

**THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANING OF MOURNING RITUALS IN BOTLOKWA
COMMUNITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

BY

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DEDICATION

To my daughter, Khumo Masego Rangata,

I dedicate this dissertation to you my angel.

*“Through hard work, perseverance and a faith in God,
you can live your dreams”* Ben Carson.

DECLARATION

I declare that **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL MEANING OF MOURNING RITUALS IN BOTLOKWA COMMUNITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references and that this work has not been submitted before for any other degree at any other institution.

.....
SERETLO-RANGATA MMAKWENA LINDA

.....
DATE

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Firstly I am thankful to God. I am humbled by His grace and favour upon my life and the provision of strength to carry on even through difficult times. 'In you I live, move and have my being'.

Without the support and encouragement of great many people, I couldn't have managed to complete this dissertation. I wish to extend my gratitude to:

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the psychological meaning of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community, Limpopo Province. The study focused on identifying and describing the types of mourning rituals observed and performed by the participants after the loss of a loved one. Furthermore the study explored the subjective meaning the participants attach to the mourning rituals so as to identify and articulate the psychological themes embedded in the mourning rituals. A total of ten participants (male = 5; females = 5; aged between 40 and 60) were selected using the purposive sampling method. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Thematic content analysis method was used to analyse the data.

The three major themes that emerged during data analysis were; a) The types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one; b) the subjective meaning that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals and c) the psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one. The findings of the study suggest that the mourning rituals performed by the Batlokwa people have significant psychological meanings. These include assisting the bereaved to cope with the death of a loved one, strengthening the bereaved and ensuring that the bereaved are healed and accept the death of a loved one. The study results further shows the different subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals performed. Furthermore the findings of the study suggest that the participants perform mourning rituals in order to prevent them from misfortunes, illnesses, bad luck and to remove what is perceived as a “dark cloud” hanging over them after the death of a loved one.

The findings further suggest that the bereaved benefit psychologically from performing the mourning rituals. One of the benefits is having to let go of the deceased with the knowledge that their loved ones’ soul is resting in peace. The study is concluded by, among others, recommending that psychologists familiarise themselves with different cultural groups and different ways of grieving and mourning within different cultures in order to better understand patients’ different mourning processes.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Death and bereavement are inevitable parts of a life cycle. Often when death occurs, the bereaved tend to respond to the emotions of loss by using different coping strategies which may differ from one person to the other, and from one cultural group to the other. Every culture has its own rituals and customs that guide and shape the way the bereaved mourns. Although death is an inevitable part of human experience that tends to destabilise the community within which the deceased has been functioning, the bereaved need to find purpose in a death of a loved one. It is acknowledged that trauma suffered as a result of the loss of a loved one may have profound lasting effects on the survivors' lives (Selepe & Edwards, 2008).

Crying, fear and anger are the common emotions that, in most cultures, are expressed in the funeral rites and customs of mourning which follow bereavement. In many societies, the requirements for dealing with a major loss are played out over the entire lifetime of the bereaved. For example, this is often reflected in the rituals that are performed, the types of clothing that are worn, and one's rights and obligations to participate in various community activities (Parkes, Laungani & Young, 1997). Rituals also enhance the expression and containment of strong emotions for the family members and friends of the deceased. The repetitive and prescriptive nature of rituals usually ease feelings of anxiety in that they provide structure and order in times of chaos and disorder in the family that is mourning. Rituals further represent a symbolic affirmation of values by means of culturally standardized utterances and actions. From this perspective, rituals seem to perform specific functions in a given society or culture. For example, African women would cover their heads when attending a funeral (Radzilani, 2010, Taylor 1980).

1.2 Research problem

Death is a final life transition often surrounded by cultural rituals to assist the bereaved to express their grief and mourning. Although understood as a natural part of life, death usually causes the bereaved to be overcome by shock, hurt, confusion and in some instances prolonged sadness. Furthermore although death is a universal experience, the nature of death and dying has changed dramatically throughout recent history, and these changes have important implications for how individuals think, feel, and act (Carr, 2012). The loss of an attachment relationship through death poses profound challenges to our adaptation as living beings. As an expression of an evolutionary heritage shared with other social animals, we respond to such separation with a wide range of deep emotions, including weeping, behavioural disorientation, and yearning for the lost attachment figure. Mourning usually involves culturally determined rituals that help the bereaved individuals to make sense of the end of their loved one's life and give structure to what can feel like a very confusing time (Bowlby, 1973 as cited in Neimeyer, Prigerson & Davies, 2002).

According to Selepe and Edwards (2008), the behaviours, coping strategies and mourning rituals related to the death of a loved one are often culturally bound. In an African context, there are culturally unique rituals and mourning practices for specific ethnic groups, clans and kinships that facilitate the process of grieving. The rituals and mourning practices observed often serve many purposes to the bereaved and accomplish different emotional and psychological needs.

Radzilani (2010) noted that mourning rituals enhance the expression and containment of strong emotions for the family members and friends of the deceased. The repetitive and prescriptive nature of rituals usually ease feelings of anxiety in that they provide structure and order in times of chaos and disorder in the family that is mourning. Even though there is some literature that points to the psychological significance of the mourning rituals, not much is known about the mourning rituals in the Northern Sotho community, more especially the psychological significance of these practices. The present study thus seeks to address this gap by exploring the psychological meaning of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community, Limpopo Province.

1.3 Operational definition of concepts

- **Psychological meaning:** In the context of the present study, the concept psychological meaning will refer to the importance and relation of a certain activity, object or situation to the mental and emotional state of a person.
- **Mourning:** This refers to the external response to a loss. It is the external things that one does for example the shaving of a head, and lighting of the candle. Mourning is influenced by the bereaved cultural expectations, customs and gender (Keene & Reder 2006). In the context of the present study, the concept mourning will be understood to mean what an individual does to deal with the loss of the loved one.
- **Mourning rituals:** These are specific behaviours or activities that give a symbolic expression of certain feelings or thoughts of groups and individual (Radzilani, 2010). In the context of the present study, mourning rituals will be understood to mean the activities and behaviour observed by the bereaved to expressed feelings associated with grief.

1.4 Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to explore the psychological meaning of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community, Limpopo Province.

1.5 Objectives of the study

- To identify and describe the types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the loss of a loved one.
- To determine the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals.
- To identify and articulate the psychological meanings embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved.

1.6 Significance of the study

It was anticipated that this study could add to the body of existing body of knowledge on the psychology of death and mourning rituals. The findings of the study could contribute towards the expansion of our understanding of the study of bereavement, its associated psychological reactions and mourning rituals in a Northern Sotho community. It is further hoped that the findings of the study could add more insights and contribute in the development of the emerging field of African psychology. The study could also assist psychologists and counsellors regarding understanding the mourning rituals, particularly within the Batlokwa culture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter aims to look at the already exciting literature on the psychological meaning of mourning rituals. The literature will focus on the following topics: death and dying, grief, bereavement and mourning, culture and mourning and psychology and mourning. The theoretical framework that guided the researcher in the present study will also be discussed.

2.2 Death and dying

Death is an inevitable part of life and how an individual approaches the death and dying process is a phenomenon that continues to be examined. Ultimately, how an individual reacts to death and dying is dependent on a variety of factors, including death attitudes, developmental statuses, and cultural considerations. Death is component to the process of life, in that dying is a social as well as a physiological phenomenon. It constitutes crisis for society as well as for individuals and groups. Various patterns of behaviour and social processes have been institutionalized as coping and response mechanisms for confronting the crisis of death (Bryant, 2003, Varga, 2015).

According Barry and Yuill (2012) regardless of all humanity's achievements in altering and controlling for its own benefit many of the challenges posed by nature, death still remains as a place and part of existence beyond our complete control. Humans can definitely alter and condition the cultural practices surrounding dying and the causes of death, but the actuality of death occurring cannot be transcended. Death is one of life's few certainties.

Barry and Yuill (2012) further stated that regardless of how a society defines death, when it does occur it can lead to a traumatic and significantly upsetting period both in the lives of friends and relatives and also in wider society. The various bonds that link a person to others and to wider society are, for a time at least, broken and damaged; a phase of uncertainty and change follows, where people need time to

make adjustments and hopefully re-establish their own personal and social narratives. That is why so many rites and rituals surround death, the purpose of which is to repair and heal those social and individual bonds so as to allow for the return of some form of 'normal' functioning. The occurrence of death disturbs the harmony, cohesion, and solidarity in both family and community and comes to its victims without notice when it is time; it gives neither option of choice nor opportunity for negotiation. Its effects, most times, can be electrifying as reactions to its occurrence are always irresistible and irreversible, and sometimes emotionally demoralising, and psychologically and economically incapacitating (Biwul, 2014).

2.2.1 The death of a loved one

According to Stroebe and Stroebe (1993) the loss of a loved one is a tragedy unequalled by any other for most bereaved people. It is an experience that occurs some time or other in nearly everyone's life, and many suffer losses long before they reach old age, when such events occur with increasing frequency. Closely associated with the emotional pain, and often a major trigger of it, is the survivor's growing awareness of the emotional fact of death, the sense that one has lost something essential that cannot be retrieved. Furthermore Stroebe & Stroebe (1993) stated that the tearing and wrenching of attachment bonds create not only painful open wounds at the surface of the survivor but defects in the innermost fabric. The missing, longing, yearning, pining, and searching are both for the dead and the living. Myriad losses are experienced: losses of intimacy, companionship, parts of the self, roles, security, styles of living, a sense of meaning, and visions of the future.

Worden, (2009) stated that Bowlby studied how the intensity of grief may be influenced by the type of attachment one had with the deceased. His attachment theory provides a means for people to understand the strong bonds of affection that individuals make with each other and the intense emotional reaction individuals have when these bonds are broken. The aim of attachment behaviour is to maintain a bond of affection and any danger to this bond will give rise to very precise behaviour such as crying and clinging.

The death of a loved one is among the most stressful of all life events, yet the psychological impact varies widely based on the nature (cause) of the death, the relationship, and the bereaved person's resources and risk factors. Loved ones who have witnessed a patient's long and difficult struggle may have little emotional energy left to grieve when the end finally comes. The place and cause of death, both factors associated with the duration of one's illness, also shape the bereavement process (Carr, 2012). The loss of a loved one is a stressful life event which is approached differently from various cultures. The coping mechanisms of dealing with death are often accompanied by mourning rituals that have various functions and meanings to the bereaved. Rituals provide the opportunity for public display of grief, expression of emotions regarding the death of a loved one and for community support. The loss of a loved one to death is often one of the most emotionally painful experiences that a human can have. Even when the death is not that of a loved one, simply being a witness to death can evoke a natural horror and revulsion (Gordon 2000, Malinowski, 1948 as cited in Moore and Williamson, 2003).

2.3 Grief, bereavement and mourning

2.3.1 Grief

Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothatha (2013) stated that within the African culture, grieving is considered to be a process hence death is understood to be a process that is not limited by time. During this process, rituals are performed; these rituals need to have significance and relevance to the living dead and the living and that normal grieving is one that is not restrained to specific events over a set period of time. According to Murray, Toth, Samantha and Clinkinbeard (2005) grief is a socially constructed, flexible phenomenon, and given current levels of immigration and contact among various cultural and ethnic groups, mourning patterns can be expected to change. In addition to commonalities, group differences in values and practices continue to exist and present a wide range of normal responses to death.

Furthermore, Murray et al. (2005) indicated that general areas in which differences exist include the following: (a) extent of ritual attached to death (b) need to see a dying relative; (c) openness and type of display of emotion, (d) emphasis on verbal expression of feelings and public versus private (i.e., solitary or family) expression of

grief; (e) appropriate length of the mourning period. Other differences according to Murray et al. (2005) include (f) importance of anniversary events; (g) roles of men and women; (h) role of extended family; (i) beliefs about what happens after death, particularly related to ideas of suffering, fate, and destiny; (j) value of autonomy/dependence in relation to bonds after death; (k) coping strategies; (l) social support for hospice patients; (m) whether certain deaths are stigmatized; (n) definition of when death actually occurs; (o) barriers to trusting professionals; and (p) interweaving of religious and political narratives.

