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Widowhood Rituals versus Widows' Rights: Sampling Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya

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Abstract

The research article sets out to assess the effects of African indigenous widowhood rituals on widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The Feminist Theory supported this research, which utilised a descriptive research design so as to unveil the main problem. The study population consisted of 600 participants who were the key informants of the study. Based on the Taro Yamane sample size determination formula of 1967, the sampled participants were 186. It relied on structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as one of the several sources of primary data collection tool. The quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the help of MS Excel. The qualitative data generated from the interviews were analysed by using content analysis. The narratives were presented around the study objectives, namely, the nature of widowhood rituals, the extent to which the widowhood rituals affected widow's rights, and the efficacy of the measures put in place to mitigate the infringement of widow's rights. The study emphasizes the significant impact of widowhood rituals on widows' lives, including psychological distress, social isolation, economic challenges, and discrimination. Measures to mitigate the infringement of widow's rights, such as education campaigns, enforcement of human rights laws, economic support programs, and legal reforms, receive varying levels of agreement. The study recommends developing programs to address misconceptions, advocating for legal reforms, and fostering community involvement to provide support to widows.

Key Words: Discrimination and Distress, Rituals, Stigma, Social isolation, Widows and Widowhood

Introduction

This research article presents a terse overview of what African Widowhood rituals entails and thereafter links it with widow rights. It is a universal truth that widows are among the most helpless members of society. About 245 million widows live in the world today, according to estimates (UN, 2020). Cultures all over the world use ritual and ceremony to symbolically uphold gender roles and hierarchies (Peterson & Hood, 2019). Negative effects on women's health, physical well-being, and psycho-social development are just some of the consequences of these gender-based practises, which also violate women's human rights and human security. Issues of GBV were first articulated at a series of conferences commemorating the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985), which ultimately led to the declaration of June 23 as the first-ever International Widows Day. WRP have remained deeply entrenched in the patriarchal social order of many societies around the world, despite extensive feminist strategizing to the contrary (Petersson & Willa, 2019).

The likelihood of becoming a widow rises with age, making it one of adulthood's most devastating realities, particularly in the African context (Atindanbila et al., 2015). Widows made up 18% of U.S. males and 52% of females in the 75–84 age brackets in 2019, while widows made up 32% of males and 75% of females in the 85+ age bracket (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Center for Health Statistics, 2010). These sorts of patterns have been seen in other places too. In 2019, 16% of men and 45% of women in the UK aged 65 and up were widowed, according to data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS, 2019). Among those aged 75 and up in 2019, 27% of men and 63% of women were widowed. In most African cultures, it affects women more than men. The fact that women marry slightly older men and men tend to die at a younger age than women helps to explain this difference. Asian women aged 24 and above 10% of them experienced loss of husbands to death or divorce. Many more have experienced the heartbreak of loss at the hands of divorce or widowhood. When a marriage ends in divorce, women often receive nothing in the way of an inheritance, and the law rarely provides them with any protection; women risk having their children absorbed into the husband's family.

In Africa, becoming a widow involves a series of ceremonies (Sulumba-kapuma, 2018). Widowhood is defined by the African's faith in the afterlife (Glendon & Kaplan, 2019). When a spouse passes away, their surviving partner is said to have "entered widowhood" (Veljanovska & Dukoski, 2020). Widowhood is an ongoing and frequently lengthy state with social and personal implications and meanings (Isenström & Quennerstedt 2020). Widows and widowers are defined as women and men who have experienced the loss of a spouse, respectively. Cultural and indigenous beliefs about death, ghosts, inheritance, feminine roles, family structure, and family relationships are inextricably woven into the practises of widowhood. Africa's age-old widowhood practises are reinforced and perpetuated by the widespread belief that the ghost of the deceased may return to dispute and haunt all manner of objects and relatives. One of the justifications for subjecting widows to inhumane and humiliating custom practises is the belief that death corrupts, and that the dead retain contact with the living, especially their closest life partners. It is so believed that if these rites and practises are carried out correctly, it would help restore the peace and safety that death disrupted. The populace's superstitions lead them to defend such customs by arguing that they have practical applications, such as shielding widows from the influence of their late husbands.

