the community, as an experience which was lost due to their changed status as widow and certain traditional and cultural beliefs of communities (Dube 2019:101).

4.4.5.2 Sub-theme 5.2: Participants' suggestions for community education about the rights of women

In South Africa different institutions such as the media and schools are utilised to make sure that all citizens are aware of the importance of human rights (Itsweni 2018:97). However, participants in the study reported that they are not aware of their human rights and it is relevant and essential to supply the community with the necessary education regarding widowhood and women's rights (Cebekhulu 2015:84). The rights relating to the protection of women in South Africa are found in the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (South Africa 1996: Chapter 2). The Constitution provides for the right to equality and prohibits all discrimination based on gender, sex, marital status, sexual orientation and culture (South Africa 1996: section

9). In addition, the Commission on Gender Equality protects the gender equality of all people and makes recommendations to Parliament about any law or issue that concern gender inequality and the status of women (Commissioner on Gender Equality 2013:1).

A study conducted by the Commissioner on Gender Equality (2013:13) revealed that many widows from rural areas unfortunately have to bear discriminatory practices because of the ignorance of the law and high illiteracy prevalence in certain communities. Therefore, participants suggested that social workers should conduct community education about the rights of women and present various social work services to widows. Participants emphasise that it is important for them to know their rights due to the abuse experienced from the community and their parents/ family-in-laws, resulting from the lack of information and understanding about their rights. Despite all legislation documented to protect women against all forms of abuse, violence and abuse against women in South Africa are still a problem, particularly relating to widows and because of widowhood practices (Cebekhulu 2015:41). Widows further continue to experience exploitation and abuse because of the widowhood customs, rites and practices in some communities. The exploitation and abuse of widows are justified through socio-cultural systems such as the patriarchal system (Commission on Gender Equality 2013:9).

Itsweni's (2018:98) study findings of bereavement experiences of Vhavenda widows in Limpopo province, supported the study finding that widows did not know about their rights as widows. Only a few widows in the study knew about their rights, although they did not understand what these rights entail and how it can be exercised. Social workers operating from the strength-based perspective should utilise every available resources and opportunity to empower widows about their rights and what it entail in their situations.

Participants, Khensani, Tinyiko, Velly and Salvah expressed themselves as follows in this regard:

Khensani stated *“Social workers should educate people in our community to stop accusing us widows of bad things. Our community should understand that widows are human being like any other people.”*

Tinyiko emphasised the importance of community education through an awareness campaign to alert widows about the services rendered by social workers by stating: *“I also think that social workers must conduct awareness campaign to our community to encourage widows and other women to seek support and counselling to the social worker’s office because other widows/ woman are not aware of all the services that are rendered by the social workers including counselling.”*

Velly said *“I also think that social workers should work with the chiefs to fight for the rights of widows in the community because I heard that some of the widow was chased in her home by her in law without any reason. Social workers should work with widows and teach them about their right and also advocate for them because some of the widows are illiterate and the in law take advantage of their situation.”*

Salvah mentioned that widows many times are victims of abuse by their family-in-law because they lack the necessary information: *“I think the social workers should move around our villages and educate us about our rights because we are being abused by the community and our family in law. There are lot of information that we don’t know which I think can be very helpful in our day to day life”.*

As stated in Chapter 2 (section 2.8.4) the Constitution (South Africa 1996: Chapter 2, section 10) stated that every person has the right to human dignity, and their dignity should be protected and respected. The Constitution further states that everyone has the right to freedom and security (South Africa 1996: section 12). By using the strength-based perspective, widows should be empowered to exercise their innate potential to know their rights and be able to apply their inner strength to deal with their widowhood situations. As mentioned in Chapter one (section 1.5.1) empowerment is crucial in assisting clients to resolve their problems.

Social justice is regarded as a value of social work which underlies the professional conduct of social workers (Dube 2019:96). The importance of social workers addressing social injustices are also indicated by the the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) emphasising that social justice is regarded as a social work practice imperative (Dube 2019:96). The social work profession is mandated to prevent social injustices which society is exerting on widows. Sexism is defined by DuBois and Miley (2014:139) as: "...the belief that one sex is superior to the other. Sexism most frequently manifests as prejudicial attitudes toward and discriminatory actions against the females, giving gender privilege to men."

Sexism which is prevalent in many African societies, and a driving force in the oppression of and discrimination against widows, can be addressed by social workers by supporting widows, voicing their pain and the consequences of the social injustices forced on them. Social workers also need to assist widows to cope with their pain, fears, shame, anger and despair which they experience as a result of being the victims of social injustices. Social workers should empower widows to find ways to cope with their circumstances.

4.4.5.3 Sub-theme 5.3: Participants' suggestion regarding financial support to widows

Participants suggested that social workers should provide widows with social relief, especially in the case of widows who are unemployed and without any income. As described by the Department of Social Development (2010:2). "Social relief of distress is defined as a temporary provision intended for persons in such a dire material need that they are unable to meet their families' most dire needs". According to Sehlabane (2014:27) the provision of social relief allocated to persons who qualify for it, differs according to the person's circumstances or household situation. This means that granting social relief takes place by means testing. Participants reported experiencing a need for social relief such as financial support and food parcels. Seven out of the 13 participants mentioned a need for food parcels to help them provide for their family. Govender (2019:176) conducted a study about the experiences, challenges and

coping strategies of women who are the victims of domestic violence living in Phoenix and concluded that obtaining food is a vital need for women who do not have a means of providing for their families.

The husband is usually regarded as the breadwinner to financially support his wife and children. When he dies the financial resources of the family also decline (Dube 2016:34). Umeh and Jane-Frances (2015:307) concluded that poverty is not only about income, but it also includes the wellbeing of a person, both materially and psychologically (Umeh & Jane-Frances 2015:307). This was confirmed by Itsweni (2018:108) in a study about the experiences of the death of a loved one and bereavement amongst the young Vhavenda widows in the Limpopo province that found that widows who faced financial problems after the death of their husbands, have difficulties in raising their children because of a lack of finances and emotional support. In some communities, widows experience various forms of abuse by community members, which are considered to be normal and an accepted form of cultural and traditional behaviour in patriarchal communities (Dube 2016: 34). The author concludes that the economic wellbeing of the widow is affected after the death of her husband (Dube 2016:34). The principle of social justice theory emphasises that all individuals have access to goods and services regardless of factors such as their age, gender and ethnicity. This means that social workers should advocate on behalf widows who are unable to support themselves or take care of themselves, regarding their needs such as financial assistance.

Pertunia, Khensani, Velly and Tintswalo mentioned the following with regards to the rendering of financial support to widows:

“I think social workers could help widows who are struggling, who does not know where to find their next meal. I have seen a lot of widows move from one relationship to another because of poverty. They do it not because they like what they are doing but they are forced by their situation such as unemployment and poverty.” (Pertunia)

“I think social workers should assist widows by giving them food parcels, especially those who are unemployed and have no other source of income. A lot of widows are

starving with hunger and their children and they don't have anyone to support them.”
(Khensani)

“I think social workers can help widows with the provision of food parcels to those that are unemployed for the period of three months after the death of their husband. This will give widows time to look for a job without the stress of how I am going to provide food for my children.” **(Velly)**

“If it is possible that social workers could help to build us houses because as you can see I don't have house. My house I cannot even call it a house because it can fall down during the heavy rains. At my age I don't think I will be able to build a house.”
(Tintswalo)

4.5. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presents the research findings derived from the transcribed interviews with 13 participants who reside in Mavalani village, Mopani district in the Limpopo province. The biographical profiles of the participants are firstly discussed, followed by five themes with their sub-themes and categories. Each theme, sub-theme and category is discussed and provided with direct quotations and storylines from what participants said in the interviews with the researcher, listed according to the pseudonyms awarded to the participants. The experiences and views of the participants are subjected to a literature control to support, confirm or contrast the themes and the storylines.

The first theme focuses on the participants' experiences about their widowhood. This theme is presented under four sub-themes. The first sub-theme is participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood. Under this sub-theme, two categories are identified, namely the loss of status as a married woman and financial losses because of widowhood. The second sub-theme is participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of their widowhood. Under this sub-theme, two categories are identified, namely changes experienced in the relationship with the family-in-laws and changes experienced regarding friendships in the community. The

third sub-theme is participants' experiences of social support structures. Three categories are identified, namely participants' experiences of social support from the family; participants' experiences of social support from significant others; and participants' experiences of social support from religious groups. The last sub-theme is participants' experiences regarding the performance of traditional rituals. Here, two categories were identified, namely experiences of participants in adhering to traditional rituals and experiences of participants about their non-adherence to traditional rituals.

The second theme focuses on the participants' accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood. The participants' accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood are presented in three sub-themes. The first sub-theme is the participants' accounts of the challenges regarding the community's perception of widowhood; the second sub-theme is participants' accounts of challenges in relation to financial independence; whilst the third sub-theme is participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships. Under the third sub-theme, two categories were identified which are the challenges to adopt a disciplinary role in the relationships with the children, and challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships

Theme three presented the participants' accounts of their strategies to cope with the challenges of widowhood. The coping strategies are grouped into four sub-themes, namely participants' accounts on religion and spirituality as coping strategy, participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy, participants' accounts of support from family members and others as a coping strategy, and participants' accounts on the coping strategy of self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied.

The fourth theme discussed the participants' accounts of advice to other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood. The participants' views regarding advice to widows are presented in two sub-themes. Firstly, participants' accounts of advices to other widows about the acceptance of their loss and secondly, participants' accounts regarding advice to widows about managing relationships. From the second sub-theme emerged two categories, participants' advice about how to manage relationships with other male partners and participants' advice about how to manage relationships with their children

Theme five presents the participants' suggestions regarding social work practice with women in widowhood. The suggestions regarding social work practice are presented under three sub-themes, namely participants' suggestions on counselling and support to widows, participants' suggestions for community education about the rights of women, and participants' suggestions for financial support to widows.