According to Marks (2004) within the black African culture, if there is a family culture that prevents the public expression of sadness, this may lead to an individual's difficulty in experiencing possible emotional and spiritual healing. If there are restrictions in the expression of deeper and emotional grief, individuals may experience feelings of shame about their own inability to acknowledge and express their grief.

2.3.1.1 Theories of grief

According to Murray et al., (2005) theories of grief differ in the numbers of stages they describe, but they all assume that grieving consists of three basic phases: (a) a period of shock, denial, and disorganization; (b) a period of extremes including intense separation pain, volatile emotions, and active grief work; and (c) a period of resolution, acceptance, and (for the bereaved) withdrawal of energy from the deceased and reinvestment.

a) Kubler Ross' stages of grief

According to Stroebe and Stroebe (2007) grief is defined as the mainly emotional reaction to bereavement, incorporating diverse psychological and physical reactions.

Individuals should be cautioned against taking any staging of grief too literally because grief is not a linear process with concrete boundaries but, rather, a composite of overlapping, fluid phases that vary from person to person. Therefore, stages are meant to be general guidelines only and do not prescribe where an individual "ought" to be in the grieving process.

Moran (2011) indicated that Kübler-Ross proposed that there were five stages that most patients went through as they struggled with the realisation that death was approaching i.e. denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. The first stage is denial, where the bereaved experiences the initial shock of the death. For many people it may take a little time for the reality of the death to sink in, but eventually one comes to accept the experience cognitively and proceed to the emotional experiences of bereavement.

Moran (2011) reported that the second stage of grief is bargaining. This stage stems from a strong desire to see the deceased again or a wish that the loss is not permanent. Often times individuals will engage in a dialogue with a higher power of some sort, promising to live a better life or even offering to trade places with the deceased out of fear that life cannot continue without the deceased. The third stage is anger, which is a result of the frustration with the inability to hold onto the deceased. This anger and frustration can be directed at multiple sources, such as a higher power, emergency response personnel, doctors, the deceased, or oneself.

Moran (2011) further indicated that the fourth stage is called depression, which is distinct from clinical depression. In this context, depression refers to the profound sadness and emotional pain experienced after the death of a loved one. The fifth and final stage of death is acceptance, where the bereaved accepts the reality of the loss and is able to move on in his or her life by both focusing on the present and being optimistic about the future. The bereaved is able to think and speak about the deceased without experiencing any prolonged emotional pain.

b) Bowlby's theory of grief

Bowlby, (cited in Worden, 2002) identified how certain circumstances surrounding the death of a loved one could affect the characteristics, intensity and duration of the bereavement process. His grief theory explained a cycle of phases the bereaved person experienced, the grief reactions and the time to reach recovery. During the initial phase of grief bereaved people experience a sense of numbness and shock, and may show outbursts of extreme intense distress or anger. In this phase the bereaved is unable to fully comprehend the impact of the death. In the second phase the bereaved protests the loss, and searches and yearns for the deceased to return.

This stage triggers crying, anxiety, self-reproach, confusion and loss of security. During the third phase, as the bereaved learns to live without the deceased, intense despair is experienced.

c) Parkes' analysis of grief

Parkes built on past theories, to develop a new conceptualised grief experience. He believed that "grief is not itself a unitary and universal phenomenon but is derived from the interactions of several components which are themselves universal" (Parkes, 2000, p. 323). His assumptions were as follows;

- a) All social animals make and maintain attachments which are necessary for survival.
- b) It is in the nature of attachments that they resist severance. If a threat is perceived to the attachment (separation), neuro-physiological arousal occurs and behavioural inclinations (crying and searching) begin to achieve a reunion with the separated object.
- c) Attachments have high survival – value, attachment behaviours take priority over other tendencies.
- d) If the set goal of the behaviour is not accomplished, the behaviour will gradually diminish and the person becomes open to other attachments.

Parkes conceptualised grief as a succession of transferring phases that are present for a time, but fade in and out and peak, then giving way to the next phase. These phases were numbness, pinning, disorganisation and despair and recovery. His conceptualisation of grief helped explain how it could be felt long after the loss of the loved object (Parkes & Weiss, 1983).

2.3.2 Bereavement

According to Worden (2002) from a biological perspective, grief signifies that one has ill health, and just as physiologically healing is necessary to restore and balance one's body's equilibrium, so too must the bereaved be restored. Mourning is therefore seen as a 'process of healing'. The place and cause of death, both factors associated with the duration of one's illness, also shape the bereavement process.

Bereavement is understood to be natural and may be linked to different emotional responses, behavioural responses and feelings. For example, one who is in the process of bereavement may go through feelings of unhappiness, anger or even a sense of release. One may also feel the need to isolate oneself from social interactions or reach out to others for encouragement. Bereavement may be explained as 'complicated bereavement' when it extends beyond the expected time period; when it is devastating and damaging to one's functioning (Salters-Pedneault, 2014).

According to Olasinde (2012) bereavement is the emotional reaction following the death of a family member or a friend and the variation occurs between people of different faiths, ethnic backgrounds and national origins in their approach to death and bereavement. Other variations depend on the age, sex of the deceased, length; intensity of the grief process depends on the duration of the illness, the cause, manner of death, the family, status of the deceased and cultural beliefs.

All human beings go through the process of bereavement at some period in their lives. The passing of a loved one is a significant and continual shift in an individual's life. Bereavement includes a process of going through changes that are more likely to be experienced by the bereaved and those that are surrounding them. In the South African context, there exist diverse cultural categories including Western, Eastern and African cultures. These cultures handle the process of bereavement in a different manner from one another and cultural ways of doing things play an important role in approaching bereavement. (Yawa, 2010).

Furthermore Yawa (2010) indicated that within the Western culture, bereavement appears to be internally directed, whereas in the Black African culture (within the traditional African black culture and mixed African black culture), it seems to be directed outwardly. A traditional Black person also goes through the inner process of bereavement like denial and avoidance. However, there is also an added expectation that he must go through specific rituals related to bereavement in accordance with his culture and ethnic group.

According to Stroebe and Stroebe (2007) bereavement is associated with various psychological symptoms and illnesses and these psychological reactions to bereavement are diverse, varying between individuals, between cultures and ethnic groups as well as the type of relationship lost. It is widely accepted that bereaved people go through various stages of the grieving process. Bereavement is an individual and personal process, one that many would argue is never completely finished. However, most individuals at some time reach the point of acceptance.

Bereavement is simply defined as experiencing the death of a loved one. Often-times the term bereavement is used interchangeably with other terms such as loss, grief, and mourning. Loss refers to the process of terminating or losing a relationship or person. Bereavement may be used to describe different types of losses such as the loss of work, a physical ability, belongings or other happenings however, for the purposes of this study bereavement will refer to a combination of responses to a major loss of a significant person. (Horrocks, 2006, Salters-Pedneault 2014).

2.4 Culture and mourning

2.4.1 Culture and death: African conception of death

Death and bereavement are inevitable parts of a life cycle. Often when death occurs, the bereaved tend to respond to the emotions of loss by using different coping strategies which may differ from one person to the other and one cultural group to the other. Every culture has its own rituals and customs that guide and shape the way the bereaved mourns. Although death is an inevitable part of human experience that tends to destabilise the community within which the deceased has been functioning, the bereaved need to find purpose in a death of a loved one. It is acknowledged that trauma suffered as a result of the loss of a loved one may have profound lasting effects on the survivors' lives (Selepe & Edwards, 2008).

Culture as accumulated knowledge and achievements has through the passage of time been passed from one generation to another through performance. However cultural and ritual practices come to pass with time but is only those which are seen as relevant to the present generation which is passed on to the next generation. The new generation will also accept only those which they see fit and relevant to their lifestyle. Indigenous people place a great deal of importance on passing this

knowledge on to future generations, not only for the sake of preserving the knowledge, but also for preserving their own cultures and identities (Khosa, 2009, Kipuri 2010)

According to Hayslip (2003) although people often think of the denial of death as an individual phenomenon, cultures vary in terms of the extent to which they deny the reality of death, and individuals' responses to death are to a certain extent a function of the cultural contexts in which the individuals are born, grow, mature, and eventually die. Each culture has its own approaches to dealing with loss. These may be more or less standardized but almost always involve a core of understandings, spiritual beliefs, rituals, expectations and etiquette. In many societies, the requirements for dealing with a major loss are played out over the entire lifetime of a survivor, for example, in rituals, what is worn, how one is addressed by others, and one's rights and obligations to participate in various community activities (Parkes, 1997).

For indigenous African people, dying marks a further developmental milestone which is not separate from life developmental processes and stages. For the indigenous African people, dying is a transition to, or 'growing' to a different phase of being. The dead transcends to the state of collective immortality and exists in the company of the spirits. Death, as commonly perceived among the Shona in Zimbabwe, is the separation of the body and soul in which the material body takes a new state of decomposition while the soul due to its immortality continues to survive as a spiritual entity. The Shona find that it is not a single rite but rather several of them which they perform in respect of their dead and for their own well-being (Mwandayi, 2011, Nobles, 2006).

According to Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2013) like birth, death is characterised by a series of cultural rituals and rites of passage which at times continue for the duration of the mourning period, as long as the living dead is remembered and continues to influence the actions of the living. The mourning or grieving process cannot therefore be linked or limited to some time span in a discrete sense. It is for this reason that Africans take time off from work when their loved ones are dead, to perform rituals that eternally connect them to the deceased.

Therefore from an indigenous African ontological viewpoint, death does not imply an end to life; instead, it marks the beginning of another phase of being. The length of time for a formal mourning period and sometimes the amount of bereavement leave people are allowed to take from work is determined by a combination of personal, familial, cultural, religious, and societal factors. Ancestors protect and provide guidance to those in the material realm and therefore are highly respected, venerated and very important to the community of the living (King, 2013).

Mourning customs also affect whether bereaved individuals may feel comfortable seeking support as well as the appropriate ways for their friends and family to express sympathy during this time. For example, cultures may differ greatly on how much or how little the aggrieved individual may talk about their loss with friends, family members, and co-workers and may determine whether or not participating in a bereavement support group or psychotherapy is acceptable (McGoldrick, Hines, Lee & Ameldia, 1991).

Death of a family member affects the whole family system; intense grief is usually experienced and roles need to be renegotiated. In order to fulfil obligations towards the deceased and foster adaptation to loss and subsequent changes, rituals are often employed. Funeral and bereavement rituals have been universal phenomena across times and cultures. They are often perceived as the primary duty to the deceased and represent a culturally sanctioned framework for dealing with loss, associated grief, and the change within a social system when one of its members is gone (Pietkiewicz, 2012).

Eyetsemitan (2002) suggested that the cultural interpretation of death is better understood within the frame-work of Nigeria's triple heritage i.e. Christianity, Islam and African traditional belief system. The traditional African belief system is also referred to as ancestor worship. Unlike the Christian and Western ways of thinking, the premise for ancestor worship is based on an understanding that the life course is cyclical and not linear. Those who are dead, though not physically seen, are alive in a different world and can reincarnate in new births. Furthermore, Eyetsemitan (2002) indicated that to be in the world of the dead is to have supernatural powers over those in the world of the living and such powers include the ability to bless or to curse, and to give life or to take life. When death occurs, divination as to the cause of

death is sought from dead ancestors with death causes usually attributed to spiritual elements (witchcraft, offending one's ancestors, or gods) rather than medical or physical reasons.