Communities across sub-Saharan Africa uphold traditions like widow cleansing and widow inheritance. Doris (2018) stated that nearly all ethnic groups in Ghana observe the practice; however, there may be some variations in how it is carried out (TeiAhontu, 2018). It is widely held in some more conservative communities that a man's death is the result of his unfortunate wife's bad luck (Doris, 2018). For this reason, some communities in Ghana accord a widow special respect (Doris, 2018). It is widely held in these communities that, if she finds another husband, this woman will bury him, too (Doris, 2018). A widow needs to get rid of her unfortunate situation in order to avoid this tragedy.

Many Kenyan ethnic groups include widowhood rites in their funeral ceremonies to honour the deceased spouse (Erick *et al.*, 2016). While rituals for both widows and widowers exist, the widows are much more involved and time-consuming. Traditionally, widowers undergo fewer restrictions and sacrifices during widowhood. The Luo culture of Kenya, widows is expected to undergo a cleansing ritual before they remarry. The ritual involves being smeared with white clay and being bathed in a mixture of herbs and water (Ochieng, 2013). The ritual is believed to purify the widow and remove any bad luck that may have caused the death of her husband. Ahontu (2018) states that one aspect of Luo widowhood rituals is the wearing of all-black clothing during the mourning period, followed by an exchange to all-white garments. The widow stays with the body for a year and cries loudly most of the time to show her grief, drinks the water used to bathe the body, and spends the night in the same bed as the body. Nonetheless, he noted that the introduction of new religions into the country has led to the decline in the practice of certain widowhood rituals. In a study by Ndiinu and Musya (2023) on the intersection of culture, ecclesia, and transgender persons navigating identity, beliefs, and acceptance, he observed that Africans have retrogressive culture that involves rituals that negatively affects the rights of the girls that stay out of marriage and widows in the society.

For some people in the past, a man's death was seen as a result of his wife's bad luck (Bemang', 2020). This belief underpins the treatment a widow receives in some parts of Ghana after the death of her husband. It is widely held in these communities that such a woman will marry and bury at least two more husbands if she is able find them. Women's varied

contributions to the economy's expansion are often overlooked. Widowhood rituals are performed not only in Ghana, but throughout Africa.

Statement of the Problem

The indigenous values of ubuntu (personhood), such as mutual respect and caring, are taught by Africans. They however fail to act accordingly when it comes to the treatment of widows (Juma & Simiyu, 2019). Despite international human rights conventions, many countries, including Kenya, continue to practice biased and inhumane treatments such as widowhood rites, female genital mutilation, and betrothal. Kenya, as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, has an obligation to abolish discriminatory laws, regulations, customs, and practices. Unfortunately, widows often face prejudice, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression, and abuse. In Kenya, a significant percentage of widows are young, with some forced into undesirable marriages and suffering sexual abuse. While some research has focused on widowhood rituals and human rights, there's a lack of attention to the systemic mistreatment of widows in third-world nations (Nyongesa et al., 2016; Zhu, 2022 and Naldi et al., 2020). Qualitative investigations provide a more detailed understanding of the impact of widowhood rituals, and addressing these issues is crucial for the well-being of widows in the African social context, particularly the Luo community in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The purpose of the study on "Assessing the Effects of African indigenous Widowhood Rituals on Widow Rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya" investigates the impact of indigenous widowhood rituals on the rights of widows in a particular region of Kenya. The study sought to explore how these rituals affect widows' ability to inherit property, access education, and participate in decision-making processes, among other aspects of their lives.

Literature Review

In this treatise, there is a discussion about different theoretical perspectives put forward by scholars, researchers, and philosophers regarding the widowhood customs and rights in African tradition. Additionally, the chapter covers the conceptual framework, theoretical framework, empirical literature, critical analysis, and research limitations related to the topic.