Chapter 5 comprises a summary of the research report, its conclusion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter rounds off what the researcher started in the introductory chapter, it conveys to the reader what the researcher has discovered in conducting the research and the worth of it (Hofstee 2006:155). In doing so, it consolidates the key message regarding the developing of an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo Province, regarding their widowhood. It also proffers suggestions on how social workers can render effective services to this vulnerable group. The chapter comprises of an introduction, the summary and conclusions of the research outcomes, the recommendations of the research and a conclusion of the chapter.

5.2 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The research report is summarised, and conclusions are drawn about the general introduction to the study, the orientation of the study and the themes, the literature review, the research methodology employed in the study and the research findings and conclusions.

5.2.1 General introduction, orientation of the study relating to the themes

In the general introduction and orientation to the study in Chapter 1, the concept of 'widowhood' is clarified as described in the literature by different authors and an overview is given of widowhood globally and nationally. The introduction of the study includes a description of the consequences of widowhood, such as the frequent loss of the widow's husbands' property or material possessions, especially in developing countries (Korang-Okrah & Haight, 2014:1). Widows across the world are regarded as the poorest of the poor because of cultural and religious, discrimination (Owen 2011:618). The death of a husband has an extra significance because it represents not simply the departure of a partner, a friend and breadwinner, but it also results into a radical change in a woman's social status and lifestyle (Azumah & Nachinaab

2018:44). The hardships experienced by widows in different societies, such as the issue of having to adhere to cultural rituals for widows, that may be seen as disrespectful towards widows, stigmatising, oppression and isolation from the community with suspicious attitudes of family members, as if they have killed their husbands are pointed out by researchers (Baloyi 2017; Tasie 2013:159).

The rationale for this study was motivated by the observations regarding the social work services rendered to widows when the researcher was employed by the Department of Social Development in Limpopo Province. The fact that limited research was available in social work and general literature regarding the topic of this study, justified the undertaking of this study to assist social workers with suggestions and guidelines in rendering services to the widows in Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo.

Two theoretical frameworks were adopted for this study, the strength-based perspective and social justice theory. The strength-based perspective focussed on the widows from a perspective of acknowledging and recognising their skills, internal and external resources, positive relationships and community support, rather than focussing only on their limitations, problems and insufficient resources. The social justice theory assists the researcher in recognising the importance of the rights and fair treatment of all persons, but especially widows in society, who are seen as a vulnerable population group and who are frequently subjected to prejudicial attitudes, unfair treatment and practices and oppressive behaviour. Bearing this in mind, Dube (2019:97) postulated that a new social injustice concept of 'widowism' can be articulated to explain the abuse, oppression, discrimination and dehumanising experiences widows may experience because of widowhood. The contributing aspects of the two theoretical frameworks to the study are the multidimensional perspectives applicable, not only focussing on the identifying of the challenges the widows experienced, but also on their positive experiences, strengths and coping strategies and keeping in mind how social injustice can influence the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows dealing with widowhood.

A qualitative research approach and a phenomenological research design, complemented by an explorative, descriptive and contextual strategy of inquiry were

employed and assisted the researcher to explore the in-depth experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows in Mavalani. The research questions in this study were as follows:

- What are the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood of the women in Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province?
- What suggestions are to be made for social work practice in rendering services to the widows in the Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province?

In doing the research, the researcher collected the data by means of conducting face-to-face interviews with 13 participants residing in Mavalani village. They were interviewed about their experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood.

In order to deal with the research problem and find answers to the research questions, the research goal was formulated to –

- develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood of the woman in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo; and
- proffer suggestions for social work practice in rendering services to women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo Province regarding their widowhood.

The research goal of the study was accomplished by addressing the research objectives of this study which were to -

- explore and describe the nature of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood;
- describe the findings regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo, regarding their widowhood; and
- draw conclusions and make recommendations about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood and proffer suggestions about it for social work practice.

In exploring the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo province regarding their widowhood, the following themes emerged from the data analysis:

- The widows' experiences of widowhood.
- Widows' accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood.
- Widows' accounts of their coping strategies to cope with the challenges of widowhood.
- The participants' advice to other widows on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood.
- The participants' suggestions regarding social work practice to women in widowhood.

The themes were narrowed down into sub-themes and categories. The themes regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of the women in Mavalani regarding widowhood, emerged as sub-themes and categories which answered the first research question relating to the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood of the women in Mavalani, as follows:

- **Experiences of women of Mavalani village regarding their widowhood**
 - Loss of social status: The experiences of losses because of widowhood, included the loss of status as a married woman. The widows experienced that because of various factors like the community's cultural and religious beliefs, the loss of their marital status being replaced by the status of widowhood was experienced as having lowered their status, with certain consequences. The community's attitudes and perceptions of widowhood are imbedded in long historical and cultural traditions, which include the belief that widows may have caused the death of their husbands. These traditional beliefs of the Mavalani community caused the widows to experience discrimination and oppression from the community.
 - The widows experienced financial losses due to their widowhood. Cultural and societal expectations of the traditional roles of women being homemakers and child bearers are still evident in the Mavalani community.

This and the lack of further education of some of the widows presented a struggle for them to find formal employment with a stable financial income.

- The widows were subjected to changes in relationships with people because of their widowhood. The relationships influenced were their relationship with their family-in-laws and revolve around the inheritance system which many times exclude women and widows from inheriting the property of their deceased husbands. Some of the widows had negative experiences with their parents-in-law, like property disputes and accusations of them having killed their spouses. The relationships they built while their husbands were still alive changed to the extent that the participants reported that their in-laws no longer talk to them or visit them. Another change in relationships experienced by widows is their relationships with friends in the community. Community perceptions are shaped by the traditional beliefs which include that a widow is now a single woman and may pose a threat to her married friends' husbands.
 - The widows experienced support from various structures which included their biological family, some friends and colleagues, neighbours, and church members. These support structures supported them in various ways which included emotional support, financial support, spiritual support and food parcels.
 - The experience of the widows regarding the adherence to, or their non-compliance with traditional rituals, is a complicated subject from a cultural perspective. Viewing these rituals as abusive and oppressive, most widows in this study did not comply with the traditional rituals for widows. The traditional rituals were also perceived as having increased stress and causing depression for the widows.
- **Challenges the women of Mavalani village experienced associated with widowhood**
 - The challenges the widows experienced relate to the community's negative perceptions of widowhood that included disrespect and stigmatization of widows being a threat to other women's husbands. This contributed to the widows' feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and that their dignity as a person was affected.

- Another challenge the widows experienced is the struggle for financial independence and stability. Unemployment, low educational qualifications which influenced the chances of employment, and insufficient income because of having to accept informal employment only, are some of the challenges widows experienced to provide substantially for their households. Widows may also be desperate and succumb to risky sexual behaviour to be financially supported, thereby increasing their risk of contracting HIV and AIDS.
- The challenge regarding the maintaining of positive relationships, especially regarding disciplining of their children, was a challenge for the widows. This was caused by the perception that the husband is the head of the household and the primary figure in disciplining the children, which created a challenge for the widows to discipline the children without the deceased father.
- Several of the widows perceived challenges in engaging in intimate relationships with other men after the death of their husbands. Most of the widows were not interested in starting new relationship with other men due to various reasons. One of the reasons provided was that they did not feel ready to start a new relationship with another male. In some of the cases this was based on their previous relationships, where the widows experienced abuse from their late husbands. Another reason is that the widows were afraid to engage in new relationships because they feared that maybe the men had other motives to get involved with them because of the money or property left to them by their deceased husbands. Some of the widows furthermore perceived that they were not treated with respect by their new partners.
- **Coping strategies of the widows of Mavalani village in dealing with their challenges.**

The widows narrated applying various coping strategies that enabled them to survive and cope after the death of their husbands. Most widows indicated that they rely on their spirituality and religion as a coping strategy. Counselling from

social workers and psychologists was also identified as a coping strategy assisting the widows with the challenges and adjustment after the death of their husbands. The widows reported seeking support from their family members, friends and colleagues by sharing and discussing their problems with them. The widows also used self-motivation and maintaining positive attitudes and kept themselves busy with various tasks to carry on with their normal functioning as strategies of coping with the feelings and challenges of widowhood.

The research question regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies was addressed in a synopsis of the abovementioned conclusions drawn from the findings of analysing the data collected.

The second research question about the suggestions to be made for social work practice in rendering services to widows in the Mavalani, Mopani District, Limpopo Province, was answered based on the research findings obtained from the participants addressed in two themes. The first theme, namely the participants' accounts of advice for other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood, has two sub-themes and categories. The first sub-theme is described as the widows' accounts of advice to other widows regarding the acceptance of their loss. The second sub-theme consists of the participants' accounts regarding the advice on managing relationships, which has two categories namely the advice of widows regarding how to manage relationships with other male partners and managing relationships with their children. The second theme comprises the suggestions the widows made for social work practice regarding the assisting of widows. The three sub-themes which emerged here are their suggestions on counselling and support for widows, recommendations regarding community education about women rights and recommendations regarding financial support for widows.