Traditionally, mourning has been understood as the cultural or public expression of grief through one's behaviours which may be indicative of the likelihood that it mainly occurs in the company of others and not in isolation. Mourning may be understood as the manner of undergoing the psychological, emotional, behavioural, social and physical reactions to the experience of loss. It is more challenging for an individual to acknowledge the reality of the loss if they are left out from the funeral rituals and prohibited from acknowledging the loss (Marks, 2004).

Hutchings (2007) further noted that in Zulu culture, death is considered a highly intensified form of pollution that emanates from the corpse itself, and the relatives of the dead are thought to be not only in a position of danger themselves and in need of fortification, but also to a source of pollution to the society. Thus they may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified after the mourning period, which is always longest for the nearest relatives. After several months of mourning, a cleansing ritual is performed to cleanse the bereaved and the belongings of the deceased and in a case of the widow, she is given herbs in order to take away the bad luck. After a year or two after death another ritual is performed and a mixture of medicine is used to cleanse the bereaved of "isinyama" that is, a dark shade at the death of their loved one. The other purpose of this ritual is to assist the family to process their grief (Maloka 1998, Manyedi, 2003, Nel 2007, Ngubane, 2004).

Mkhize (2008) explains that in most African societies, when a death is announced, the family is immediately regarded as 'polluted' (isinyama') or 'sefifi' in Setswana, which implies a negative shadow which also means that the family is thrown into a state of disequilibrium. Failure to perform rituals, or performing them inappropriately may lead to the deceased's spirit being trapped in the intermediate world as a wandering spirit and such a spirit may be very troublesome.

Funeral rites are performed for the purpose of ensuring that the deceased would be able to join the ancestral spirits because in African tradition, when a person dies, it is believed that his spirit cannot reach the destination to the land of the “living dead” before the performance of death rituals. Such a spirit is capable of making the bereaved family members to have bad-luck or continue to demand from the family that the death rituals be corrected or be performed again if unhappy. (Makgahlela, 2015, Wiredu, 1995).

Bereavement takes place within the context of families and communities and is played out through interaction. Specific bereavement practices vary depending on the cultural diversity of the bereaved. Failure to follow through with certain traditional practices or rituals after death of a person can have a devastating impact on the family of the deceased and can result in an experience of unresolved loss and lack of closure (Waliggo 2006:237).

2.4.2 Worden’s four tasks of mourning

In addition to the stages of grief, Worden (2002) developed a model of grief that focused on a series of tasks for the bereaved to work through. The task model has four developmental tasks, one building on the other, for the bereaved to achieve. All human growth and development is influenced by various tasks. Mourning (the adaption to loss) also involved accomplishing certain tasks. Since mourning was viewed as a process and not a state, the tasks implied ‘grief work’, or the work of freeing oneself from the bondage of the deceased, readjusting to the environment without the deceased and re-investing in another relationship.

Worden (2009) proposed four tasks of mourning and indicated that when these tasks are completed, the bereaved person is on the way to healing. Worden’s four tasks of mourning are as follows;

- a) Task 1: To accept the reality of the loss. The first task involves accepting the reality of the loss; that the loss is real, the person is dead, and reunion in this life is impossible. Coming to this acceptance takes time because the reality of loss includes intellectual and emotional acceptance and funerals and other rituals often help the bereaved person move toward acceptance.

- b) Task 2: To experience the pain of grief. It is important to acknowledge and to work through the pain and not to cut off ones feelings and deny the pain. It is almost impossible to lose someone you have loved and cared for deeply without experiencing some level of pain. The suppression of the pain can prolong or delay the course of mourning; and experiencing the grief leads to pain but eventual healing
- c) Task 3: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing. This task involves identifying the various roles that the deceased person played in the relationship with the bereaved person and to adjust to the fact that the deceased no longer will perform these roles. Sometimes the bereaved person regresses and feels helpless with lowered self-esteem. The bereaved must develop skills to cope and redefine the loss in a way that it will benefit the survivor.
- d) Task 4: To withdraw emotional energy and reinvest it in another relationship/ to relocate the deceased emotionally and to move on with life. The final stage of grieving is to withdraw emotionally from the deceased so that the emotional energy may be invested in a new relationship. This does not mean that the bereaved person forgets about the deceased person, but rather that the bereaved finds an appropriate place for the deceased in his or her emotional life. The bereaved person is able to think about the deceased person with sadness but not with the overwhelming intensity of pain previously experienced. After completion of this task, bereaved persons are able to reinvest their emotions back into life and living.

Worden, (2009) indicated that mourning was finished when the four task of mourning were completed and when the person can reinvest his or emotions back into life and in the living. However he did add that there is a sense that mourning can be finished and there is a sense in which mourning is never finished. It is important to express one's grief and detach emotionally from the deceased to recover full function.

2.4.3 Mourning rituals around Africa

Cohen (2002) noted that in all societies, when a person dies, family, friends, and neighbours respond in structured, patterned ways to the death. Cultural guidelines determine the treatment and disposal of the body and prescribe a period of mourning

for close relatives. Death ritual, like much of human behaviour, is an expression of a cultural blueprint, of attitudes, values and ideals passed down by parents, and their parents, which an individual learns as a member of society.

According to Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2013) for traditional Africans, the living dead are an inseparable and influential part of their being and it is for this reason that when Africans perform rituals by the grave side for example, that they do not refer to connecting with the dead person's spirit. They communicate with the living dead as, 'I am talking to my father or mother or grandfather, not the spirit or body of my dead father or dead mother'. This is a clear illustration that the living dead are regarded as genuinely and authentically living with and among the living and having an influence on them. Mourning practices and death rituals are part of the complex response to loss which positively aid the bereaved when coming to terms with the ruptures caused by death.

Traditional western practices of dying and death have typically occurred within the domestic space, with the deceased still physically present for ritualized practices such as the laying-out and visiting by invited family, friends and neighbours. Death rituals and mourning practices are considered to be a positive adaptive response, or sense-making dimension to death which supports the accommodation of bereavement over an extended period of time (Ellis-Gray, 2010).

According to Van Gennep (1966) as cited in Cohen (2002), rituals done at death are similar to those carried out at other important phases in the life of an individual, for example, at birth, puberty and marriage. An individual's life is a journey and a constantly changing process. In the journey the individual is faced with different challenges which he must be able to overcome so as to be able to move to the next stage of life. In order to assist an individual to handle these challenges, society has created ceremonial reactions which Van Gennep (1966) termed as the "rites of passage."

All societies prescribe a period of mourning for close relatives and other kin of the deceased and the duration depends upon their relationship with the dead: the closer the connection, the longer the mourning period. The mourners are segregated physically from other members of the group and during the mourning period, society

permits, or require an expression of grief. The depth and duration vary from group to group and are contingent on kinship connection. The bereaved do not participate in any social activities or public gatherings weddings, like funerals, parties and church services as they are believed to be contaminated (Cohen 2002, Magudu, 2004).

Setsiba (2012) noted that the bereaved may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified or cleansed through performance of a ritual. There is a mourning period which usually takes longer for the family of the deceased. This mourning period prescribes to the family what acceptable behaviours are and what are not until the stipulated end of the mourning period. This is due the belief that death hovers over them like a shade until such a time that they undergo a purification rite. Failure to cleanse or purify as required by tradition is believed to bring bad luck (i.e. misfortune) or evil to the family or people close to the deceased.

Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2013) stated that in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribe[s] that originate from Limpopo province believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbours, attending family and community functions. Mourning rituals may require isolation of the bereaved, the wearing of special mourning clothing or special markings, and may require actions that seem to some outsiders to be pointlessly destructive or unpleasant for example, tearing one's clothing, not bathing, tearing of one's skin, beating oneself or shaving one's head. In a few societies, the rituals for dealing with a death are spread out in a series of ceremonies that span months or even years. After the burial, the community will be invited to go back to the family of the deceased for a meal. All the community members must wash their hands with water that has special cut aloe leaves. Reference has also been made to a plant called *Lippia javanica* or umsuzwane in Zulu, as a plant that is used in Zulu burials for washing of hands or cleansing (Dlukulu, 2010, Hutchings 2007).

Baloyi (2008) indicated that in traditional African thought of death, the grieving process is characterized by rituals such as the bereaved family members shaving their hair, and the slaughtering of a domestic animal. Different rituals are performed depending on who the deceased is and how they have died. For an example in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribe that originates from Limpopo province, believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after

sunset, visiting neighbours, attending family and community functions and wears black clothes. The black clothes symbolise the dark cloud, death which is associated with loss and pain (*bohloko*) in Sepedi. In case of the wife dying, the widower is also forbidden from having an intimate affair before completion of a stipulated period, usually six months to one year depending on the cultural group concerned. He is also barred from arriving home after sun set. There are different practices which vary from different ethnic groups and they all have symbolic significance.

The other process of bereavement that is undergone in the Zulu culture is that after the burial the bereaved are required to shave their heads or at least a lock of their hair is cut off and the hair is burnt together with the deceased clothes. If the bereaved is a man, he is supposed to put a strip of a black cloth. The children are also expected to put on the black strip for a specific period. However, widows are expected to wear black mourning clothes (Ritcher 2005).

After a person dies, some cultures will not touch the deceased person's clothes or belongings. The Luo people in Kenya perform a ritual called "*keyo nyinyo*" where the family and relatives divide between themselves articles left by the deceased, such as clothes, furniture, dishes, calabashes, and cooking pots. The mourning period ends after a year whereby the family members of the deceased all partake in the ritual of burning clothes of the deceased. (The Healthcare Chaplaincy, 2009, Shiino, 1997, Yawa, 2010).

According to Kgatla (2014), death rituals among the Northern Sotho people are a structured and collective activity that invites the co-presence of close family and extended families. Although among the Northern Sotho, death is sometimes a unifier and death rituals can reinforce good relations and cooperation, this is not the case in all instances because death can cause disagreements and misunderstandings among family members in regard to the mourning rituals to be performed and the people to be involved. Kgatla (2014) further noted that despite these disagreements and misunderstandings, mourning rituals stabilise the situation during the period of stress, facilitate and enable the management of emotions during a time of transition and help to enhance social support for the bereaved family in a non-disruptive and orderly way.

According to Selepe and Edwards (2008), in traditional African cultures, funerals and bereavement rituals help in the purification of the mourners who are believed to be polluted or contaminated from contact with the dead. Therefore the community members participate in ceremonies that are considered to be essential for the removal of contaminated spirit from the mourners and allow the mourners to re-enter society and return to the process of living. According (Pietkiewicz, 2012) funeral and bereavement rituals constitute a pathway of culturally normative and socially supported behaviours for the mourners i.e. how one should express and contain strong emotions, what roles one should adopt, and how to go on with one's life. In this way, funeral rituals provide meaningful and affirming experiences for the bereaved and mediate the transitions for both deceased and mourners (from life to death or one social status to another).

In a study conducted by Martin, van Wijk, Hans-Arendse and Makhaba (2013) that investigated the significance of bodies in African bereavement rituals the results showed that bereavement rituals can be differentiated by gender in African traditional contexts. Furthermore, cultural traditions often designate the elderly and men as principal figures in guiding bereavement rituals. The findings on the study also showed that certain acts of bereavement rituals are constructed and perceived as grief work unusual to women, such as, wailing and crying.

Shoko (2007) also indicated that in the Karanga belief, burial ritual practices are important, otherwise the deceased would be disappointed and inflict the family concerned with illnesses, diseases, misfortunes and deaths. And so the rituals serve the purpose of eliminating danger and enhancing the well-being of both the living and the dead. Some-post death burial rituals include the ritual of honour and appeasement. These are held because there are many ills of life which confront the Karanga people in Zimbabwe and which necessitate an appeal to spiritual forces through ritual action. These include illnesses, diseases, dangers, misfortunes, deaths and in fact all matters which threaten the well-being of the living.