Feminism is a social theory and movement aimed at achieving gender equality and challenging patriarchal systems of power and oppression. The proponent of the theory was Mary Wollstonecraft in 1792; the theory seeks to end discrimination, sexism, and other forms of gender-based violence that limit women's rights and opportunities. African indigenous widowhood rituals have been subject to criticism by feminist scholars for their negative impact on the rights and well-being of widows (Humm, 2022). Feminism theory emphasizes the importance of equal rights and opportunities for women in all aspects of society. It posits that gender is a social construct that has been used to justify patriarchal systems of power and oppression, which disadvantage women. Feminist scholars argue that African indigenous widowhood rituals reinforce patriarchal systems of power and reinforce gender-based discrimination and violence against women. These rituals, according to feminist theory, undermine women's rights, restrict their freedom, and perpetuate gender inequality (Ba-an, Segbefia, & Ofori, 2021).

In a study by Nwajiuba (2014), the author analysed the impact of African indigenous widowhood rituals on widows' rights in Nigeria. The study found that these rituals were often used to deprive widows of their rights, including the right to inherit property, participate in social activities, and remarry. It also found that widows who refused to comply with these practices faced ostracism and other forms of social exclusion. The study concluded that African indigenous widowhood rituals were a form of gender-based violence against widows and called for their abolition.

Moreover, in the context of African indigenous widowhood rituals, feminist scholars have criticized these practices for perpetuating gender inequality and violating the rights of widows. For example, Okonjo-Iweala (2017) argues that widowhood practices in Africa are often oppressive, as they require widows to undergo degrading rituals and deny them inheritance rights. Additionally, Mlama and Kapinga (2018) note that widowhood practices may have negative impacts on women's health and economic well-being. Feminism theory also provides a useful framework for analysing the impact of African indigenous widowhood rituals on widows' rights.

It is commonly held that widows and widowers in Africa are required to participate in certain rituals upon the death of their spouse (Dorgbetor, 2021). Although there is no inherent bias against men, the vast majority of patients are women. It is extremely rare for a man to go through it, and when he does, the circumstances are usually quite different (Olanisebe, 2015). Most African cultures follow this tradition, though the specifics may vary by tribe (Fraser & Nwadinobi, 2018).

Widows in many African cultures undergo additional degrading rituals, such as being stripped naked and paraded through the streets to a river for ritual purification, having their hair shaved, having pepper applied to their shaved hair, sleeping on a stone, and sleeping on a stone as a pillow. One more is to have the widow drink the filthy water that was used to wash the body (Atindanbila et al., 2015; Agu, 2018; Idialu, 2012; Kuenyehia, 1998). It is reported by Nyongkah

(2018) that in Cameroon, the widow is given a pair of split calabashes to use for eating and drinking, and she is not permitted to wash her hands before or after meals. Not only is she barred from speaking to anyone for eight days, but she also cannot laugh or cry loudly.

Widows are stigmatised in some societies; they may be forbidden from attending social events for up to a year, required to wear special clothing for the rest of that time, and considered impure simply by touching it (Atindanbila, et al., 2015). Dery (2016) provides an illustration of the widowhood rites practiced among the Gas in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana, which includes the process of seclusion, ritual washing, and reintegration into society. The UN Division for the Advancement of Women (2005) also reports that indigenous widowhood rites in Ghana could involve confining the widow in a room, shaving her head, tying a rope around her neck, and performing a ceremonial bath. Additionally, the study reveals that 31% of widowed individuals were requested to remarry within their own family. Twenty-three percent said their families were responsible for the forced marriage (United Nations, 2005). In Luo tradition, the widow and a small group of female relatives wait with the body until everyone else arrives to complete the burial. Until the body is buried, widows are also forced to fast.

Men have traditionally held positions of power and authority over women in most African societies (Amlor & Owusu, 2016). It is based on a system in which men have more control over the economy and society at large. There is a common belief in some African cultures that a man's death is the result of a curse placed on him by his wife (Okoro & Nkama, 2018). This becomes more problematic when women are marginalised, stripped of their rights and benefits (Ba-an et al., 2021). The lives of widows and their children are negatively affected when these rights are violated (Manala, 2015). Supporters of the tradition argue that it discourages sexual promiscuity and may even appease the deceased's spirit, protecting the family from harm in the afterlife (Dorgbetor, 2021). For instance, there are unintended financial, social, and mental health effects of widow inheritance (Okoro & Nkama, 2018). Keeping a deceased relative's assets within the family as a means of protecting the surviving spouse and children is a form of discrimination, economic deprivation, and "property grabbing" that should be avoided at all costs (Olanisebe, 2015). This is done despite the widow's wishes for material, emotional, and egotistical gain. An UN-CRC was established in 1990. When children are not given the protection they deserve, they lose out on a fundamental right that could have a major impact on their development and success later in life (CEDAW, 2003). Widows and their children, who face enormous financial and social constraints already, have seen their situation worsen as a result of this. As a result, the family's financial situation worsens, and the children have less to eat (Manala, 2015).