The suggestions to be made for social work practice in rendering services to widows in the Mavalani are based on the widows' accounts of advice for other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood and their suggestions for social work practice regarding widowhood entailed the following:

- **The widows of Mavalani village's accounts of advice for other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood**

The widows' accounts on advice to other widows to address their challenges in their everyday life include having to accept their loss. By accepting their loss, widows can face the reality of their present circumstances, attach meaning to their loss and focus on planning their future. The widows included advice for widows about relationships with male partners, such as having to be careful not to get involved too soon and firstly to complete the grieving process. They must also keep in mind how they are going to adjust with a new partner and the motives of a male partner to get involved with them. Some of the widows advised that it is important for widows to become financially independent to provide for their children and to keep open and effective communication channels open with their children to support them with the challenges they experience after the death of their fathers. The participants also mentioned that widows need to ensure that if they get engaged in a relationship again, that their children will be and are involved in the process to build a positive relationship with the new partner.

- **Suggestions of widows of Mavalani village for social work practice regarding dealing with widowhood**

Widows in Mavalani village reported a lack of sufficient support and services received from social workers, suggesting that social workers should provide them with counselling, support and debriefing sessions on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood. The widows further reported that they were not aware of their human rights. Therefore, it is relevant and essential for social workers to supply the community with the necessary education and information regarding widowhood and women's rights. Programmes to address and increase gender sensitivity and reduce discrimination and oppressive actions against women, need to be presented in the community. Participants also suggested that social workers should provide widows with social relief, especially to widows who are unemployed and without any income. The widows' recommendation in this regard, referred to the need for an amendment to change the Government's policy regarding social relief to include this

vulnerable group in the receiving of a social relief grant. The assistance with food parcels were also suggested by the widows.

To summarise: the answers to the two research questions developed at the outset of this study, were obtained from the five themes, their sub-themes and categories identified in analysing the data obtained during the research interviews with the widows in the Mavalani village, Mopani district Limpopo Province.

The research goals of the study were accomplished by addressing the research objectives of this study which were to -

- explore and describe the nature of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood;
- describe the findings regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo, regarding their widowhood; and
- draw conclusions and make recommendations about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo regarding their widowhood and proffer suggestions about it for social work practice.

The research objectives of this study were achieved as follows:

- **Exploring the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani regarding their widowhood.**

The researcher explored the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in the Mavalani village by collecting data through conducting face-to-face interviews with the participants with the aid of an interview guide comprising of open ended questions. The interviewing skills of clarification, active listening and probing were implemented during the interviews, with an in-depth exploration of the challenges and coping strategies regarding the participants' widowhood. The researcher collected data until she was satisfied that she had reached the point of data saturation after

interviewing 13 participants. In exploring the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of the widows regarding their widowhood, the data were collected, analysed and presented as findings in Chapter 4. After the data analysis the themes, sub-themes and categories emerged regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows in Mavalani, Mopani District in Limpopo province as already discussed (see section 4.3 and Table 4.2) and will be concluded in section 5.2.4

The use of the data collection methods and tools chosen for this study and the interview protocol used, enabled the researcher to collect in-depth information to address and meet the first research objective, of exploring the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women regarding widowhood in Mavalani village.

- **Describing the findings regarding the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani regarding their widowhood.**

The findings related to the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women regarding their widowhood, have been presented and described in detail (see section 4.3 and Table 4.2) and will be concluded in section 5.2.4.

The women's experiences regarding their widowhood had been described under theme 1 in Chapter 4, with a detailed report on the findings, to meet the description of this objective. The participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood are reported under theme 1, sub-theme 1.1 with its two categories which are the loss of status as a married woman and the financial losses because of widowhood (4.3.1). The participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood are reported under theme 1, sub-theme 1.2 with its applicable categories, namely changes experienced in the relationships with the family-in-law and changes experienced regarding friendships in the community. The participants' experiences of social support with its applicable categories are reported under theme 1, sub-theme 1.3. The participants' experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals and its applicable categories of the adherence of the widows to the traditional rituals or not, are reported under theme 1, sub-theme 1.4.

The women's challenges regarding their widowhood are described under theme 2 in Chapter 4. The participants' descriptions in relation to the challenges they have experienced are divided in three sub-themes, namely the community's perception of widowhood, their descriptions of challenges of gaining financial independence, and challenges to maintain relationships. Participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships as a sub-theme, are further described in categories of relationships with their children regarding discipline and engaging in new romantic relationships.

The research objective was met in describing the coping strategies that women used to deal with their widowhood challenges. Participants' accounts on employing religion and spirituality as coping strategies, are described under theme 3, sub-theme 3.1. Participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy and of support from families and others as coping strategies are reported, as well as the participants' accounts on self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied.

Participants' advice to other widows and suggestions for social workers regarding social work service delivery, are described in themes 4 and 5, with their sub-themes and categories (see section 4.3 and Table 4.2). In describing the findings, it can be concluded that by relating the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows in Mavalani village, the second research objective was met.

- **Drawing conclusions and making recommendations about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women in Mavalani regarding their widowhood and proffering of suggestions for social work practice.**

In Chapter 1 conclusions are drawn relating to the general introduction, the research questions, goal and objectives of the study (5.2). Conclusions regarding the application of the research methodology, the research methods used, and the research findings discussed in Chapter 4, are drawn in this chapter (see 5.2.3 and 5.2.4). The conclusions and recommendations are presented in this last chapter regarding the final findings of the study.

5.2.2 Literature review

The literature review focused on understanding widowhood, culture and widowhood, rituals and mourning, implications of widowhood, implications of the patriarchal system in widowhood practices, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood and international and national legislation for the protection of widows in South Africa.

The background and an understanding of the phenomenon of widowhood is provided in terms of various belief systems and rituals in several communities. Widowhood is one of the major social problems recognised in African societies, especially relating to widows from disadvantaged backgrounds. The researcher explored the understanding of widowhood in the literature, dealing with different concepts such as widow practices and widow rituals as defined and described different authors.

The practices performed in the process of grieving and the traditional rituals performed by widows internationally and in African and South African communities, are diverse. Different ethnic groups in South Africa further have dissimilar cultural widowhood rituals and practices. This study focused on the Mavalani village in the Mopani district in Limpopo province, and the participants were widows from the Tsonga ethnic group living in Mavalani village. The literature review included dealing with the widowhood practices in the Tsonga cultural group. The following synopsis describes the traditional customs and practices followed by widows in the Tsonga culture:

- In the lives of the Tsonga speaking people of South Africa, the ancestors play an important role.
- A widow is expected to be submissive, respectful and avoid arguments with other people until the mourning period which lasted up to twelve months, is over.
- After the death of a husband, a widow must adhere to certain cultural rites of the community concerned, for instance she would have to cut her hair, wear black clothes and cut her nails under the guidance of the older women in the community.

- After the death of the husband or the head of the family, Tsonga widows need to remove the grass cap of the hut (house) and they would take its grass to be a carpet for the widow to sit on. Presently the practice is replaced by sitting on a matras.
- A widow is not allowed to use the same gate entrance with all the members of the family, she is supposed to use her own gate or jump the small walls made around the huts or houses which is called (*maguva*) to go outside.
- A widow needs to adhere to certain cleansing rituals like 'washing off' bad luck in a river and to be purified may have to be involved in a sexual rite with a male identified by the parents-in-law.
- Women are still suspected of killing their husbands. These suspicions of widows killing their husbands have negative results among the Tsonga widows. This could include being disowned by their husband's family and other widow's, resulting in widows losing their livelihoods and property.

A background of the patriarchal system is provided, whereby the power relationship is described as being not equal between women and men. The system automatically oppresses and disadvantages women in society, especially widows within the African family system. The literature review highlighted that some communities in countries such as South Africa, still practice certain customs and traditions which may result in oppressive and discriminative traditional practices towards widows. Widows may also experience disputes regarding their husbands' assets and have to deal with certain negative traditional perceptions communities may have regarding widows, which further complicate widows' challenges regarding their widowhood.

The literature review also discussed the challenges of widowhood which include challenges on psychological, social, economic and health levels. Widows are considered as a vulnerable and disadvantaged group in societies around the world. In certain South African communities, they are subjected to socio-economic, religious, cultural, emotional, physical and sexual abuse within their families and communities. Therefore, the theoretical framework which underlined this study, comprising of the social justice theory and the strength-based perspective, is applicably integrated with the literature review, pointing out the importance of practising social work from a strength-based perspective and social justice framework.

Coping strategies of widows in different communities may include positive and negative coping strategies. Positive coping strategies may include seeking employment to provide for the family, remarrying, and requiring support from family and community members and organisations. Negative coping strategies could include risky sexual behaviour to receive financial assistance to survive, wishful thinking, social withdrawal, self-criticism and begging and exploitation of their children to beg, to meet the basic survival needs of the families of widows. Other coping strategies may also be expressing emotions, cognitive restructuring and seeking social support.

The researcher also explored and discussed the international and national legislation that protect widows in South Africa in detail, such as that prescribed by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) (1948), the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996: Chapter 2) and the Commission on Gender Equality (2013). The literature control assisted the researcher to justify the findings of this study by comparing relevant applicable information from different authors and studies.

5.2.3 Research methodology employed in the study

The research methodology provided the researcher with the procedures to be followed in addressing the research problem and how to get answers to the research question. The two research questions of this study were answered through the findings of this study, and the three research objectives of this study (see 5.2.1) assisted the researcher to achieve the research goal to explore and describe in depth the experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood among women of Mavalani village and to draw conclusions and make recommendations for social work practice from the findings of the study.

The qualitative research approach was used to explore and describe the women of Mavalani Village's experiences, challenges and coping strategies with regards to their widowhood. The study was sensitive in nature and the qualitative approach assisted

the researcher to explore the participants' real-life experiences of which little were known, in-depth. Applying the qualitative research approach enabled the researcher to collect data from the participants by using semi-structured interviews as the data collection method to ask open ended questions compiled in an interview guide. The qualitative approach enabled the researcher to tap into the women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding widowhood. This approach was also chosen because it is well suited for answering the research questions to get in-depth information from the participants about their real-life experiences.