Makgahlela (2015) described "*makgoma*" as a contagious culture bound bereavement illness afflicting the bereaved spouse, parents, and the first and last born children bereaved of a parent. The Northern Sotho community members characterised "*makgoma*" to present with both debilitating physical and psychological

symptoms. The symptoms described, ranged from constipation, bulging tummy, accumulation of water in the head, swollen lower limbs, feeling cold in the spine, and feeling as if one's blood is hot, loss of appetite, losing weight, vomiting and diarrhoea.

2.5 Psychology and mourning rituals

2.5.1 Psychological effects of death

The psychological consequences of loss also vary based on the cause of death and varies widely based on the nature of the death, the relationship, and the bereaved person's resources and risk factors. In psychological terms, death is likened to a crisis because it is a stressor that forces an individual to respond and adapt in some way, or try to get strategies to cope with its impact (Carr, 2012, Frisch & Frisch, 2006).

Crying, fear and anger are the common emotions that, in most cultures, are expressed in the funeral rites and customs of mourning which follow bereavement. In many societies, the requirements for dealing with a major loss are played out over the entire lifetime of the bereaved. For example, the rituals that may be performed, the types of clothing that may be worn, and one's rights and obligations to participate in various community activities (Parkes et al, 1997).

In spiritually-oriented societies, rituals are used as healing methods for the bereaved and the Western psychiatry theories tend to view "culturally sanctioned expressions which are considered by many migrant communities as coping strategies, including passivity, euphoria, aggression, submissiveness, extroversion, self-flagellation, non-assertiveness, hierarchical dependence, hearing voices, masculinity and femininity" (p. 4) as pathologies (Ata and Morrison, 2005 as cited in Meade, 2007).

Currier, Neimeyer, and Berman (2008) noted that reactions to loss are as varied and multifaceted as the grievers themselves, although research indicates that the majority of bereaved people tend to experience strong emotions, a sense of cognitive disequilibrium, and impaired role functioning for at least a short period. Unlike many stressful life experiences, bereavement cannot be altered by the coping efforts of survivors. Indeed, the major coping task faced by the bereaved is to

reconcile themselves to a situation that cannot be changed and find a way to carry on with their own lives. Worden (2009) noted that anger is frequently experienced after a loss. It can be one of the most confusing feelings for the survivor and as such is at the root of many problems in the grieving process. This anger comes from two sources: from a sense of frustration that there was nothing one could do to prevent the death, and from a kind of regressive experience that occurs after the loss of someone close.

Worden (2002) indicated that although the bereavement process is temporary in many cases and not prolonged to an extent that it leads to a condition that may need psychotherapeutic intervention; the emotion of losing someone can be so deep that one is vulnerable to acquiring a range of psychological and somatic complaints which may necessitate a need for psychotherapy. Bereaved individuals may experience different reactions to grief such as somatic or bodily distress of some type, guilt relating to the deceased or circumstances of the death, the inability to function as one had before the loss, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy sleep and appetite disturbances, absentmindedness and social withdrawal.

According to Marks (2004), mourning may be understood as the manner of undergoing the psychological, emotional, behavioural, social and physical reactions to the experience of loss. It is more challenging for an individual to acknowledge the reality of the loss if they are left out from the funeral rituals and prohibited from acknowledging the loss. Grief-related sadness in response to the loss may be regarded to be the most adaptive as a brief reaction and the expressive functions of sadness i.e. the evocation of sympathy and helping responses in others, would also facilitate bereavement in the context of the broader social group.

2.5.2 The psychological significance of mourning rituals

Taylor (1980) stated that rituals represent a symbolic affirmation of values by means of culturally standardized utterances and actions. From this perspective, rituals seem to perform specific functions in a given society or culture, for example, African women would cover their heads and everyone wear formally in a typical African funeral. Rituals play a therapeutic role to bring back the healthy status to the bereaved members.

According to Selepe and Edwards (2008), in an African context, there are culturally unique rituals and mourning practices for specific ethnic groups, clans and kinships that facilitate the process of grieving. The rituals and mourning practices observed often serve many purposes to the bereaved and accomplish different emotional and psychological needs. Properly construed, rituals are an expression of people's thoughts, emotions, social organization and cultural identities. In a study conducted among bereaved individuals, Cook and Bosley (2001) found that participants viewed the opportunity to express sad emotions and discuss the loss of a loved one as helpful. However, they perceived helpers who focused on giving advice and who were hasty in promoting recovery to be insensitive and disregarding of their feelings of sadness and not providing them with enough opportunities to share their concerns.

Crying, fear and anger are so common as to be virtually ubiquitous and most cultures provide social sanction for the expression of these emotions in the funeral rites and customs of mourning which follow bereavement. Traditional healing seeks to bring back harmony, stability and equilibrium, not only by easing physical symptoms, but also by re-integrating the person with his or her community, the earth and the spiritual world (Parkes, 1997, Ross, 2012).

Stephen, Mwanja, and Muola (2014) conducted a study aimed at establishing how mourning rituals contribute to the psychological well-being of the bereaved for the Batsotso tribe in Kenya. The study focused on establishing and understanding the effects of the Batsotso mourning rituals and ascertaining their applicability in grief and bereavement counselling. It was found that most of the Batsotso mourning rituals have therapeutic value and some of the psychological benefits of these rituals include helping the bereaved to release and process their emotions, to feel supported and to move beyond denial by accepting the death and readjust to live life where the deceased is absent. The study further showed that mourning rituals that the participants considered not helpful to less extent helped the Batsotso people release emotions, feel supported to accept the death and to move on with life.

Stephen et al., (2014) further found that crying, engaging in rituals, and focusing on the present were actions that improved coping abilities and helped bereaved individuals adapt to their losses. Bereaved individuals valued receiving acknowledgment about their loss and the significance of the deceased individual in their lives. Establishing and maintaining connections with other bereaved individuals, especially those who were going through similar experiences of loss and grief was perceived as valuable.

Given the therapeutic value of funerals, it behoves grief counsellors and other professionals in the helping field to encourage bereaved clients to participate in appropriate and culturally relevant funeral practices. Funerals serve important psychological functions of separation and integration. Separation functions are those that acknowledge that a death has occurred; by disposing of human remains through a burial or cremation, there is a symbolic acceptance of the finality of death. The process allows mourners to come to terms with the fact that the deceased will no longer be around. Thus, an initial step toward healing is taken by the ritual of the funeral ceremony (Fulton cited in Dass-Brailsford, 2009).

Ngonyama ka Sigogo and Modipa (2004) stated that certain socio-cultural rituals bring a sense of relief and wellbeing into communities. Death has a negative impact on the remaining persons' lives and rituals are considered to have therapeutic value that assists the griever in moving on with her life. Such rituals may act as a psychological means of adjustment in the face of misfortunes and can be conceptualized as a form of intervention for bereaved.

Doka (2002) indicates eight therapeutic benefits to be gained by mourners from a ritual, such as a funeral, following bereavement. These benefits are:

- a) to confirm the reality of the death
- b) to assist in the expression of grief
- c) to stimulate recollections of the deceased
- d) to focus emotional energy on a structured activity
- e) to provide social support to the grievers
- f) to provide a sense of meaning to the loss
- g) to reaffirm the social order and the place of death in that order
- h) to bring a sense of finality to the loss

In a study conducted by Bolton and Camp (1986), it was found that grief adjustment among widowed individuals correlated positively with their level of participation in rituals prior to, during, and following funeral rites. Acknowledging gifts or sympathy cards, sorting and disposing of the personal effects of the deceased, and visiting the burial site of the deceased were reported as activities that integrated loss and improved the adjustment of the bereaved.

The removal of the darkness that had stricken the family due to bereavement has now been uplifted through rituals, can be associated with a sense of catharsis for the bereaved. The experience of catharsis is secondary to the bereaved believing that they have now been purified and protected. The cleansing appears to be a therapeutic process that entails steaming, sniffing and bathing with water mixed with traditional herbs. In some cases, the traditional healer knocks the bereaved on their joints with "*ditsheme*", which is meant to strengthen the bereaved. The bereaved will then be incised on their joints, traditional herbs rubbed on the incisions (Letsosa & Semenya, 2011, Pears, 2012 as cited in Makgahlela, 2015).

However Richter (2005:1007) noted that amaZulu do not work through the death of a loved one emotionally but instead involve themselves in the funeral rituals surrounding the actual burial. The purpose of this concentration on ritualism is to protect people from becoming absorbed emotionally. The focus is diverted from the current problem by engaging the bereaved in the complexity of rituals. Setsiba (2012) indicated that grief reactions can be accompanied by strong emotions and performance of a grief ritual can serve as a vehicle of expressing those emotions. During mourning, groups of people join with each other to express words and behaviours symbolic of support and comfort. Neighbours have the opportunity to express their condolences, share what they have to assist the mourners to deal with the reality of loss. Therefore, rituals allow for those supportive interactions to happen which can strengthen family and group.

2.6 Theoretical framework: The Afrocentric perspective

The researcher in the present study used the Afrocentric perspective as a lens through which the therapeutic significance of mourning rituals were understood. According to Monteiro-Ferreira (2014) the Afrocentric perspective materialised as a theory of knowledge in the 1980s under Molefi Kete Asante, in order to pose a systematic challenge to Western epistemology and was also primarily addressed to a detailed investigation and questioning of the Eurocentric nature of knowledge; to avoid personal and collective destruction of people of African descent; to reclaiming an African cultural systems the coherent meeting point of every African cultural and historical past. This perspective also emerged as a set of premises that would account for the understanding of an African sense of totality and wholeness in a network of multiple and particular manifestations of different fields of knowledge to address the life and experience of people of African descent in America, in the African continent, and in other diasporas.

According to Mkabela (2005), the Afrocentric paradigm locates research from an African viewpoint and creates Africa's own intellectual perspective. It provides methods African people can use for making sense of their everyday experience and takes the indigenous African's point-of-view. The aim is to be sufficiently detailed and sensitive to actual social contexts and to investigate the methodological bases or orderly character of ordinary social activities. The Afrocentric paradigm focuses on Africa as the cultural centre for the study of African experiences and interprets research data from an African perspective. The Afrocentric perspective examines topics with the eye of African people as subjects of historical experiences and seeks to re-locate the African person as an agent in human history in an effort to eliminate the illusion of the fringes. Afrocentricity as a theory of change intends to re-locate the African person as subject, thus destroying the notion of being objects in the Western project of domination. (Asante, 2003).

According to Monteiro-Ferreira (2014), the Afrocentric perspective is theoretically rooted in the pursuit of human knowledge from a culturally and historically located perspective of the subject and understanding of human expressions in diverse multicultural societies. Afrocentric theory seeks neither a totalising nor a universal scope and certainly not an essentialised perspective on knowledge but put an

emphasis in on African location as the methodological approach to African traditions and cultures while refusing the subaltern place that has always been conferred to Black expressions, artistic and cultural, by Eurocentric scholars.

Afrocentricity approach emerges as a methodology that consciously operates within African ways of knowing and existence and results in the implementation of principles, methods, concepts, and ideas that are derived from our own African cultural experiences). The Afrocentric idea rests on the assertion of the primacy of the African experience for African people and the crucial role attributed to the African social and cultural experience is the ultimate reference (Mazama, 2001, Mazama, 2003). Pellerin (2012) noted that Afrocentric methodologies must operate as valid and reliable research aimed towards the freeing of African peoples' thoughts and realities hence Afrocentricity is the social science inquiry basis of African cultural phenomenon in practice. Employing an Afrocentric methodology in exploratory research involves investigating African phenomenon for the purpose of developing a culturally accurate understanding of Africana reality.