There is limited empirical research on the effects of widowhood rituals on widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County in Siaya County, Kenya. However, a study by Njoroge, Owino, and Okech (2020) explored the nature of widowhood rituals and their effects on the rights of widows in Siaya County. The study found that widowhood rituals vary in nature, depending on the ethnic community in which they are practiced. Some rituals involve the shaving of hair, wearing of black clothes, and the withdrawal of social activities, while others involve the widow inheriting the deceased husband's property. The study further revealed that these rituals often infringe on the rights of widows, particularly their property and inheritance rights.

Methodology

The study applied a descriptive research design to assess the effects of widowhood rites on widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. According to Creswell (2014), descriptive research design involved collecting data through observations, surveys, interviews, and case studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. In addition, descriptive research design was used to generate hypotheses for further investigation or to inform policy and program development. To conduct a descriptive research design in assessing the effects of widowhood rites on widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, the researcher employed a variety of data collection methods, including questionnaires and interviews. These methods could be used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, which was analysed using techniques such as content analysis, thematic analysis, and statistical analysis.

The research took place in Alego Usonga sub-county located in Siaya County in Alego Usonga Sub-County, the population was estimated to be around 180,000 people, with a substantial number of widows who were likely to have experienced the effects of widowhood rites (Siaya County Government, 2020). However, the target population of this study was developed through a sub-frame of approximately 600 key informants (that is, households headed by widows and experts of women human rights) that were adopted from the cluster frames designed by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics in each of the five selected clusters in order to select key informants to be interviewed. In the first stage, the study area was divided into ten clusters based on the ten administrative units or locations/Wards, including Siaya Township, East Alego, South Alego, South-East Alego, North Alego, Central Alego, South-Central Alego, West Alego, South-West Alego, and Usonga Locations. In the second stage, the researcher intentionally selected only five clusters that were predominantly rural from

the list of ten clusters identified. The selected clusters were Southeast Alego, South Central Alego, North Alego, East Alego, and Usonga.

In addition, the strategy to determine a sample size had several approaches to using a census, especially for the small populations' use of the internet sample size calculator, the use of the recommended published tables, and adoption of acceptable sample size determination formulas. The sample size of the households was done using the TaroYamane formula presented as:

$$n = N * (s / (s + (N-1) * e^2))$$

Where: Sample size=n,
Total population=N = and
Error tolerance (confidence level) =e

Therefore, based on the study population N = 600,
And Error tolerance at 0.05,
Then the sample size will be established as:

$$\frac{600}{1 + 600(0.05)^2}$$

$$\frac{600}{1 + 600(0.00250000000000000005)}$$

$$\frac{600}{1 + 1.5000000000000002}$$

$$\frac{600}{2.5}$$

n = 240

The sample size, therefore, was estimated to be 240 participants. The formula showed how to calculate the sample size needed for a given estimated population size (N), desired degree of precision (e), and level of confidence (95%). The study relied on structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as one of the several sources of primary data collection tools. Because of the limited publicly available information concerning widowhood rituals and widow's rights, field research in these contexts was necessary in order to enhance theoretical understanding of this phenomenon. The questionnaires were presented in a 5-point Likert scale, showing the level of agreement per each statement; 1 strongly agreed and 5 strongly disagreed. The questionnaires were divided into five sections, whereby: Section A asked questions on the demographics of the participants; Section B asked questions pertinent to the nature of widowhood rituals in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya; Section C asked questions pertinent to the extent to which the widowhood rituals affected widows' rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya; finally, Section D asked questions pertinent to the efficacy of the measures put in place to mitigate the infringement of widow's rights in light of the widowhood rituals in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya.; Section E asked questions on widow's rights.