The researcher employed the phenomenological design, complemented by an explorative, descriptive and contextual strategy of inquiry to achieve the objectives. A phenomenological research design was applied in this study to allow the researcher to fully understand and describe the experiences of the women of Mavalani village's challenges and coping strategies about their widowhood. With the exploratory research design the researcher was able to obtain a new insight and a better understanding of the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of women's regarding their widowhood. The descriptive research design enabled the researcher to describe women's experiences and challenges regarding widowhood, their coping strategies employed to cope with their widowhood challenges and how they would like to be assisted by social workers in social work practice. The contextual design allowed the researcher to better understand the women experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood in their natural environment within their context which included their cultural and beliefs.

Applying the strength-based perspective as a theoretical framework enabled the researcher to understand that participants have the capacity to realise their innate potential to deal and cope with their challenges. Using the social justice theory, the second theory applied in this research, to underline the framework of the study, enabled the researcher to understand that in the light of the injustice practices and dehumanising behaviours, discrimination and oppression suffered by widows, social workers should advocate on behalf of widows to create better living environment for widows. The application of theoretical framework in the form of the the strength-based

perspective and the social justice theory assisted the researcher in proffering the necessary suggestions for social work practice regarding widowhood.

The researcher was granted permission to conduct the study by the Social Work Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa, on 20 February 2021. A sample of 13 widows of Mavalani village were selected and interviewed in the study when data saturation was reached. The purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants with first-hand experience and knowledge of widowhood, who could provide rich information about the research subject, meeting the criteria of inclusion discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.8.3). The use of the snowball sampling technique enabled the researcher to gain access to women who have experienced widowhood.

The researcher conducted this study during the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, she ensured that she adhered to all Unisa's Covid-19 protocols for participants to feel safe and free to express their feelings and thoughts (see section 3.5.1). The researcher was granted verbal permission by the headman of Mavalani village to conduct the study in Mavalani village. The researcher contacted the first participant referred by the headman telephonically, keeping in mind the inclusion criteria, to introduce the study and to make an appointment with her to explain the purpose, benefits, risks and content of the study, resulting in getting informed consent in writing from the participant to participate in the study (see Addenda B and C). The first participant referred the researcher to another possible participant, who in turn referred the researcher to other possible participants, and so forth, thereby employing the snowball sampling technique. The abovementioned procedure was repeated for each participant. Subsequently, appointments were made with prospective participants who were willing to participate in the study. Arrangements were made with them, regarding the venues and times suitable for them to be interviewed. On the days of the appointments, Covid-19 protocols were adhered to, such as screening and sanitising before and after the meeting, wearing face masks, and maintaining social distancing.

The method of data collection was face-to-face semi-structured interviews assisted with an interview guide (see Addendum I) to keep the interview focused and keeping

flexibility in mind to assist the researcher in collecting rich data. Discussing the open-ended questions in the interview guide enabled the researcher to explore all aspects of the women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies regarding their widowhood.

The interviewing skills used by the researcher included clarification, active listening and probing that were implemented to ensure that the interview process was productive. The asking of follow-up questions during the interviews to obtain clear statements from participants was important (Greeff 2011:345). Active listening assisted the researcher to pay attention during the interviews by maintaining eye contact. Probing allowed participants to elaborate their answers (Babbie 2016; Creswell & Creswell 2018:191). All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants, by using an audio recorder. Subsequently the interviews recorded on the audio recorder were transcribed. The duration of all interviews was approximately 45 minutes to an hour per interview.

By pilot testing the interview guide, using the semi-structured interview guide was pre-tested on two voluntary participants who shared similar characteristics to the intended research participants' and who met the inclusion criteria. They did not form part of the study sample and the data obtained from them were not used in the research. The pilot test assisted the researcher in identifying potential problems and areas that led to the research instrument being adjusted. During the pilot testing, the researcher ensured that she adhered to the Covid-19 protocol.

The methods of data analysis in qualitative research include obtaining an understanding of the phenomenon under study by the use of classification, interconnections and descriptions of the data to enable the researcher to interpret, explain and understand the data collected (Graue 2015:8). In analysing the data, the researcher applied the eight steps of qualitative data analysis proposed by Tesch (cited in Creswell 2014:196). After the independent coder completed the analyses, the researcher and the supervisor discussed the preliminary themes identified and compared it with the researcher's analyses. After consensus was reached about the themes, their sub-themes and categories were finalised. Five themes with sub-themes

and categories were identified during the process of data analysis. The methods of data analysis assisted the researcher to identify and group narrative data into themes, sub-themes and categories containing meaningful information.

The assessment of the trustworthiness of a study in qualitative research is crucial to validate the research findings (Nieuwenhuis 2016:123). The model of Lincoln and Guba (in Lietz & Zayas 2010:190) was employed to make use of various strategies to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability were used to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. Therefore, researcher applied persistent observation, prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checking, 'thick' descriptions of the data, independent coding and the full description of the research process in this study to ensure it.

Ethical clearance to undertake the research was obtained from the Scientific Review Committee of the Department of Social Work at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (see Addendum E). Obtaining this ethical clearance is vital as it is the first important aspect regarding the application of ethical principles in research (see Addendum E). Widows are recognised as a vulnerable population group regarding research ethics. Therefore, the researcher ensured that she proceeded with extra caution to protect participants from any harm or exploitation in this research. The researcher paid strict attention to maintain the principles of anonymity and confidentiality to this vulnerable population group, ensuring that they were able to make an autonomous decision to voluntarily participate in the study or not to participate in the study. She adhered to the necessary principles of ethical research which is informed consent, confidentiality, privacy, anonymity, and debriefing, managing and protecting data to safe guide the well-being of the research participants (see section 3.8).

5.2.4 Research findings and conclusions

This section provides a summary and conclusions based on the data analysis as comprehensively discussed in Chapter 4. The 13 participants comprised of women (widows) meeting the selection criteria, who were identified and recruited to be part of the study. The participants' ages were between 33 and 65 years. Four participants

were between 33 and 50 years old, seven were between 50 and 60 years, and two were older than 60, aged 64 and 65 years. The participants in this study were in different psychosocial developmental stages according to the psychosocial developmental stages of Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental model.

All 13 participants were from Mavalani village, Mopani district in Limpopo province and they were all widows from the Tsonga ethnic group. Six of the participants were employed. Two of the employed participants were employed as professional nurses, two participants as domestic workers, one participant as a cashier, and one participant was employed as a lay counsellor. Five participants were unemployed, and two participants were retired. South Africa is struggling with a high unemployment rate as reflected by the study where 38% of the participants were unemployed and only two of the participants were employed as professionals in the economic market. The literature confirmed that women may lack the skills and education to enter the professional and formal economy and are less likely to achieve work satisfaction and self-growth because of the historical, institutional and systematic challenges of patriarchy and gender discrimination practices.

The 13 participants had between one to seven children each. Most of the participants had dependents or children who still needed to be taken care of, and this was one of the burdens the participants faced since the death of their husbands. Six of the thirteen participants did not complete their matric or grade 12, and only two of the employed participants had a professional tertiary qualification. Most of the participants have been widows from the age of 40 and four had already been widows under the age of thirty.

The following five themes were identified: participants' experiences of widowhood, participants' account of the challenges associated with widowhood; participants' account of their coping strategies to cope with the challenges of widowhood, participants' account of advice regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood and participants' suggestions for social workers to assist them regarding widowhood, with their sub-themes and categories. In summary, the themes, their sub-themes and categories, with the researcher's conclusions, entailed the following:

Theme 1: Participants experiences of widowhood

The first theme, its sub-themes and categories emerged from the participants' responses to the question posed to them about their experiences regarding their widowhood. The participants described various experiences they had of widowhood and four sub-themes with different categories were identified namely; participants' experiences of losses because of widowhood, participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood, participants' experiences of social support structures and participants' experiences regarding the performing of traditional rituals.

Sub-theme 1.1: Participants experiences of loss because of widowhood

The participants expressed various experiences of loss due to the passing of their loved one, like their loss of their social status as a married woman, and the financial losses after the death of their husbands.

a. The loss of social status as a married woman:

The participants revealed that they experienced a loss of their marital status as married women as the result of the death of their husbands. The widows perceived a loss of their marital status due to their widowhood, with the community awarding widows a lower status as married woman. The findings further revealed that widows find it difficult to continue life without their husbands, and to deal with the changes of their status or position in the society from being a wife to having become a widow. The widows not only lost a husband but also their companion, breadwinner, authoritative figure and the status in the community by being married. This belief of widows having a lesser status may be imbedded in the religious and cultural beliefs of communities that a woman is subordinated to men and the woman's status is subordinated to the status of her husband. The community's perceptions of widows perceiving widowhood as having a lesser status than married woman, may also be imbedded in certain cultural beliefs that widows may be part of the reasons for the death of their husbands, which further strengthen the difficulties for the widows to adjustment to widowhood. These traditional beliefs cause widows to experience discrimination and oppression from the community and family members because of being widows.

b. Financial losses: The participants experienced the loss of financial security or support after the death of their husbands as problematic.

Participants used to depend on their deceased husbands for financial support. Cultural and societal expectations of the traditional roles of women being homemakers and child bearers are still evident in the Mavalani community. Because of these cultural and societal expectations widows used to depend on their deceased husbands for financial support. Lack of job opportunities and the lack of further education of some of the widows, presented a struggle for them to find formal employment with a stable financial income. Eight of the participants in the study experienced a financial burden because five of them were unemployed, and three could only obtain informal employment positions and were depended on their late husbands for financial assistance. The researcher concluded that widows of Mavalani village are still tied to the cultural and societal expectations of the traditional roles which regard women role as that of child bearing and child rearing and to be responsible to take care of the household chores in the family, while men are considered to be the financial providers for the wife and the children. When the husband died, widows experienced financial loss which makes it difficult for widows to adjust well in their widowhood.