Asante (2007) identifies five basic characteristics of an Afrocentric oriented project:

- The first characteristic that must be established is an interest in psychological location, whereby the direction and orientation out of which African people operate is prioritized and determined by the symbols, motives, rituals, signs, and language that African people create.
- The second basic characteristic is a commitment to finding the African subject place. The focus of this characteristic is establishing the centrality of African people as subject in all phenomenon, (i.e. whether social, political, economic, or religious seeking the subject role of African people, ideas, and concepts.
- The third characteristic is a defense of African cultural elements. This involves the total safeguarding and protection of African culture i.e. values, habits, customs, religions, behaviours, and thoughts and clear of all interpretations that are un-African.
- The fourth characteristic is a commitment to language and vocabulary refinement. This means that the person who contextualizes African reality must be aware of the subject role of all African phenomena. This also means that the terms and definitions used to define Africana people are not

outsourced from other cultures, but instead are derived from African social-historical experiences and languages.

- The final basic characteristic of an Afrocentric project is a commitment to a new African narrative. This involves creating a new corrected history of African people throughout the world. It is important to understand that this new narrative will not falsify the social history of Africa, but promote culturally centred African historiographies, literature, economic development, and religious orientations.

The Afrocentric approach was therefore considered a suitable theoretical framework for the present study, as the aim of the study is to explore the psychological meaning of mourning rituals from the perspective of African people in Botlokwa community, Limpopo province. The researcher also ensured that the cultural thoughts and practices were protected from interpretations that are un-African by using a Sepedi language expert to translate the research instrument and information obtained into both English and Sepedi.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

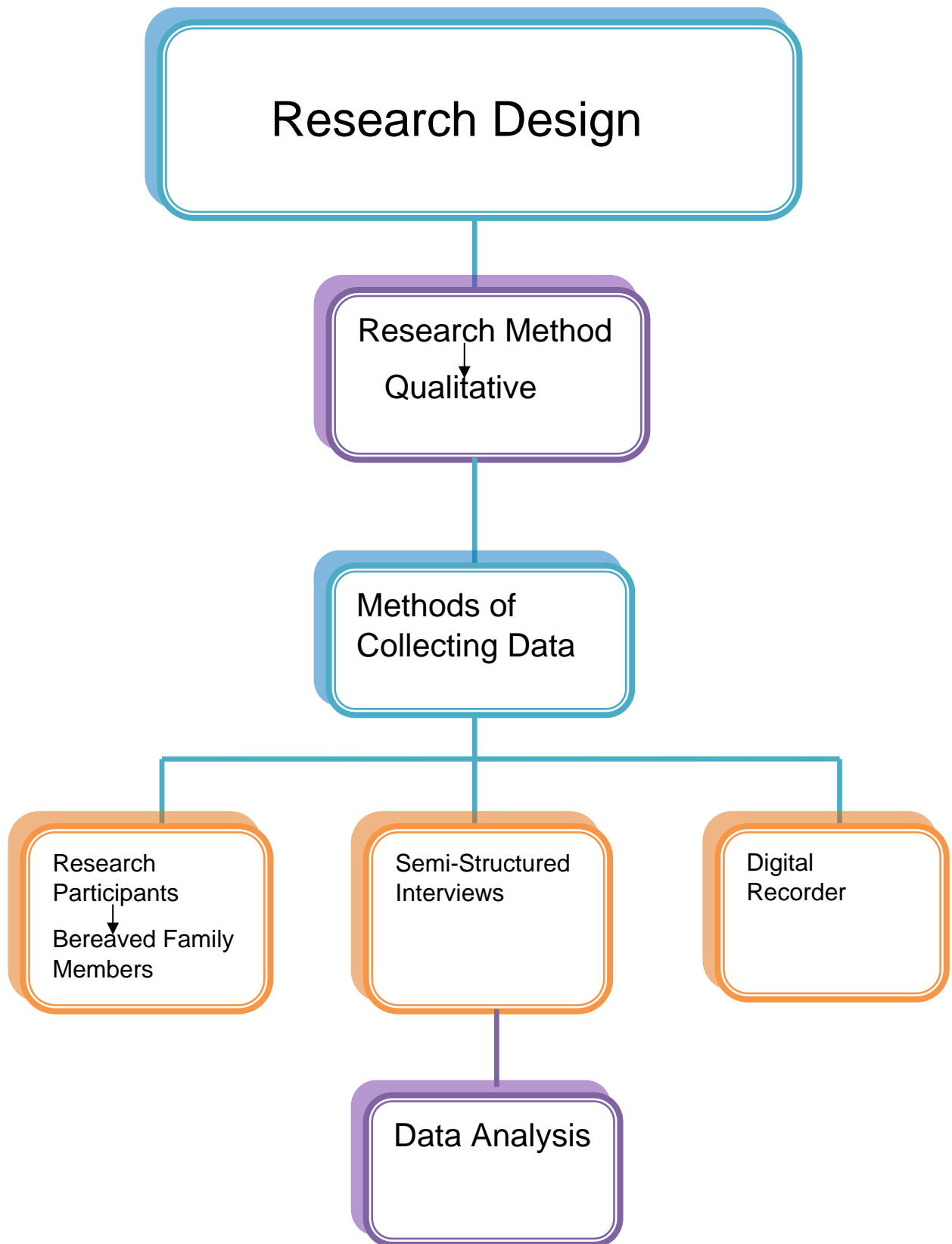
3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology that was used in this study is outlined in detail. The chapter discusses qualitative research as an approach that was used for the present study. The strength and weaknesses of this approach are highlighted. The chapter goes further to provide a discussion regarding the setting for the study and how sampling was done. The discussion on data collection provides information on how data was collected. The data collection method that was chosen is explained including the data collection instrument. The data analysis method is also described in detail whilst the issues relating to trustworthiness of the study are highlighted. The last part of this chapter focuses on the ethical considerations for the present study.

3.2 Research design

The qualitative approach was followed to explore the psychological meanings of mourning rituals observed in Botlokwa indigenous community in Limpopo Province (see Figure 1 for illustration of the research process).

Figure 1 Schematic Representation of the Research Design



Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. An advantage of qualitative research is that the researcher obtains a more realistic feel of the world that cannot be experienced in the numerical data and statistical analysis used in quantitative research (Merriam, 2009). A qualitative approach is a suitable approach for this study because qualitative methods generally aim to understand the experiences and attitudes of participants, to explore the phenomenon being studied and to provide in depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

According to Babbie (2010), the strength of qualitative research is its ability to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue. It is a flexible way to perform data collection, subsequent analysis and interpretation of collected information. Qualitative research however has some shortcomings because the approach is not an appropriate means of arriving at statistical descriptions of a large population. According to Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) one advantage of qualitative methods is the opportunity given to respondents to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses, as quantitative methods do. Open-ended questions have the ability to evoke responses that are meaningful and culturally salient to the participant, unanticipated by the researcher and rich and explanatory in nature. The data is collected from very few cases or individuals which means findings cannot be generalised to a larger population. Rigor is more difficult to maintain, assess and demonstrate and subjectivity leads to procedural problems (Merriam, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

3.3 Sampling

Sampling is defined as the selection of some part of an aggregate or totality on the basis of which a judgement or inference about the aggregate or totality is made and involves the process of obtaining information about an entire population by examining only a part of it. Purposive sampling was utilised in the study. This is a sampling method based on the judgement of a researcher regarding the characteristics of a representative sample. It involves selecting participants who share particular characteristics and have the potential to provide rich, relevant and

diverse data pertinent to the research question. (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000; Tong, Sainsbury & Craig, 2007). Schutt (2008) noted that in purposive sampling, each sample element is selected for a purpose, usually because of the unique position of the sample elements. Purposive sampling may involve studying the entire population of some limited group or a subset of a population. With purposive sampling the researcher selects the sample arbitrarily which he considers important for the research and believes it as typical and representative of the population. The study was conducted at Mphakane village, Botlokwa in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. The village of Botlokwa is about 55km north of Polokwane and in a society that is dominated by Christianity. They still attend their respective churches whenever they can, while not forgetting their traditional African beliefs ("Religion" 2016). The researcher chose to conduct research in this community because the Batlokwa people still preserve their culture (Religion, 2016). Furthermore, the researcher is familiar with the area. The researcher was not aware of any study of this nature that has been conducted within this area.

There appears to be no clear agreement on any specific time period needed for recovery from grief. Most bereaved persons experiencing normal grief will note a lessening of symptoms at anywhere from 6 months through to 2 years post loss. Normal or common grief that appears to occur in 50 to 85% of people following a loss, is time-bound, begins soon after the loss, and largely resolves itself within the first year or two Kellehear (2002). According to the Patient Education Institute (2012) normal grief symptoms happen less often and will feel less severe as time passes although recovery does not happen in a set period of time for most bereaved people having normal grief, symptoms lessen between 6 months and 2 years after the loss.

According to Bryant and Peck (2009), as much as people vary in age, they also vary in the likelihood of having experience on tradition and general knowledge about funerals and mourning rituals. Middle-aged and older persons tend to hold more favourable attitudes and knowledge about funeral and mourning rituals, as opposed to young persons' often less traditional approach to dealing with grief.

Based on the above considerations regarding the period needed for recovery and the likelihood of having knowledge about funerals and mourning rituals, the participants chosen were people who had experienced death in their families within

the last two years preceding the interviews. The participants were middle-aged and older persons (males = 5; females = 5), with ages ranging from 40 to 60.

3.4 Data collection

Data for this study was collected through the use of semi structured one-on one interviews (see Appendix 1a: Interview guide – English version; and Appendix 1b: Interview guide – Sepedi version).

Semi- structured interviews contain standardised questions and/ or a list of topics, but the interviewer can still deviate and ask follow-up or probing questions based on the replies of participants. Semi-structured interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail. The flexibility of this approach, particularly compared to structured interviews, also allows for the discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants (Du Plooy, 2002, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008). Babbie (2006) noted that semi-structured interviews allow for extensive probing, follow-up questions, discussion, and observation of emotional reaction not possible in a quantitative study such as a telephone or mail survey. Personal interviews allow analyses of thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, and opinions that have a high level of content validity.

The interviews were conducted in Sepedi or English depending on the preferences of the participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and later translated (for the non- English transcripts) into English by an independent Sepedi-English language expert before the data was analysed. During the process of the interview, data was recorded by using a digital recorder. Using a digital recorder according to (Blaxter Hughes & Tight, 2006), the researcher is able to concentrate on the process of the interview and be able, for example, to give appropriate eye contact. The digital recorder was used by the researcher in the study to record the semi – structured interviews conducted with the participants.

3.5 Data analysis

Data were analysed using a content analysis. According to Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005), content analysis can be described as a quantitative analysis of qualitative information involving the counting of the frequencies and sequence of certain words, phrases or concepts in order to identify keyword and themes. Qualitative content analysis has been defined as a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns. Qualitative content analysis pays attention to unique themes that illustrate the range of the meanings of the phenomenon rather than the statistical significance of the occurrence of particular texts or concepts (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). Furthermore, Marvasti (2004) noted that the approach of content analysis offers convenience of simplifying and reducing large amounts of data into organized segments and also assist in the translation of the content of thousands of pages into a few common themes.

The following five steps of content analysis as outlined by Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Kelly (2006) were followed:

- **Familiarisation and immersion:** The researcher reads through the data collected over and over again making notes in order to familiarise herself with it. Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000) indicated that this process involves immersion in the raw data (or typically a pragmatic selection from the data) by listening to tapes, reading transcripts, studying notes and so on, in order to list key ideas and recurrent themes
- **Inducing themes:** The researcher determines and organises the repeating patterns of themes, propositions or ideas related to the research question of the study. Pope, Ziebland and Mays (2000) noted that this stage is characterised by identifying all the key issues, concepts, and themes by which the data can be examined and referenced. This is carried out by drawing on a priori issues and questions derived from the aims and objectives of the study as well as issues raised by the respondents themselves and views or experiences that recur in the data.