The research article utilises secondary data besides the primary data that was supported by reports of NGOs, previous studies, government reports, and news reports of cases to thoroughly examine and possibly concerning the study variables of researcher interest (nature, extent, and measures to mitigate the negative impact of widowhood rituals and violated widow's rights) in each of the cases. Therefore, for each of the cases, the researcher sought to use expert practitioners and locals in matters concerning widowhood. The selected participants were strategic depending on the insights they had and the roles they played in the management of widowhood challenges. For the interviewees, it could be broken down into representatives from such as Lawyers and Human Rights Experts from the selected wards. Quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires, which were analysed through descriptive statistics with the help of MS Excel Version 2013 and SPSS version 25. The raw data was edited and pre-coded to assign numbers to predetermined responses, making it easier to manage the data. The editing process ensured that participants followed the instructions and answered all questions appropriately. The frequencies, and percentages were presented using tables. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews and audio recordings. The interviews were transcribed and presented as excerpts, with a focus on the study objectives related to widowhood rituals, their impact on the rights of widows, and the effectiveness of measures to protect those rights.

Data analysis and Presentation of Findings

This treatise consists of data presentation, analysis and interpretations based on the specific objectives of the extent to which the widowhood rituals affect widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The study had a sample size of 240 participants where respondents were selected at random from the five selected clusters, with a sample of 48 participants drawn from each cluster, however each cluster had 46 Widows who participated in answering the questionnaires while 2 participants from each selected cluster participated as experts in women rights (such as Lawyers, Human Rights Experts and Women Right Experts from the selected Wards) who participated in answering the semi-structured interviews. The selected clusters were South East Alego, South Central Alego, North Alego, East Alego, and Usonga. The presentation, analysis and interpretation based on the research objectives of the study, but first it discussed the response rate then delved into the analysis of the specific objectives. This is illustrated in Table 4.1

Validity of data collection instruments

Table 4.1: Response Rate

Selected Wards	Questionnaires				Interviews			
	Response		Non-Response		Response		Non-Response	
	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
South East Alego	40	17.39%	6	2.61%	2	20%	-	-
South Central Alego	32	13.91%	14	6.09%	1	10.00%	1	10.00%
North Alego	39	16.96%	7	3.04%	1	10.00%	1	10.00%
East Alego	37	16.09%	9	3.91%	1	10.00%	1	10.00%
Usonga	32	13.19%	14	6.09%	1	10.00%	1	10.00%
Sub-Total	180	78.26%	50	21.74%	6	60.00%	4	40.00%
Total	230		100.00%		10		100.00%	

Overall Response Rate

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Overall Response	186	77.50%
Overall Non-Response	54	22.50%
Overall Total	240	100.00%

Widows Rights

The findings reveal a mixed situation for widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County. While the community appreciates the contributions of widows and provides emotional support, there are concerning issues surrounding the equal treatment of widows compared to men, obstacles in claiming property, and a minority viewpoint that does not fully value the contributions of widows. These findings indicate the need for further efforts to address gender inequalities, ensure property rights, and promote greater recognition and support for widows within the community. The findings were presented using 5-point Likert scale as shown below.

Key: 1= Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree.

[Table 4.2 Widows Rights in Widowhood Rituals](#)

Statements	1		2		3		4		5	
	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
The community values the contributions and sacrifices made by widows in Alego Usonga Sub-County.	98	54.4%	82	45.56%	-	-	-	-	-	-
Widows in Alego Usonga Sub-County are treated equally to men in terms of access to resources and opportunities.	31	17.22%	12	6.67%	-	-	60	33.33%	77	42.78%
Widows are able to claim their late husband's property without any hindrances or obstacles.	21	11.67%	24	13.33%	-	-	74	41.11%	61	33.89%
The community provides emotional and psychological support to widows to help them cope with grief and loss.	121	67.22%	59	32.78%	-	-	-	-	-	-
The community values and appreciates the contributions of widows in Alego Usonga Sub-County.	134	74.44%	36	20%	7	3.89%	3	1.67%	-	-