Sub-theme 1.2: Participants' experiences of changes in relationships because of widowhood

The second sub-theme included changes in relationships with family and community members for the participants after the death of their husbands. It was revealed that various issues lead to the change in relationships with friends in the community because of certain traditional beliefs. In addition, disputes regarding the deceased's property are one of the key issues experienced by participants which changed their relationships with their in-laws.

a. Changes experienced in the relationship with the family-in-law:

The participants experienced changes in their relationships with the family-in-laws after the death of their husband. These changes in their relationships with their family-in-law were caused by various issues such as disputes over the inheritance of their deceased husband's property. The traditional and cultural systems which exclude women to inherit their natal family properties also extend to widows. These conflicts in the family contributed to some of the participants having been evicted from their

homes, especially those participants who were still staying with their parents-in-law. The participants further experienced changes in their relationships with their parents-in-law because of the accusation of having killed their spouses. The good relationships participants had with their in-laws had deteriorated. Because of these accusations their in-laws are no longer talking to them or visiting them. Their interaction and care for one another had changed since the death of their husband. The researcher concluded that the belief that the husband's properties belong to the family-in-law in after the passing of the husband, also contributed to the disputes over the inheritance of the deceased's properties. The accusation that widows killed their husbands for material purposes, resulted that some of the widows were evicted by their family-in-law from their husband's home, with the consequences that widows struggled to build houses for them and their children due to lack of finances. The researcher further concluded that widows evicted from their husband's homes and the accusations of having killed their husbands, resulted in them being treated unfairly and suffering discrimination because of their status of being widows.

The strength-based perspective underlining this study, accentuated the importance of the social workers' role to identify, and enforce the widows' inherent strengths to deal with their challenges.

b. Changes experienced regarding friendships in the community:

The participants experienced loss of friendships and people close to them, after the death of their husbands. The loss and changes of their friendships and close people around the participants, were due to community perceptions that widows have a lesser status compared to married women. Some participants lost their friendships with married women due to the community's perception that as single woman, they pose a threat of stealing their friends' husbands. The researcher concludes that the Mavalani community is still shaped by the traditional belief that perceives widows or single females as lesser person compared to the married woman. This community perception that widows or single woman are a threat to their husbands, led to the discrimination of widows that continues to oppress widows in the period where the community should support widows rather than isolating and stigmatising them. The social justice theory, the other theoretical framework of this study, underlines the importance for social

workers to practice social work from a social justice perspective, which includes addressing these barriers of oppression and discrimination the widows experienced.

Sub-theme 1.3: Participants experiences of social support structures

The participants articulated that they received support from family and other people such as friends and colleagues, neighbours, and church members. The support received differed among the participants.

a. Participants experiences of social support from the family: Ten (76,9%) of the participants received emotional and instrumental support from their biological families. This included financial support to provide them with their everyday necessities, encouraging widows not to lose hope because of their loss and also through allowing widows to share their problems with their biological families for the latter to better understand their situation. Only two participants mentioned having received support from their family-in-laws during the funeral. Therefore, it is evident that most of the participants' families-in-law did not support them after their husbands' death. The researcher concludes that support received by participants from their biological families assisted widows to cope and to adjust with their widowhood challenges. Participants lacking social support from their family-in-laws made some of the widows turn to their biological families for social support.

b. Participants' experiences of social support from significant others: Some of the participants stated that their neighbours were very helpful to them and their families to assist them by sharing and lending what they needed after the death of their husband. The researcher arrived at the conclusion that the principle of *ubuntu* of sharing and having compassion was actualised towards the widows/participants by their neighbours through lending them food when they were in need. The relationships that widows have with their neighbours also contributed to the support they received from them after the death of their husbands.

The support participants received from friends and colleagues were financial support and emotional support. The participants considered this support helpful to cope with the challenges following the death of their husbands. Eight of the participants interviewed received support from their church members through their prayers,

financial contributions and the reading of the Scriptures from the Bible. Participants valued the spiritual support as it comforted and helped to heal them from the loss. It is concluded that spiritual support enhanced the wellbeing of widows and it is an important element for widows to help them cope with the challenges of widowhood. From the participants' experiences of support received, it can be concluded that participants received varying support from different people such as family, neighbours, friends, church members and colleagues. This support is considered helpful. It enabled them to cope better with their challenges of widowhood. The social worker's role will be to enhance the support structures of widows which can be identified as strength from a strength-based perspective framework.

Sub-theme 4: Participants' experiences regarding the construction of traditional rituals.

This sub-theme relates to the participants' experiences regarding the construction of traditional rituals. The participants shared their experiences about the traditional rituals that widows had to perform after the death of their husbands. Some of the participants in the study revealed that traditional rituals had to be performed to show respect to the elders of the family and to honour their deceased husbands. Only five participants adhered to the traditional rituals. In this sub-theme, two categories emerged, namely the experiences of participants who adhered to rituals and the experiences of participants who did not adhere to rituals.

a. Experiences of participants adhering to traditional rituals

The participants' accounts of adhering to the traditional rituals was another experience identified. The participants articulated that according to the Tsonga traditional rituals, they should not get involved in intimate relationships until they have completed their mourning period, are not allowed to be in a public place or attend any event and need to always bend their fingers and look down when speaking to people. When they completed their mourning period, a cleansing ritual has to be performed to remove the bad luck. Some of the traditional rituals participants adhered to after the death of their husbands according to the prescribed Tsonga rules as part of the mourning rites, required them to sit on a mattress and wear mourning clothes for a period of 6 or 12 months.

The researcher concluded that widows' adherence to the traditional rituals was to appease their family-in-laws, to be regarded as a respectful person who respect culture and fear that if they are not cleansed, bad things will follow them and their children. Some of the widows adhered to the traditional rituals to prove to their family-in-laws that they did not kill their husband so that they can be given their husband's inheritance. Some of these traditional rituals, like not being allowed to be in public spaces, increased the stress, stigma and loneliness of the widows. From a social justice framework, it can be concluded that social workers need to educate communities regarding the negative effects of traditional rituals on widows and advocate for widows who do not want to adhere to these traditional rituals.

b. Experiences of participants for non-adhering to traditional rituals

The participants who did not follow the traditional rituals indicated various reasons for not adhering to the rituals. Some of the participants mentioned that they did not believe in the traditional rituals, and some participants were of opinion that rituals are a waste of time without any benefits. The traditional rituals were perceived as increasing stress and depression for the widows, while some of the participants were of the opinion that it is a form of abuse. Another reason mentioned by participants for not adhering to the rituals, was because of their religious beliefs, for example Christianity lets them decide not to adhere to the traditional rituals because it is against their spiritual beliefs. At the same time, they had to make their families or parents understand and be aware about their decision not to adhere to the traditional rituals.

Therefore, the researcher concluded that the widows' adherence or not to the traditional rituals also depends on the person's belief such as her religious belief and the perceptions widows have with regards to the traditional rituals. Widows had to ensure that they explained to the families or parents the reason for them not to adhere to the traditional rituals because of the fear to be seen as disrespecting their family-in-laws and the community for not adhering to the traditional rituals. The decision of most of the participants not to adhere to the traditional rituals, may indicate that widows in some communities are in a process to embrace their rights to be seen as equal to men and not to be subjected to oppressive rituals. From a social justice framework, a social

worker will address the inequalities and discrimination against widows in communities by educating and advocating for the rights of women and widows.

Theme 2: Participants' accounts of the challenges associated with widowhood

The second theme addressed the participants' accounts of challenges associated with widowhood. The three sub-themes that emerged in this theme were participants' accounts of the challenges regarding the community perceptions of widowhood, participants' accounts of challenges in relations to financial independence and, participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships. From the last sub-theme, participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships, emerged two categories, namely challenges to adopt a disciplinary role in the relationships with the children and challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships

Sub-theme 2.1: Participants' accounts of challenges regarding the community perceptions of widowhood

The participants had various challenges in the community regarding community members' perceptions of widowhood. The community members' perception of widowhood included the showing of disrespectful behaviour towards participants after the death of their husbands. Some of the participants mentioned that disrespectful behaviour from the community members to them, included stealing from them because the culprits knew that they no longer have the protection from the husband and another disrespectful behaviour from the community members is changing the way community members used to communicate with widows before their husband passed away. Negative conduct towards widows from community members is the labelling of widows as being unfaithful to the community and perceiving widows as a threat that may steal another women's husband. These negative perceptions towards widows made some of the participants feel uncomfortable, socially isolated and finding it difficult to live in the community.

It was concluded that the community members' negative perceptions and conduct towards widows, contributed to the challenges widows encountered in their everyday life. It affected them emotionally and psychologically to the extent that widows felt not

free to live in the community. The researcher concluded that the patriarchal system, religious system and culture also contributed negatively to the lives of the widows. Because their husbands are deceased, they now felt that with their husbands' death they lost the protection, dignity and respect brought about by their husbands. The traditional patriarchal system, religious system and culture also contributed to the community members' perceptions to perceive a widow as a lesser person who is incomplete without her husband.