- **Coding:** This process involves the coding or labelling of themes identified in order to assist in the easy identification of the themes determined. According to Clarke and Braun (2013) coding as a common element of many approaches to qualitative analysis involves generating pithy labels for important features of the data of relevance to the (broad) research question guiding the analysis. Coding is not simply a method of data reduction; it is also an analytic process as codes capture both a semantic and conceptual reading of the data. The researcher codes every data item and ends this phase by collating all their codes and relevant data extracts.
- **Elaboration:** After the induction of themes and coding the researcher explores and checks the identified themes with the aim of comparing sections of text and to check for information that might have been left out during the coding system. The aim here is to go through the material over and over until there is certainty that no new themes surfaces. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) this stage also involves the refinement of those themes. During this phase, it will become evident that some candidate themes are not really themes (e.g., if there are not enough data to support them, or the data are too diverse), while others might collapse into each other (e.g., two apparently separate themes might form one theme) and other themes might need to be broken down into separate themes.
- **Interpretation and checking:** This step involves putting together a written report regarding the study using themes identified from the analysis as subheadings. Clarke and Braun (2013) writing-up involves weaving together the analytic narrative and (vivid) data extracts to tell the reader a coherent and persuasive story about the data, and contextualising it in relation to existing literature.

3.6 Quality criteria

In order to ensure that the results of the study have scientific merit, the following qualitative research principles as outlined by (Shenton, 2004) were observed:

3.6.1 Credibility

According to De Vos (2002), this is the alternative to internal validity, in which the goal is to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. Credibility establishes whether or not the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and is a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. A qualitative researcher establishes thoroughness of the inquiry by adopting the following credibility strategies: prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity (field journal), triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing authority of researcher and structural coherence.

Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) indicated that to improve the credibility of qualitative content analysis, researchers not only need to design data collection strategies that are able to adequately solicit the representations, but also to design transparent processes for coding and drawing conclusions from the raw data. In the context of the present study, the researcher ensured credibility by providing participants an opportunity to decline partaking in the study. They were also given an option to withdraw in the process should they no longer want to be part of the study. The participants participated willingly and were therefore able to share about their experiences openly and freely. The researcher also utilised a semi-structured interview guide which allowed probing and for recurring themes to be obtained.

3.6.2 Transferability

This as the alternative to external validity or generalisability, in which the burden of demonstrating the applicability of one set of findings to another context rests more with the investigator who would make the transfer, than with the original investigator (De Vos, 2002). According to Bitsch (2005) as cited in Anney (2014), the "researcher facilitates the transferability judgment by a potential user through 'thick description'

and purposeful sampling” (p. 85). This means that when the researcher provides a detailed description of the enquiry and participants were selected purposively, it facilitates transferability of the inquiry. In the context of the present study, the researcher ensured transferability by using participants that were from different social contexts. These participants were also deemed to be from different age groups and different experiences in terms mourning rituals in an attempt to ensure the applicability of the study to other communities and environments.

3.6.3 Dependability

This is the alternative to reliability, in which the researcher attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon chosen for study as well as changes in the design created by increasingly refined understanding of setting. This represents the set of assumptions very different from those shaping the concept of reliability. Dependability involves participants evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations of the study to make sure that they are all supported by the data received from the informants of the study (Anney, 2014, De Vos, 2002).

Shenton (2004) further indicated that in order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. In the context of the present study, the researcher ensured dependability by providing thorough information regarding the research design and its application and the process of data collection and analysis.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability captures the traditional concept of the objectivity. The need to ask whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another is stressed. The concept of confirmability is the qualitative researcher’s comparable concern to objectivity. Here steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (De Vos, 2002, Shenton, 2004). Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of an inquiry could be confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997 as cited in Anney, 2014).

Confirmability is “concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the inquirer’s imagination, but are clearly derived from the data” (Tobin & Begley, 2004, p. 392). For the present study, the researcher maintained objectivity and refrained from using personal preferences or prejudices to influence the participants’ contribution to the study. Furthermore for the present study, the results were in line with other studies in the field, thus providing a measure of conformability.

3.7 Ethical considerations

3.7.1 Permission to conduct the study

This study forms part of a bigger research project sponsored by the National Institute for the Humanities and Social Sciences (NIHSS), and undertaken by Prof T Sodi. The bigger research project is entitled: “The experiences of death, dying and bereavement in three African communities in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Though ethical clearance for the bigger project was obtained, the researcher in the present study also applied to the University of Limpopo’s Research Ethics Committee to obtain ethical approval as well. Permission to access the participants in the community was obtained from the local tribal authority in keeping with the local communication protocols (see Appendix 2a: Letter to Botlokwa Tribal Authority – English version, and Appendix 2b: Letter to Botlokwa Tribal Authority – Sepedi version).

3.7.2 Confidentiality

Gregory (2003) indicated that taking confidentiality seriously does not only mean intentionally taking it upon oneself not to reveal to others what has been revealed in confidence by the participants, but it also places a burden upon the researcher to ensure that confidentiality is not breached accidentally or as a result of carelessness. Similarly, the researcher in the present study ensured that confidentiality is maintained. In this regard, confidentiality was ensured by safely filing the interview schedules and participants transcripts and by ensuring that only people part of the research team had access to the information.

3.7.3 Informed consent

Researchers are obliged to ensure that the participants know and understand all the relevant information about the study and their consent without any force and consent is achieved when the participants in the research study comprehend its objectives, understand the level, and agree to cooperate (Baker, 1994). Prior to asking for the prospective participants' consent, the nature and purpose of the study and all procedures that would be undertaken during data collection were explained to the participants. The main aim was to provide the participants with all the information that would help them make informed decisions. Written consent was required and the potential participants were asked to complete the consent form before data was collected. A consent form was provided to participants (see Appendix 3a – Consent letter and form English version and 3b – Consent letter and form Sepedi version).

3.7.4 Voluntary participation and autonomy

Babbie (2002) indicates that the norm of voluntary participation is easier to accept in theory than to apply in practice; however no one should be forced to participate. For the purpose of this study, no force to coerce the potential participants to take part in the investigation was used as participation was voluntary. Each participant was expected to give his/her permission to take part in the study and they were also informed that they were free to withdraw from the study anytime should they want to do so.

3.7.5 Aftercare for participants

According to Strydom (2002), the responsibility to protect participants against harm goes further than efforts to repair, or attempt to minimise such harm. In other words, there is a need for researchers to thoroughly inform participants about the potential impact of the study and to take appropriate measure to minimise the harm. The participants should be given assurance that they will be indemnified against any physical and emotional harm. Given the nature of the subject matter that was under investigation, the interviews were approached in a sensitive manner and some participants showed some adverse emotional reactions during the interview.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed discussion of the research methodology applied for the study. As mentioned above, qualitative research was employed in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect information from the participants. In order to help the interviewer keep accurate information a data recorder was used to capture the information. In addition, data collected from the participants was analysed using content analysis. Lastly, ethical issues such as permission to conduct the study, informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation and autonomy and aftercare of participants were presented.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the study are presented, starting with the demographic details of the participants, and followed by a presentation of themes and the subthemes that emerged. The following key themes emerged from the study: a) the types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one; b) the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals; and, c) the psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved. The chapter will be concluded by giving a brief summary of the findings.

4.2. Demographic details of participants

Ten individuals participated in this study. The demographic details of the participants are presented in the table below (Table 1). Pseudo names were used to protect the identity of each research participant.

Name	Age	Gender	Period of mourning	Relationship with the Deceased
Participant 1	58 years	Female	1 year 6 months	Wife
Participant 2	58 years	Male	1 year 8 months	Son
Participant 3	46 years	Male	2 years	Father
Participant 4	49 years	Male	1 year	Husband
Participant 5	60 years	Male	6 months	Brother
Participant 6	59 years	Female	8 Months	Mother
Participant 7	41 years	Female	3 Months	Daughter
Participant 8	43 years	Female	1 year	Mother
Participant 9	44 years	Male	1 year 2 months	Father

Participant 10	60 years	Female	2 years	Granddaughter
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Table1: Demographic details of the participants

The above table illustrates demographic information of the participants that were interviewed. All participants were drawn from Mphakane village, Botlokwa in Limpopo Province. The participants comprised equal percentage of both female (50%) and male (50%). The participants were elderly community members from the age of forty one (41) and sixty (60) years who had experienced the death of a family member within a period of two years. All the participants in the study were Sepedi (Setlokwa) speaking.

4.3 Emerging themes

The emerging themes and subthemes are presented in a tabular form as reflected in Table 2 below. A detailed narrative presentation of each theme and subtheme will also be given.

Table 2: Themes and subthemes

Theme number	Main Theme	Subtheme
1.	Types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one (4.3.1)	Consulting a traditional healer (4.3.1.1)
		Cleansing (4.3.1.2)
		Mourning clothes (4.3.1.3)
		Social interaction restrictions (4.3.1.4)
		Distribution of the deceased's clothes (4.3.1.5)
2.	Subjective meaning the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals (4.3.2)	Knowledge passed on by elders (4.3.2.1)
		Appeasing the ancestors and avoiding illnesses and misfortunes (4.3.2.2)
		Cleansing the contaminated spirit

		and removing bad luck (4.3.2.3)
3.	Psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved (4.3.3)	Coping with the death of a loved one (4.3.3.1)
		Strengthening the bereaved (4.3.3.2)
		Healing and acceptance (4.3.3.4)

4.3.1 The types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one

All the participants in this study were able to respond to or describe the types of mourning rituals they performed after the loss of a loved one. The following subthemes emerged from the narratives of the participants: a) consulting a traditional healer b) cleansing c) mourning clothes d) social interaction restrictions and e) distribution of the deceased's clothes. What follows is a presentation of each subthemes in terms of the relevant extracts from the narratives by the participants. A brief summary of the associated psychological meanings is presented at the end of each subtheme.

4.3.1.1 Consulting a traditional healer

The findings of this study suggest that most participants find it important to consult with a traditional healer immediately after the death of a loved one for different reasons. Other participants indicated the importance of consulting a traditional healer for protection and security during the funeral arrangements and ceremony. The following extracts are from the interviews regarding the above-mentioned sub-theme:

“Before the funeral there are not a lot of rituals that are performed. It is just that when there is death in family, because there will be a lot of people now in the house, then you must get protection for the funeral and so that the funeral arrangements can go well.” (Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

“After my mother’s death a traditional healer was called and used muthi (traditional medicine) to cleanse and strengthen/secure the home and also my

mother's grave if they are not sure if the person died due to natural causes and also for them to rest in peace.” **(Participant 2, male, 58 years old).**

“Some people who have doubts/suspicious will look for a traditional healer to come and strengthen/secure the deceased's body, they use muthi in order to help the deceased's spirit to rest in peace. So sometimes the family goes to the mortuary and they would perform rituals there, like smear muthi or herbs on the corpse, which is why we restrict people from viewing the body because of that.” **(Participant 3, male, 46 years old)**

Other participants indicated that consulting the traditional healer after the death of a loved one is done to assist the deceased's soul to rest in peace. The following extracts support the above statement:

“In our culture when a person has passed away we go to a traditional healer to enquire about how we should help our person's soul rest in peace before we bury them. Then the traditional healer will give us muthi and instruct us what to do.” **(Participant 6, female, 59 years old).**

“After we buried my mother a traditional healer was called and divined to check whether the deceased is resting in peace, so for my mother the traditional healer saw that my mother was not resting in peace and her spirit was still in the house.” **(Participant 7, female, 41 years old)**

However, for other participants consulting the traditional healer is about seeking answers regarding the circumstances of the deceased's death. The following extracts support this statement:

“After the death of our son we went to a traditional healer to enquire because it happens that sometimes you after you bury someone for you to immediately follow them, like also pass away. And also to find out whether the deceased's death was natural or due to witchcraft and then traditional healer will give us some muthi to use for protection during funeral arrangements.” **(Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“So after we had called the mortuary, we went to a traditional healer to find out what had happened to these children for them to die like that. And we went to the mortuary because the traditional healer had given us herbs to smear on the deceased’s bodies in order to prevent the person who had done that to them from taking also their spirits.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old).