Demographic Information:**Age of the Widows**

21.11%) and 36-45 years (27.7%), which Based on the findings on the age of widows, it is evident that there is a diverse range of ages among this group. The data reveals that the majority of widows fall within the age groups of 26-35 years together account for nearly half of the total widows surveyed. This suggests that a significant proportion of widows are relatively young or in the middle stage of their lives when they experience the loss of their spouse. Furthermore, the data indicates that there is also a considerable presence of widows in the older age brackets. The age group of 46-55 years comprises 17.78% of the widows surveyed, while those above 56 years account for 21.67%. This demonstrates that widowhood occurs at later stages in life as well, highlighting the ongoing presence of bereavement and its impact on older individuals. Interestingly, the youngest age group, 19-25 years, represents 11.67% of the widows surveyed. These finding sheds light on the unfortunate reality that some individuals experience the loss of their partners at a very young age. The emotional and practical challenges faced by young widows may differ significantly from those experienced by older widows, indicating a need for targeted support and resources tailored to their specific circumstances. Table 4.3 indicates the results gotten when the household widows were asked to indicate their age category and their response was as follows:

Table 4.3 Age of the Widow's

Age	Frequency	Percentage
19-25 Years	21	11.67%
26-35 Years	38	21.11%
36-4 Years	50	27.7%
46-55 Years	32	17.78%
Above 56 Years	39	21.67%
Total	180	100.00%

Widow's Education Level

Based on the findings in Table 4.4 presents as follows, evidence that the educational level of widows is diverse but primarily concentrated at the "O" level, accounting for 75.56% of the total. This suggests that a significant portion of widows have completed their secondary education, which provides them with a foundation of knowledge and skills. While "O" level education is generally considered to be basic, it still equips individuals with fundamental competencies that prove to be valuable in various aspects of life. The data also indicates that a considerable proportion of widows have attained a diploma level qualification, with 18.33% falling into this category. Diploma programs often offer specialized training in specific fields, enabling individuals to gain practical skills and knowledge that are directly applicable to the workforce. This suggests that a significant number of widows have acquired vocational or technical expertise, potentially increasing their chances of finding employment or engaging in entrepreneurial activities.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that a smaller percentage of widows have obtained a degree-level education (5.00%). Earning a degree typically involves a more extensive and comprehensive study of a particular subject or discipline. This suggests that a portion of widows have pursued higher education, allowing them to acquire advanced knowledge and critical thinking skills. A degree-level education provides widows with broader career opportunities, greater earning potential, and the ability to engage in more specialized roles within various sectors. The data also highlights a limited number of widows who have reached the master's level (1.11%). Master's degrees are typically pursued by individuals seeking advanced knowledge and expertise in a specific field or discipline. Attaining a master's level education indicates a high level of dedication and specialization. Widows with master's degrees may possess an advanced skill set and a deeper understanding of their chosen field, potentially enabling them to pursue leadership positions or engage in academic and research endeavours.

Table 4.4: Widow's Educational Level

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage
"O" Level	136	75.56%
Diploma Level	33	18.33%
Degree Level	9	5.00%
Master's Level	2	1.11%
Total	180	100.00%

Influence of Widowhood Rituals on the Widow's Rights in Alego

This section collected data to evaluate the extent to which the widowhood rituals affect widows' rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. The findings were presented using 5-point Likert scale as shown below. Based on the findings of the study on the Influence of Widowhood Rituals on the Widow's Rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya, it has been observed that certain key statements received varying levels of agreement or disagreement from the participants. Firstly, a significant percentage of widows strongly agreed (58.33%) and agreed (38.89%) that they experience psychological distress during the transitioning into their new life. This suggests that the loss of their spouse and the associated rituals have a substantial impact on their emotional well-being as given in Table 4.5.

Key: 1= Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Strongly Disagree.