Sub-theme 2.2: Participants' accounts of challenges regarding financial independence

It is evident that participants of this study struggled for financial independence to provide and support their children. The participants made efforts to find employment to be financially independent, but these efforts were mostly unsuccessful. Some of the participants resorted to work as domestic workers and some as volunteers without any income. The lack of job opportunities providing an income for the widows, led some of them into prostitution for financial benefit, risking themselves in contracting HIV and AIDS. For the participants who were in informal employment, their jobs did not provide substantially for their families. The researcher concluded that widows' educational levels which influence their employment opportunities also played a key role for widows not having been employed, because of their low educational levels. The researcher also concluded that widows should be encouraged to reconstruct their challenges into opportunities to realise their potential by developing new skills that will assist them to be financial independent and be able to support their children.

Sub-theme 2.3: Participants' accounts of the challenges of maintaining relationships

The participants' account of challenges in maintaining relationships was another factor identified. This sub-theme is divided in two categories that entail the challenges regarding adopting a disciplinary role in the relationship with the children and challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships.

a. Challenges to adopt a disciplinary role in the relationships with the children

The additional family role and responsibility of having to take over the responsibilities of their late husbands, is one of the challenges they encountered. The extra family roles and responsibilities include maintaining relationships with their children, especially with regards to disciplining and guiding them in the absence of their father. The participants in the study also accepted the perceptions that their deceased husband was a figure of authority, which made it easier for the husband to discipline the children. Now that the husband is deceased, it makes it difficult for the widows to adjust into their new roles in their family. Hence, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that widows find it difficult to accept their new roles and responsibilities in disciplining their children. The reason being that is because of the cultural perception women are regarded as subordinated and as the carer who is unable to discipline children as a figure of authority like the father. Social workers can encourage and enable widows from a strength-based perspective by assisting them to identify their strengths to fulfil the different roles they have after the death of their husbands and be able to discipline their children in a constructive way.

b. Challenges in engaging in new romantic relationships

Several widows in the study struggled to engage in intimate relationships after the death of their husbands, due to various reasons. Some of the reasons provided by the widows are based on their previous relationships where they experienced abuse from their deceased husbands. Others were not ready to start a new relationship with other men. The two widows, who started new relationships, perceived that they were not treated with respect by their new partners. Other reasons why the widows were afraid to engage in a new relationship were because they feared that the men perhaps had other motives to get involved with them, because they assumed that they have money or because of the property left to them by their deceased husband. Due to these reasons, some widows feared of experiencing similar situations if they engage in new relationships.

The researcher concludes that some of the widows were still emotionally attached to their deceased husband and felt were not ready to move on to new relationships with other men. The researcher also concluded that the relationships widows had with their

deceased husbands contributed to how widows perceived engaging in new romantic relationships in future. Social workers can educate and support widows from a strength-based perspective regarding becoming involved in romantic relationships and from a social justice framework, to deal with the importance of not getting stuck in traditional roles allocated to women and men in society.

Theme 3: Participants' accounts of their coping strategies to cope with the challenges of widowhood

This theme is about exploring how widows cope with the challenges they experience after the deaths of their husbands. Four sub-themes were identified as coping strategies used by widows in this regard, namely participants' accounts of their religion and spirituality as a coping strategy, participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy, participants' accounts of support from family and others as a coping strategies and participants' accounts of the role of self-motivation and keeping themselves busy as a coping strategy. These coping strategies entailed the following:

Sub-theme 3.1: Participants' accounts on religion and spirituality as a coping strategy

Ten widows in the study relied on their spirituality and religion as a coping strategy. Religion was regarded as the most important coping strategy employed by widows to cope with the challenges of widowhood to support and empower them to face their challenges after the death of their husbands. Widows relied on prayer, reading of the Scriptures from the Bible and the spiritual support from fellow church members in order to cope with the loss of their husbands and the adjustment of being widowed. Some of the widows felt more content and comforted after communicating through prayer with God about their problems. The researcher concluded that widow's spirituality and religion play an important role in comforting and assisting them to adjust in dealing with their loss and their widowhood challenges. The importance of this conclusion is that social workers need to activate and involve religious organisations and churches in supporting widows regarding widowhood.

Sub- theme 3.2: Participants' accounts of counselling as a coping strategy

The participants' responses highlighted the importance of counselling by social workers and psychologists. They confirmed that it assisted them to cope with the challenges experienced and the adjustment to be made after the death of their husbands. Further counselling sessions with social workers and psychologists made participants to understand, accept and deal with the concept of bereavement. The participants stated that counselling brought hope and strength in their lives and assisted them to be able to face their new challenges as widows.

The researcher concluded that it is important for widows to seek counselling sessions with professionals such as social workers and psychologists to receive assistance to facilitate their process of healing and to cope in their situations after the death of their husbands. Social workers need to be knowledgeable regarding the specific needs and struggles widows are experiencing to assist them effectively.

Sub-theme 3.3: Participants' accounts of support from family and others as a coping strategy

The study findings revealed that five participants resorted to seeking support from their family members, friends and colleagues by sharing and discussing their problems with them as a coping strategy. However, taking into consideration the number of participants who received support from friends and family, it is evident that support from family and others to them were limited. The researcher concluded that allowing participants to share their challenges and experiences would help them to emotionally release their stress and assist them to heal from their loss. Hence, social workers can establish support groups for widows to be able to share their experiences with one another and be supported through their journey.

Sub-theme 3.4 Participants' accounts on self-motivation and keeping themselves occupied as their coping strategies

Self-motivation was mentioned by some of the participants in the study as a way to cope with widowhood challenges. Participants encouraged themselves to be strong and to be positive despite all the challenges and experiences they have been through after the death of their spouses. Some of the participants in the study used self-talk to

motivate themselves to alleviate widowhood stressors. The type of chores identified by some participants in this study to keep themselves busy as their coping strategies, were to do farming and sell vegetables. They said that apart from these activities providing food and an income, they also did it to keep themselves busy in order to cope with the challenges of widowhood, while other participants resorted to working hard at the workplace to avoid stress associated with widowhood.

The researcher concluded that self-motivation, keeping themselves busy to avoid being overwhelmed with the stressors and challenges of widowhood and positive self-talk, enabled participants to continue with their day to day activities rather than to focus on their widowhood challenges. From a strength-based perspective, the social worker engaging with widows can use a positive self-talk strategy as strength and as an empowerment tool to assist widows dealing with widowhood.

Theme 4: Participants' accounts of advice to other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood

In the participants' accounts of their advice to other widows regarding dealing with the challenges of widowhood, two sub-themes were identified. These sub-themes were participants' accounts to other widows about the acceptance of their loss and participants accounts about managing relationships, which consisted of the following:

Sub-theme 4.1: Participants' accounts of advice to other widows about the acceptance of their loss

The participants' accounts of advice to other widows to address their challenges in their everyday life, included dealing with the acceptance of their loss. By accepting their loss, widows can face the reality of their present circumstances and attach meaning to their loss and focus on the planning of their future. Four participants' advice to widows was to first accept the death of their husbands to be able to continue with their lives. The researcher concluded that it is important for widows to accept the death of their husbands to overcome their pain of loss and be able to plan about their new future, goals and responsibilities without their husband.

Sub-theme 4.2: Participant's accounts regarding advice about managing of relationships

One of the recommendations from the participants to other widows was giving advice about managing relationships to them. Under this sub-theme, two categories emerged, namely managing relationships with other male partners and managing relationships with their children.

a. Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with other male partners

Participants' advice to other widows is that they should be careful to engage to soon in relationships with male partners. One participant in the study also warned that some of the male partners' may have ulterior motives to engage into a relationship with a widow, which could be the expectation that the widow inherited property and/or money from the deceased husband. Widows' advices to other widows in this regard is to first look at the motives of a male partner for getting involved with him and to contemplate how they would have to adjust to live with a new partner. They would also advise other widows were that they first need to complete their grieving process before engaging in relationships with a male partner. Therefore, widows need to carefully consider the motives of the new partner, how they would have to adjust to living with the new partner and how their relationship with the new partner is going to affect their children.

b. Participants' advice about how to manage relationships with their children

Participants' advice to widows on how to manage relationships with their children is that they need to learn the skills to have open communication regarding issues or challenges with their children. Some of the participants also mentioned that widows need to ensure that if they get engaged in a new relationship, their children must be involved in the process to build positive relationships with the new partner. Some of the participants articulated the importance of widows to grow to be financially independent by seeking employment to provide for their children. From the widows' advice about how widows should manage their relationships with their children, the researcher concluded that the importance of open communication with their children regarding all the issues widows face in their everyday lives, would help to reduce conflict in their families and assist widows to build strong parent-child relationships.

The researcher further concluded that widows would benefit from social workers assisting them with developing their parenting and relationship skills to empower their coping strategies with their children and when getting involved again in romantic relationships.

Theme 5: Participant's suggestions for social work practice regarding widowhood

The following three sub-themes emerged under the theme: participants' suggestions for social work practice regarding widowhood, namely participants' suggestions on counselling and support to women in widowhood, participants' recommendation for community education about the rights of women, and participants' recommendations regarding financial support to widows.

Sub-theme 5.1: Participants' suggestions on counselling and support to widows

Participants articulated the lack of enough support and services received from social workers, suggesting that social workers should provide widows with counselling, support and debriefing sessions on how to deal with the challenges of widowhood. Participants suggested that it is crucial for widows to receive counselling after the death of their husbands and during the grieving process, because it assists them to express their feelings about their loss and the challenges they experienced as widows. Some of the participants also suggested that social workers should support widows through the establishment of support groups for widows. Through support groups widows would have the opportunity to meet and share their experiences and challenges as widows with other widows. From the participants' suggestions, the researcher concluded that counselling and support services to widows are crucial in helping widows to cope with their new situations and to deal with the grieving process, adjustments and challenges they experience to adapt to their changed lifestyle without a husband.