“When someone has passed away at home, a traditional healer is called to come and perform rituals here at home, so that the dark cloud or “sefifi” can be removed.” (Participant 4, male, 49 years old).

From the above extracts, it does appear that help seeking behaviour is triggered by the loss of a loved one. In this cultural context, a traditional healer appears to be the most relevant and critical person to be consulted immediately after suffering the loss of a loved one. The services of a traditional healer are sought for protection during funeral arrangements and also to get their loved one’s souls to rest in peace.

4.3.1.2 Cleansing

The participants indicated that various cleansing rituals are performed after the death of a loved one. The prescriptions regarding the performance of the cleansing rituals were also highlighted by the participants. Although there were some similarities in the cleansing rituals performed, there were also differences, as it is evident in the extracts below:

“After my husband’s death I underwent cleansing rituals together with my last born child and we were assisted through steaming our bodies to sweat out the deceased’s sweat. After the traditional healer steamed me, he used razor blades to make pricks all over my body and applied muthi afterwards.” (Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

“As family members because it was our mother who passed away, we looked for a traditional healer to come treat all of us as the deceased’s children. So the traditional healer cleansed us, he steamed us in hot stones and water

mixed with muthi and then gave us muthi drink to apply on our bodies.”

(Participant 2, male, 61 years old)

“You must be steamed up with hot stones that are used to cleanse you and your skin pricked using razor blade to take out the dirty blood and they strengthen your body the way they can so that you can be strong. Then you will be given herbs to apply on your body.” **(Participant 3, male, 46 years old)**

“After the burial a traditional healer is called to come and cleanse you and also pricks your skin. The yard is also cleansed by mixing water and “muthi” in a basin and sprinkling the water around the yard. All these is done to remove the spirit and shadow of the deceased.” **(Participant 8, female, 43 years old)**

“After the funeral they wash and cleanse you so that the dark cloud that covers you can leave. After the death of a loved one there is a bad spirit that covers you that is why you need to be cleansed.” **(Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“So before the funeral I was told to block my ears with tissue and also cover the ears with a beanie so that no air gets in there. I was also requested to wear a jacket to show respect and that I am in mourning. After the funeral the traditional healer comes to cleanse you of the bad omen. The cleansing includes burning stones, boiling water and mixing with muthi and them steaming. Then a razor blade is used to prick your skin in order to take out the dirty blood. For me they didn’t shave my whole hair but they cut bits of hair from my head.” **(Participant 4, male, 49 years old)**

After the funeral the traditional healer is called and she/he then burns stones, boils water and mix with muthi and then steam up all of you in the house. This is done to remove the dark cloud and also the deceased’s shadow.” **(Participant 5, male, 60 years old)**

“The traditional healer is called to treat the bereaved, what they do is that they put stones on the fire, mix that with herbs and then the bereaved are steamed up, after this they knocked us all on our joints so that we can be strengthened

and not experience back pain problems.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“The cleansing occurs after the funeral, the traditional healer puts the stones on the fire to burn then they steam us. We also sniffed some muthi so that we could sneeze. But we were not treated the same, as the last born I was called “moll” or chief mourner and I got extra treatment, I was pricked using razor blades the whole body and muthi was applied. The traditional healer then used hoe on whole body like as if they were ploughing.” (Participant 7, female, 41 years old)

“So in the olden days after the funeral and the cleansing ceremonies, they would shave hair but nowadays after people make these nice hairstyles it is not easy for one to shave their hair, like my wife also didn’t shave her hair.” (Participant 9, male, 44 years old)

“My daughters were then cleansed, they were steamed using hot stones and muthi so that their placenta should not be fearful and be able to contain children again and also to remove the dark cloud.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old)

Based on the above extracts, cleansing rituals include a number of activities such as the steaming, pricking of the skin using razor blades and also applying *muthi* on ones’ skin. There are differences noted in the cleansing rituals based on the relationship one has with the deceased as indicated in some extracts (Participant 1, 2, 7 & 10). It does appear that in all instances there is “*moll*” (chief mourner) who may be expected to undergo more mourning rituals than other family members. In most cases the “*moll*” appears to be the spouse of the deceased, the last born child of the deceased or someone who has some kind of special relationship with the deceased than other family members.

From the above extracts, it does also appear that the cleansing rituals have a number of symbolic functions that include the following: a) to symbolically remove what is understood in this cultural context to be a “dark cloud” that is covering the family after death, b) to rid the bereaved of “dirty blood” and the deceased’s shadow and c) to make the bereaved sweat out the deceased’s sweat.

4.3.1.3 Mourning clothes

The participants pointed out that there are different types of mourning clothes that are worn after the death of a loved one and their significance. The findings of the study also highlighted gender differences in terms of mourning clothes worn after death of a loved one and the periods for wearing such clothes. The following extracts illustrate this:

“There are changes in the clothing; you wear black clothes to show that you are in mourning to show that you are now a widow. You must either wear black dress and doek or “motoiši” or put a blanket over your shoulders as a sign of a great respect to your late partner.” (Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

“As the deceased’s children we wore black cloths on our arms to show that we were in mourning, and after 3 months we take them off.” (Participant 2, male, 58 years old)

“In my case when my child passed away, my wife was told to wear a small blanket/ shawl on her shoulders, whereas the older family women wore doeks, blue or black which will be taken off after 6 months.” (Participant 3, male, 46 years old)

“The mourning clothes show that the person is in mourning and they lost someone dear to them, and people will be able to tell by the type of mourning clothes they wear which person they lost. I wore a piece of black cloth on the arm when my brother passed on but for others if it is their parent they were a “khiba” and doek.” (Participant 5, male, 60 years old)

“The family agrees on the colour and the type of clothing you wear, when my child passed away my family made for me a black shawl and doek to wear for a period of three months. This was to show that I was in mourning and respect to my child.” (Participant 8, female, 43 years old)

“As the husband whose wife is deceased they make for you a black cloth to put or clip on the arm/shoulder. And you wear this for a certain period about 3 to 6 months.” (Participant 4, male, 49 years old)

“When my daughter passed away, her eldest daughter wore a black dress as the chief mourner and the others wore doeks to show that they are in mourning, and for her son a black cloth was cut for him to put on his arm to show that he is in mourning.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“As the deceased’s children we must wear in a manner that shows that we are in mourning and to show respect to the deceased, my other siblings are not wearing anything but I am wearing a black doek as the last born for three months.” (Participant 7, female, 41 years old)

“When my son passed away, a piece of cloth was cut and clipped on the arm which is a sign that I was in mourning. But mourning the death of a child or any family member is not like when it is your spouse.” (Participant 9, male, 44 years old)

“My daughters wore shawls on their shoulders and as the grandmother I wore a black doek for three months. This was to show that we were in mourning and also respected the deceased.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old)

The extracts presented above indicate that there are differences in the mourning clothes that are supposed to be worn as it depends on who has passed away and the bereaved relationship with the deceased. The mourning clothes also differ based on gender as most females wear either a shawl, black *doek* and dress and the males clip or wear a black cloth on the arm after the death of a loved one. The mourning clothes are worn for a certain period and the period also differs on who has passed away. It is also highlighted above that wearing mourning cloths is not only to show that the bereaved is in mourning but also as a sign of respect to the deceased.

4.3.1.4 Social interaction restrictions

The participants highlighted the importance of restrictions and withdrawal from social interaction after the death of a loved one. The withdrawal is also dependent on who passed away and their relationship to the bereaved, as illustrated in the extracts below:

“If it is your husband who has passed away, you spend a year without engaging in intimacy relationships with other men, so that you can be strong. You are also not supposed to go in to other people’s yards for about six months because the bad omen is still with you. But there is a tree called “mmale” used to remove the dark cloud if you need to go to someone’s yard urgently but other than that as a widow I am not supposed to be visiting people. And also as a widow you are not supposed to make noise or speak in a high voice or come home after sunset.” **(Participant 1, female, 58 years old)**

“For me I was restricted a lot, but I was warned by my ancestors not to engage in any intimate relationship with another woman until I was fully and well treated by the traditional healer to avoid making my new partner sick.” **(Participant 4, male, 49 years old)**

“Because it was my child that passed away I had to stay at home for the whole three months. It was only after the cleansing ceremony where they remove dark cloud and the child’s clothes have been distributed I was allowed to roam around.” **(Participant 8, female, 43 years old)**

“The restrictions differ on who has passed on, for me when my child passed away, the restriction was not for a longer period. I think I took about a week or two staying at home after that I was able to go around without any restrictions.” **(Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“In our culture the bereaved must stay at home because you are still covered with dark cloud. Before I get in someone’s yard, they bring me “mmale” which is a tree used to remove the shadows of dead people and evil spirits. I wash

my hands right there at the gate, then I will be allowed to get in.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old)

In terms of restrictions of bereaved, the restrictions are based on the belief that after death the bereaved are still covered with the deceased's shadow and this is interpreted as a bad omen. However there is an emergency help in case the bereaved needs to go to other people's yards where a plant called “*mmale*” is used to cleanse the bereaved off the deceased's shadows and therefore be safe to enter other people's yards. The restrictions also differs on the gender and the nature of the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved. Psychologically, the implication here is that while the bereaved withdraws for a specific time from social interactions they are able to focus on performing rituals needed to re-integrate them into the society and to facilitate the grieving and healing process.

4.3.1.5 Distribution of the deceased's clothes

The findings of the study suggest that the deceased's clothes are often considered to be covered with “dark cloud”, hence, the necessity for the rituals to cleanse the clothes. The participants highlighted the significance of distribution of the deceased's clothes. There were also differences that were noted from the participants regarding the length of the period to be observed before the deceased's clothes should be distributed. Below are the extracts to illustrate this:

“All the clothes of the deceased are packed and put away after the death. Then after a month or three when the mourning clothes are taken off, the deceased's clothes are also taken out and cleansed before they can be distributed amongst family members, friends and relatives. The traditional healer will sprinkle a mixture of herbs and water over those clothes in order to remove the bad cloud and cleanse them.” (Participant 5, male, 60 years old)

“All the clothing items of the deceased are removed and are not supposed to stay in the open and all just stacked in a sack, so that air should not get in there or go out of there as the children may feel the spirit of the deceased. Then there will be a month when a cleansing ceremony “go ntšha setšhila”. The traditional healer cleanses the clothes and start sprinkle “muthi” to

remove “sefifi”. The clothes will be safe to be distributed after this.”
(Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“So after a month or two after the funeral, there was a ceremony to distribute the deceased’s clothes. The traditional healer cleansed the clothes by sprinkling the clothes with a mixture of “muthi” and water. The clothes were cleansed in order to ensure that bad luck and that the clothes are safe to be worn again.” **(Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“The traditional healer took all her clothes and everything she was using and sprinkle herbs and water on them because they needed to be cleansed. I know other people wait for three months to do this together with the ceremony of taking off mourning clothes but we did this immediately after her death because we did not want to stay with her clothes uncleansed. But we will only distribute or use her clothes only after three months.” **(Participant 7, female, 41 years old)**

Based on the extracts above, the deceased’s clothes are immediately put away after his/her death as they are believed to have “dark cloud”. Another method of cleansing is evident in the above extracts which is to sprinkle a mixture of water and *muthi* in the yard and on the clothes. The clothes are cleansed by the traditional healer after a couple of months to remove the dark clouds before they can be used or distributed to family members, friends or relatives. Although as it appears that other family prefer to perform this ritual immediately after death to avoid staying with the deceased’s clothes uncleansed, the deceased’s clothes still remain unused for a couple of months.