Table 4.5: The Influence of Widowhood Rituals on the Widow's Rights

Statements	1		2		3		4		5	
	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc	Freq	Perc
1. Psychological distress is experienced during the transitioning of the new life	105	58.33%	70	38.89%	5	2.78%	-	-	-	-
2. Social isolation and inadequacy of social support	88	48.89%	89	49.44%	2	1.11%	-	-	-	-
3. Changes in economic status after the passage of their spouse.	120	66.67%	60	33.33%	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Health issues are pertinent due to widowhood rituals	136	75.56%	44	24.44%	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. The community does not discriminate against widows when it comes to their state of health issues.	82	45.56%	71	39.44%	27	15%	-	-	-	-

Discussion of the Findings

One significant finding is that a majority of widows (strongly agreed and agreed, reported experiencing psychological distress during the transition into their new life. This indicates that the loss of a spouse and the associated rituals have a substantial impact on their emotional well-being. Amaka (2021) found that widowhood is associated with increased psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. This supports the findings that widows experience psychological distress during their transition. Another important finding is that a significant number of widows strongly agreed and agreed reported social isolation and a lack of social support. This suggests that widows often feel disconnected from their social networks and lack the necessary support systems to navigate their changed circumstances effectively. Amlor and Owusu (2016) discussed the challenges faced by female-headed households, including widows, in Alego/Usonga sub-county. They found that social support networks were often inadequate, leading to social isolation. This supports the findings that widows experience social isolation and inadequate social support.

The overall study also found that the economic status of widows undergoes significant changes after the death of their spouse. A majority of widows strongly agreed and agreed, acknowledged this shift in their financial situation. This change poses challenges for widows in meeting their needs and sustaining their livelihoods. Ba-an et al. (2021) found that the death of a parent often leads to economic hardship for the surviving family members. This supports the findings that widows experience changes in economic status after the passage of their spouse. Health issues were another prominent concern among widows. A significant majority strongly agreed and agreed, reported that health issues are pertinent due to widowhood rituals. This suggests that the rituals associated with widowhood has detrimental effects on their physical well-being, potentially exacerbating existing health issues or causing new ones to arise. Fiasorgbor (2018) found that these practices usually negatively impact widows' physical and mental health. The study supports the findings that widowhood rituals results in health issues for widows. Furthermore, while some widows agreed that the community does not discriminate against widows in terms of their state of health, it is important to note that a significant portion of widows disagreed and were neutral. This indicates that discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards widows' health still exist within the community. Okoro and Nkama (2018) explored the experiences of widows in Nigeria and found that gender discrimination, including discrimination related to health issues, is prevalent. Although the study is from a different country, it supports the findings that widows may face discrimination regarding their health.

Conclusions

The overall study on the Influence of Widowhood Rituals on the Widow's Rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya has provided valuable insights into the experiences of widows in the area. The findings demonstrate that widowhood rituals have a significant impact on various aspects of widows' lives. The transition into widowhood often leads to psychological distress, including symptoms of depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Additionally, widows frequently experience social isolation and a lack of social support, exacerbating their already challenging circumstances. The economic status of widows undergoes significant changes, posing financial challenges and affecting their ability to meet their needs and sustain their livelihoods. Moreover, widowhood rituals may have detrimental effects on the physical well-being of widows, potentially worsening existing health issues or causing new ones to arise. Although some progress has been made in combating discrimination, the study indicates that discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards widows' health still persist within the community. These findings emphasize the need to raise awareness, provide support, and implement interventions to address the unique needs of widows in the study area. By recognizing and addressing these issues, it is possible to improve the rights and well-being of widows in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya.

Recommendations

To evaluate the extent to which the widowhood rituals affect widow's rights in Alego Usonga Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. Recommendation: Widows' Rights Assessment Conduct a comprehensive assessment of widows' rights within the context of the widowhood rituals. Collaborate with legal experts and human rights organizations to identify specific rights violations resulting from these rituals. This assessment will serve as a basis for legal advocacy, informing policymakers and stakeholders about the urgent need for legal reforms to align the rituals with widows' rights and dignity. By implementing these recommendations, it is possible to address the complexities and challenges associated with widowhood rituals in Alego Usonga

Sub-County, Siaya County, Kenya. Ultimately, this leads to improved rights, social support, economic opportunities, and overall well-being for widows in the community.

Areas for Further Research

Encourage and support further research on widowhood rituals and their impact on widows' rights and well-being in other Counties in Kenya. Continued studies will provide more in-depth insights into the dynamics and variations of these rituals, identify specific challenges faced by widows, and guide the development of targeted interventions. Collaboration between researchers, community members, and relevant stakeholders is essential for generating knowledge and implementing evidence-based practices.

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