Sub-theme 5.2: Participants' suggestions for community education about the rights of women

The participants indicated that due to the abuse they experienced from people in the community, the negative perceptions regarding widowhood and the behaviour and attitudes of their parents-in-law due to the lack of information and understanding about their rights, educating the community regarding the rights of women are essential in the Mavalani community. Therefore, participants suggested that it is important that social workers should conduct community education about the rights of women and various services social workers are able to offer to widows. Only a few widows in the study knew about their rights and they did not understand what these rights entail and how it can be exercised. The researcher concluded that programmes about women's rights, including programmes aimed at increasing gender sensitivity and reducing discrimination, need to be conducted in the community to empower and educate widows so that they can be able to stand for their rights rather than to be oppressed and discriminated against because of their status as widows.

Sub-theme 5.3: Participants' suggestions regarding financial support to widows

The participants suggested that social workers should be able to provide widows with social relief, especially widows who are unemployed with no income. The need for social relief, such as food parcels and financial support was mentioned by seven participants in the study to help them to provide for their families. From the participants' suggestions, the researcher concluded that the vulnerable group of widows without any income should be included in the policies to receive some form of financial assistance from the Government.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are based on the research findings of this study and the conclusions drawn by the researcher. Recommendations are made for social work with widows, social work education and continued professional development, and further and future research. The recommendations are based on the participants' contributions as identified in Chapter 4.

5.3.1 Recommendations for social work with widows

Based on the research results of this study regarding women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood, the following recommendations focused on the practice, programmes and policies for social work with widows are proffered:

- Considering the stigma, discrimination and oppression attached to widowhood in some communities, it is recommended that social workers should promote, and design programmes aimed at discouraging any form of abuse towards women and widows. With specific reference to the Mavalani community, developing programmes from a social justice framework, establishing community work projects focusing on women's and widows' rights, advocating and educating people regarding gender inequalities and social justice issues are needed.
- Social workers should enable widows to voice their suffering to facilitate awareness in the community and to motivate members of the community to address widows with respect and render support to them.
- In view of the lack of social support for widows, it is recommended that support groups for widows should be established and conducted regularly, addressing their grieving process, challenges and coping strategies with their adjustments.
- Some widows' relationships with their family-in-laws change due to disputes over their husband's properties and the accusation of them being responsible for killing their husbands. It is recommended that social workers should play the role of a mediator between the women and their family-in-laws in order to ensure that women's interests are considered, especially regarding the property left by their deceased husband.
- A policy review by the Government is recommended to institute a form of financial assistance or a social grant for widows. This should be within certain qualifying parameters and a means test to assist widows financially for a period of time after the death of their husbands.
- Considering that the widows experienced a lack of support and counselling from social workers, it is recommended that social workers should provide support and counselling to widows regarding their widowhood. Counselling and support

groups can also be established to give support regarding parenting and relationship issues.

- Social workers should in collaboration with legal consultants and financial institutions educate the communities about the legal and financial management.
- In view of the lack of knowledge about social work services rendered to widows, it is recommended that social workers should market their services through awareness campaigns in the community, to make widows aware of such services rendered by social workers.
- Based on the findings about participants' lack of financial independency or lack of employment opportunities, it is recommended that social workers should establish and promote programmes that aim at enhancing a sense of economic independence amongst women in practical terms, such as skills development projects and poverty alleviation programmes.
- In view of the community's negative perception of widowhood, it is recommended that educational programmes about the rights of women and gender discrimination should be presented to the community members to prevent ill treatment of widows in the community.
- It is recommended that workshops with the community leaders such as chiefs and headmen of villages, and church leaders should be conducted to make them aware of the challenges faced by widows and encourage them to emphasize the dignity and respect widows deserve as human beings, to the community members.
- Social workers need to be aware of the risks of HIV and AIDS as well as other health related issues imposed on widows and therefore, preventative health services in collaboration with health care organisations and practitioners are necessary.

5.3.2 Recommendations for social work education and continued professional development

The following recommendations are made for the education and continued professional development of social workers:

- Continuing professional development (CPD) training programmes focusing on social work with widows should be developed. Such workshops and seminars should educate social workers about widowhood and the challenges associated with the knowledge and skills on how to provide effective services to women in widowhood.
- Social workers need to be educated to be aware and knowledgeable regarding grief and complicated grief counselling as well as trauma counselling to assist this minority group.
- Workshops and seminars should be developed for social workers to be knowledgeable and sensitized regarding traditional practices and rituals of ethnic groups in South Africa and how to address gender inequalities and social justice issues in practice.
- As students, student social workers undergoing their practical social work training, should be sensitized about gender inequalities, discrimination, oppression and how to address such aspects from a social justice framework.

5.3.3 Recommendations for further and future research

Based on the research findings it is recommended that the following further research should be undertaken relating to women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood:

- A qualitative research study regarding widowhood that involves a larger research population should be undertaken. This research could for instance include the other four districts in Limpopo, which are Capricorn, Sekhukhune, Limpopo and Vhembe Districts. This would inform social work practice more comprehensively with additional information about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows and how they deal with it.
- Further research by means of a quantitative approach may be used in future research to obtain information and data about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of a bigger sample of widows to acquire insight into different perspectives of different ethnic groups. This would involve the use of a standardised procedure to collect numerical data and use statistical procedures to analyse and draw conclusions from the data to generalise women's

experiences, challenges and coping strategies of of being widows (Fouché & Delport 2011:63).

- Further research about women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood, implementing participatory action research (PAR) studies with communities could yield strategies and outcomes to address social injustices and gender inequalities regarding widows in rural communities, can be conducted.
- In addition, research studies investigating the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowers living in widowhood would inform social work practice regarding this group's experiences, challenges, and coping strategies and how to deal with it.

5.4 CONCLUSION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter of the research report presented summaries and conclusions made of each chapter. The recommendations for social work practice, training and education as well as for future research are provided. The study findings are summarised theme-by-theme from which conclusion and recommendations are based on the research findings.

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ADDENDUM A REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT THE STUDY

To: The Headman
Mavalani village (Block 6)
P O Box 108
Giyani
0826

Dear Headman, Mavalani

My name is Amandla Daphney Ngoveni and I am a student enrolled for a master's degree in Social Work at the University of South Africa. I am doing research with my supervisor Dr Elca Erlank, she is a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: **“Women’s experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani District, Limpopo Province”**.

Your village has been selected due to the increasing number of widows and the fact that a large number of cases of widows with social problems are reported at the Department of Social Development. This study is expected to collect important information that could contribute to the body of knowledge in service delivery in the field of social work about the experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widows and to suggest guidelines for effective social work intervention with such persons.

In view that you are well informed and knowledgeable about this topic, I kindly request you to participate in this study. The study is aimed at widows who are residing in your village in the Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province. The widows should be between the ages of 18- 65 years old and they should be widowed for at least one year. The researcher decided to undertake the study in this area because of the reported high case load of widows to be assisted by the Department of Social Development, when compared with other villages, and because the area is accessible and conveniently situated for the student to conduct the study.

It is expected that a maximum of about 15 participants will participate in the study and they will be interviewed individually. The study will entail face to face interviews with the widows that will be conducted at mutually agreed venues and on agreed times that will be confirmed in advance. It is estimated that an interview will last approximately one hour for each participant.

The university guidelines for conducting research studies require that the researcher is bound to the prescribed ethical principles, including obtaining informed and voluntary consent from participants to participate in the research, maintaining anonymity of participants, confidentiality, beneficence and proper management of the data obtained by storing hard copies of answers for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet. Participants will not be exposed to any risk or harm that will arise from participating in the study.

Please note that the study will not involve any financial or other benefit to participants for participation.

If you would like to be informed of the research findings, the feedback could furnish you with a report about the findings.

Thanking you in anticipation for your assistance.

Yours sincerely

Amandla Daphney Ngoveni

Researcher (Social work Masters' Student)

ADDENDUM B PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number: SWREC-50565443

Research permission reference number: SWREC-50565443

Date: 20 February 2020

Title: Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani district, Limpopo Province.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Amandla Daphney Ngoveni, I am a student enrolled for a master's degree in Social Work at the University of South Africa. I am doing research with my supervisor Dr Elca Erlank. She is a senior lecturer in the Department of Social Work at the University. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled "Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani district, Limpopo Province."

The research study is part of the fulfilment of the requirement for obtaining a Master's degree in Social Work. This study is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of Social Work to improve service delivery for such people.

I hereby kindly request you to participate in this study. The study is targeted at the widows from Mavalani, Mopani district, Limpopo Province. The widows should be between the age of 18-65 years and they should have been widows for at least one year. The researcher decided on your area because of the number of widows reporting at the Department of Social Development for assistance when compared with other villages.

Your willingness to participate in the research will be highly appreciated. If you are willing to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign a consent form and you will be requested to participate in a face-to-face interview about your challenges and experiences as a widow. The interview will be conducted at a suitable time and venue agreed as agreed with you. It is estimated that the interview will last approximately one hour. You will be asked the following questions:

At the beginning of the interview, the following biographical questions will be asked:

1. How old are you?
2. Do you have children? If yes, how many?
3. What is your highest school or educational qualification?
4. Are you currently employed? If yes, what type of job do you have?
5. When did your husband pass away?

Questions related to the topic

The following open-ended questions will be discussed with you to obtain information:

6. Please explain your experiences of being a widow.
7. What is the day to day challenges you encounter due to the death of your husband?
8. Describe the nature of your family relationships before and after the death of your husband.
9. What kind of support did you receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?
10. What kind of support you did not receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?
11. What are the coping strategies that you use to deal with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband?
12. What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges that widows face and to assist other widows?
13. What do you think about the traditional rituals have to be followed by widows after the death of their husband?
14. How can social workers assist women in widowhood?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. Your decision to participate or not will not affect you in any way, now or in the future. If you decide to take part in this study, kindly sign the consent document herewith, as proof of your willingness to participate.

After you have signed the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time should you so wish, without providing any reasons for your withdrawal, no repercussion or penalty, even in the middle of the interview. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign consent a form and this information sheet is yours to keep.

The information that we collect from this research project will be kept private and confidential. Any information about you will have a code number or pseudonym, instead of your name. Only the researcher and identified members of the research team will know your involvement in this research and no one will be able to identify you or link the answers you gave to you. You also have the right to ask any questions concerning the study at any time.

With your permission, the interview will be audiotaped. The recorded interviews will be transcribed word-for-word. Your responses to the interview (both the taped and transcribed version) will be kept strictly confidential. The audiotape will be coded to disguise any identifying information. Please note that my research supervisor, the translator and the independent coder will each sign an undertaking to treat the information shared by you in a confidential manner. The independent coder is someone who is well versed and experienced in analysing information collected by means of interviews and will be appointed to analyse the transcripts of the interviews independently of the researcher to ensure that the researcher will report the participants' accounts of what has been researched without any modification.

Please note that the study will not involve any financial benefit to you for participation. There is no anticipated risk or harm that may befall you from participating in the study. Should it happen that the information you have shared left you feeling emotionally upset, or traumatized, I am obliged to refer you to a counsellor for debriefing or counselling (should you agree).

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for a minimum period of five years in a locked cupboard for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further research ethics review and approval from the University.

After five years all hard copies will be shredded, and any electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme.

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Social Work at Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

You have the right to ask questions concerning the study at any time. If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Amandla Daphney Ngoveni 073 622 1470 or email: amandla.mashimbye1@gmail.com

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted you may contact Dr Elca Erlank on 012 429 4495/084 597 6464, email address: Eerlanec@unisa.ac.za. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the research ethics chairperson of the Department of Social Work at UNISA. His contact details are as follows: Prof AH Alpaslan, telephone number: 012 429 6739 or email alpasah@unisa.ac.za. Based upon the above information provided to you and being aware of your rights, you are asked to give written consent should you want to participate in this research study by signing and dating the information and consent form provided herewith and by initialling each section to indicate that you understand and agree with the conditions.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Yours sincerely

AMANDLA DAPHNEY NGOVENI

ADDENDUM C CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (participant's name), herewith confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has informed me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participating in the planned research.

I have read the Participant information sheet (or had it explained to me) and I understand what the study is about, as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without any penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, an article to be published in a journal and /or presented at a conference, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the face to face interview proceedings on an audio recorder.

I have received a signed copy of the consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname _____ Please print)

Participant Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Name & Surname _____ (Please print)

Researcher's signature _____ Date _____

ADDENDUM D RESEARCHER'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Researchers' acknowledgement

Hereby, I, Amandla Daphney Ngoveni 50565443 in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the -

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy

And that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements

SIGNED: *AD Ngoveni*

Date: September 2021

ADDENDUM E ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SWREC)

Date: 20 February 2020

Dear Ms AD Ngoveni

DECISION:
Ethics approval from 20 February 2020 to 20 July 2020

SWREC Reference #: 2020-SWREC-50565443
Name: Ms AD Ngoveni
Student #: 50565443
Staff #: N/A

Researcher(s): Name: Ms AD Ngoveni
Contact details: 50565443@mylife.unisa.ac.za; 0736221470

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr EC Erlank
Contact details: erlanec@unisa.ac.za; (012) 429 4495

Title of research:

Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani District, Limpopo Province

Qualification: Master of Social Work (MSW)

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Social Work Research Ethics Committee (SWREC) for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval has been granted effective from **20 February 2020**.

The following are standards requirements attached to all approval of all studies:

1. Approval will be for a period of twelve months from the date of issue of the certificate. At the end of this period, if the study has been completed, abandoned, discontinued or not completed for any reason you are required to submit a report on the project. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned, you must submit a report as soon as the work is completed. Reporting template can be requested from the SWREC administrator on radebn1@unisa.ac.za
2. However, at the **end of six months' period** if the study is still current, you should instead submit an application for renewal of the approval.
3. Please remember that you must notify the committee in writing regarding any amendments to the study.
4. You must notify the committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or any unforeseen event that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the study.
5. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the SWREC standard operating procedures, terms of references, National Health Research Council (NHREC) and university guidelines.

Yours sincerely

Dr KJ Males: Chairperson of SWREC
Email: maleskj@unisa.ac.za
Tel No.: (012) 429 4780



University of South Africa
Pretoria Street, Maitland Ridge, City of Tlokweng
PO Box 302 UNISA 0001 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3011 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4130
www.unisa.ac.za

ADDENDUM G DEBRIEFER'S LETTER

DEBRIEFER'S LETTER AND CV

Sineli

Dumisane Rosemarry

Tel : 073 4529 088

drsinieli@gmail.com

Amandla Daphney Ngoveni

Master of Social Work Student

Re : Acceptance for debriefing services

The purpose of this letter is to respond to your request for my assistance regarding debriefing services for your research participants. I hereby inform you that I have accepted your request to render those services to your participants without charging any amount. I am happy and willing to support your research participant when there is a need of such services.

I am a qualified and registered professional social worker. I have 10 years' experience practicing as a qualified Social Worker. My registration number with the SACSSP is 10-27363. With the experience that I have in this profession, you can trust me with your research participants. I know and understand the ethics involved in research and they are linear to our professional ethics.

Please you are requested to remind me at least two weeks before you start with your collection of data so that I can be ready to provide services to your participants when the need arise.

I wish you success in your studies

Kind regards

Sineli DR

24August 2019

ADDENDUM H EDITOR'S LETTER

DR J LOMBARD

RESEARCH REPORT CRITICAL READING, LANGUAGE & TECHNICAL EDITING

Tel: 012 546 5974
Cel: 078 116 8018
e-mail: berto@woodcarving.co.za

136 Erich Mayer St
PRETORIA NORTH
0182

<mailto:Cecelina@woodcarving.co.za>

Ref W63

EDITOR'S STATEMENT

EDITING AND CRITICAL READING OF DISSERTATION FOR MASTERS IN
SOCIAL WORK DEGREE: AMANDLA DAPHNEY NGOVENI (50565443)

This is to certify that I have critically read and edited Ms Amandla Daphney Ngoveni (50565443)'s MSW dissertation for submission to UNISA's Department of Social Work for examination.

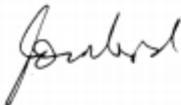
Title of the dissertation:

Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani District, Limpopo Province

The following aspects of the dissertation were edited:

- Spelling
- Grammar
- Sentence structure
- Logical sequencing
- Consistency of reference method used
- Consistency of layout

The onus and responsibility to do the corrections and implement my comments and suggestions correctly after my editing of the document, remains that of the student.



ADDENDUM I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani district, Limpopo Province

1. How old are you?

U na malembe yangani xana?

2. Do you have children? If yes, how many? U na vana xana? Loko nhlamulo ku ri ina, i vana vangani?

3. What is your highest school or educational qualification?

Xana tidyondzo ta wena ta le henhla hi tihi kumbe u dyondze ku fika kwihi?

4. Are you currently employed? If yes, what type of job do you have?

U le ku tirheni eka nkarhi wa sweswi xana? Loko nhlamulo ku ri ina, u tirha ntirho wa njhani?

5. When did your husband pass away?

Nuna wa wina u love rini xana?

7. Please explain your experiences of being a widow.

U komberwa ku hlamusela ntokoto wa wena wa ku va u ri noni?

8. What is the day-to-day challenges you encounter due to the death of your husband?

Xana hi yini mithonthlo ya siku na siku leyi u hlanganaka na yona hikwalaho ka rifu ra nuna wa wena?

9. Describe the nature of your family relationships before and after the death of your husband.

Hlamusela muxaka wa vuxaka bya wena na va ndyangu wa wena loko nuna wa wena a ha hanya na loko se a lovile?

10. What kind of support did you receive from people such as relatives and friends after the death of your husband?

Xana u kume nseketelo wa muxaka wihi ku suka eka vanhu vo fana na maxaka na vanghana endzhaku ka rifu ra nuna wa wena?

11. What kind of support did you not receive from people such as relatives and friends that would have assisted you more effectively?

Xana i nseketelo wa muxaka wihi lowu u nga wu kumangiki ku suka eka vanhu vo fana na maxaka na vanghana lowu a wu ta va wu ku pfunile hi ku hetiseka?

12. What are the coping strategies that you use to deal with the challenges that you experience after the death of your husband?

Xana hi wahi matshalatshala yo kondzelela lawa u ya tirhisaka yo kota ku tirhana na mitlhontlho leyi u hlanganaka na yona endzhaku ka rifu ra nuna wa wena?

13. What suggestions and advice do you have for addressing the challenges that widows face and to assist other widows?

Xana i swiringanyeto na switsundzuxo swihi leswi u nga na swona swo ololoxa mitlhontlho leyi tinoni tin'wana ti hlangananna yona?

14. What do you think about the traditional rituals that have to be followed by widows after the death of their husband?

Xana miswi vona jhani kumbe kutitwa jhani mayelana na ndhavuku lowu mi fanelanaka ku wu landzelela endhaku ka loko nuna wa nwina ahundzile emisaveni?

15. How can social workers assist women in widowhood?

Hiku vona ka nwina ti social worker tinga pfuna njhani ti noni xana?

ADDENDUM J : TURNITIN REPORT

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF WIDOWHOOD IN MOPANI DISTRICT, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

ORIGINALITY REPORT

16%

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