In summary, the following subthemes emerged from the results of the present study: a) consulting a traditional healer, b) cleansing, c) mourning clothes, d) social interaction and e) distribution of the deceased’s clothes. The findings from the above subthemes suggest that there are differences regarding the reasons participants consult a traditional healer after the death of a loved one. Furthermore consulting the traditional healer appears to provide a sense of security and protection during the funeral preparations. These rituals appear to remove the dark cloud that is

considered to cover the bereaved after the death of a loved one, and also to strengthen the deceased.

The findings of the study also highlighted that the types mourning clothes worn after the death of a loved one may be specific to gender differences and relationship with the deceased. The mourning clothes appear to be important to the bereaved as it is indicated that it is to show that one is in mourning and is respecting the deceased. The restrictions in terms of social behaviour and interaction were also highlighted and were also dependent of the gender and the relationship with the deceased. This appears to assist the bereaved to be able to focus on performing rituals needed to re-integrate them into the society and to facilitate the grieving and healing process. The subthemes also suggested the significance of the distribution of the deceased's clothes that are cleansed and distributed after a certain period. This does seem to facilitate the process of healing and letting go of the deceased to rest in peace.

4.3.2 Subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals

The following extracts indicate then subjective meaning that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals performed after the death of a loved one:

4.3.2.1 Knowledge passed on by elders

The findings of the study showed that other participants regarded the mourning rituals to be significant in their lives as it is a reflection of the knowledge that has been passed on by the elders from generation to generation. The following extracts illustrates this:

"We found these mourning rituals here; it is how our ancestors used to do things and it's how things should be done." **(Participant 1, female, 58 years old)**

"I think the rituals are important because it shows respect to the deceased and it is our culture that should be followed. This again helps the bereaved cope after the death." **(Participant 7, female, 41 years old)**

“This is our culture which we have been taught by our elders, although young people these days don’t want to perform these rituals they are still important.”
(Participant 3, male, 46 years old)

“The mourning rituals are very important, because this is what our parents practiced, and we also have to practice them. This is also the reason we even respect the people that have passed away and we even go to their graves to clean them. That still shows respect for them.” **(Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“I think the mourning rituals are important because they really do work and our ancestors used to perform them. We should not let our tradition die.”
(Participant 10, female 60 years old)

“Our mourning rituals should not be disregarded or stopped, it is how our ancestors did things and they are still important and work even in our days.”
(Participant 4, male, 49 years old)

The following participants continued to perceive the importance of the mourning rituals despite the influence of modernisation. The following extracts support this statement:

“I always advice people to continue with our traditional mourning rituals because they are important and should not be influenced by Western beliefs.”
(Participant 5, male, 60 years old)

“These rituals are very important because these days people frown upon them and say “Di a ila o hwile” or “Taboo is dead” saying there is no need to perform traditional rituals, it is not true.” **(Participant 5, male, 60 years old)**

“The traditional mourning rituals are important although people these days like saying “Di a ila o hwile”, it is not true. People need to perform these rituals because problems can arise if they don’t.” **(Participant 6, female, 59 years old)**

“You know it is sad that people these days like saying “Di a ila o hwile” and that is what is causing most problems for our people. People can get sick and

experience bad luck if these rituals are not performed.” **Participant 9, male, 44 years old)**

“People these days like saying that “Di a ila o hwile” and they don’t abstain from social interactions after death in the family or perform the traditional rituals. This is really dangerous as they really get sick and have things not go well for them.” **(Participant 10, female, 60 years old)**

The extracts above indicate that the participants see the importance of adhering to the performance of mourning rituals. While other participants articulated that the performance of the mourning rituals is important because it is knowledge passed on by their ancestors and elders some indicated the importance of the rituals because it is culture and works for them. Some participants showed high regard and respect to the traditional mourning rituals despite modernisation.

4.3.2.2 Appeasing the ancestors and avoiding illness and misfortunes

In this present study, the participants showed that the performance of mourning rituals may be a means to appease the ancestors and to avoid illnesses and misfortunes. The participants further also suggested that there are various illnesses and misfortunes that may be experienced when the mourning rituals are not performed.

The findings of the study also showed that there are specific illnesses that the bereaved may suffer from if they do not perform the mourning rituals. Below are the extracts that support this:

“As a widow I will get sick if I do not get cleansed. I will get sick from back pain. The back will be so swollen this much (showing by hands) and people will think you have gained weight while you are actually sick for not performing the rituals. It is called “makgoma.” **(Participant 1, female, 58 years old)**

“Makgoma kills, because these days they turn in to AIDS and you will hear that the person has AIDS but instead it is “makgoma.” **(Participant 10, female, 60 years old)**

“The bereaved need to be cleansed because if not, they will always be feeling sick and weak on their bodies body, that is why we hear of a disease called “makgoma”. Makgoma is a dark cloud and shows that the deceased’s shadow is still with you, where people get swollen the whole body and can’t be healed by medical doctors but by performing the traditional rituals.” **(Participant 4, male, 49 years old)**

“I was told by the elders that that if I don’t perform these rituals I might get sick, from what is called “makgoma”, like my body would just be swollen and I would experience just discomfort or body pains that are not explainable. And these can only be healed once I perform the rituals.” **(Participant 7, female, 41 years old)**

“The rituals are performed to prevent what we call “makgoma” which is an illness that attacks people refuses to perform the rituals. They get swollen the whole body and experience unexplained body pains.” **(Participant 10, female, 60 years old)**

“I know that these rituals must happen because there is what they call “makgoma”, and this “makgoma” end up causing the AIDS which was not even there, but it is because of the dirty blood that was not taken out.” **(Participant 8, female, 43 years old)**

Other participants suggested somatic symptoms that may be experienced if the mourning rituals are not performed. The following extracts support this statement:

“I experienced deafness because initially I refused to perform the rituals but after they performed the rituals for me I was able to hear again. I was unable to hear at all for about three to four months and even when I had gone to the shops I would feel dizzy and start to get sick and feel weak, but after they performed for me this rituals I was strengthened.” **(Participant 3, male, 46 years old)**

“One can get sick and not be able to walk, be paralysed and medical doctors unable to help them. And when you go to the traditional healers they will tell

you to perform the mourning rituals and you will be without taking any medication.” (Participant 5, male 60 years old)

“There will be unending problems in the family if these rituals are not performed. Such as the family members no longer having good health, they may be sick after one another from unexplained illnesses.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“If you do not perform these rituals you feel weak and have unending body pains which don’t get healed even if you go to the medical doctors but you must perform the mourning rituals first for them to be healed.” (Participant 8, female, 43 years old)

“It is possible that the parents of the child and the rituals are not performed, you will feel weak and get sickly and don’t feel alright at all, and not necessarily know what is wrong. This is because the spirit of your child will still be on you.” (Participant 9, male, 44 years old)

“Sometimes after the death of your child, you will feel like you heard them cry or you have seen them crawl around, so some of the rituals help with these, help you forget about the deceased.” (Participant 8, female, 43 years old)

“When a person loses a child, the placenta gets frightened, for it to be able to fall pregnant again will be a problem because people do not perform the rituals. But once you perform the rituals, one is able to fall pregnant.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old)

The above extracts suggest that the bereaved believe that the performance of mourning rituals helps in avoiding misfortunes, illnesses and unhappy ancestors. The participants alluded to a number of difficulties were outlined which may be as a result of not performing the mourning rituals such as general body weakness and pains, paralysis, infertility, deafness and what is called “makgoma”. Makgoma as described by the participants is an illness with HIV-like symptoms which is believed to be as a result of people not performing traditional mourning rituals.

4.3.2.3 Cleansing the contaminated spirit and remove bad luck

The participants further described the importance of mourning rituals in cleansing to rid him/her of the deceased's contaminated spirit. The mourning rituals are also believed to remove the dark cloud that is considered to cover the bereaved after the death of a loved one. The following extracts illustrate this:

“As the deceased’s wife I had to get traditional healer to help cleanse me of the deceased’s spirit, sweat and dirty blood. The traditional healer also used razors blades to prick my skin in order to take polluted or dirty blood out of my body.” (Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

“If these rituals are not performed, dark cloud will still be in the family, it is like the family is still clouded by death. So the rituals must be performed so that the dark cloud can be removed or leave.” (Participant 2, male, 58 years old)

“People who do not perform the mourning rituals can experience bad luck and when we go to the traditional healers they will tell them that it is because we didn’t perform the mourning rituals. That we did not cleanse the children, that they have darkness, like bad luck because the deceased are now their ancestors and are the ones supposed to bring them good luck.” (Participant 5, male, 60 years old)

“In our time after all the cleansing ceremonies were conducted the bereaved hair would also be shaved in order to remove the dark cloud, but the youth today will fight you if you try shaving their hair.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“When a person pass away, the first thing is that when their spirit leaves their body, it still remains in the house and as people who stay in that house we keep breathing that spirit. So that is why it is important to perform these rituals so that the deceased’s spirit and shadow can be taken out of us and leave the house.” (Participant 7, female, 41 years old)

“If I don’t perform these traditional mourning rituals the dark cloud will not go away from home and the home will always be under the dark cloud.”
(Participant 7, female, 41 years old)

“Makgoma is the dirty blood, which must be taken out when your skin is pricked and you are given herbs to smear on your body so that you do not get sick.” **(Participant 8, female, 43 years old)**

The participants further highlighted that the performance of rituals assisted in the removal of bad omen or bad luck as it is believed that when the deceased passes on their spirit and shadow still remains and rituals need to be performed for those to be removed. Furthermore other participants also highlighted that the bereaved need to be cleansed of the dirty bad or spirit around them after the death of their loved ones.

In summary, the following subthemes associated with the theme on the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals emerged from the results of the present study: a) knowledge passed on by elders, b) appeasing the ancestors and avoiding illness and misfortunes, and c) cleansing the contaminated spirit and removing bad luck. The findings from the subthemes showed that the participants regard the performance of mourning rituals as significant because they have been passed on from generation to generation by their elders. Furthermore the findings of the study showed that the participants perform the mourning rituals in order to appease the ancestors and avoid experiencing illness and misfortunes. The findings of the subthemes discussed indicate that the participants perform the mourning rituals because it will assist in the cleansing of the contaminated spirits and removing the bad luck associated with death.

During a mourning process, the bereaved may have a need for communal feeling and structure, hence the performance of rituals that are passed on by elders may be useful in this regard. Ancestors are considered to play an important role in assisting the bereaved’s healing process and in the provision of good luck and good health. Hence, the performance of mourning rituals to appease the ancestors and avoid illness and misfortunes appears to assist in this regard. The cleansing of the contaminated spirit appears to bring a feeling of relieve and hope for the bereaved

which may assist the bereaved to be able to cope with the loss of a loved one knowing that the bad luck has been removed.

4.3.3 Psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved

The following three subthemes emerged from the narratives provided by the participants: a) coping with the death of a loved one, b) strengthening the bereaved, and c) healing and acceptance.

4.3.3.1 Coping with the death of a loved one

The participants were able to acknowledge the turmoil of emotions that may be experienced after the death of a loved one. Furthermore, the participants expressed the significance of mourning rituals in coping with the death of a loved one. Below are the extracts that illustrate this:

“To tell you the truth, in terms of emotions it is very difficult after the death of a loved. It is so difficult because sometimes you will see like you are seeing them or their shadow passing while it is not the case as the person will be resting in peace. It is really difficult after the death of a loved one as you are constantly stressed because you are always thinking of the deceased person. It is not even easy to forget their faces but the traditional healer gave me traditional medicine called “molebatša” to help me cope and forget about the pain of losing my husband.” (Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

“Our traditional mourning rituals are important because these rituals are performed to help the bereaved cope better with the death of a loved one for an example when someone has passed away there is muthi called “molebatša” used to help the bereaved forget about the death of their loved one, and also to decrease continuously remembering the deceased and feeling pain.” (Participant 7, female, 41 years old)

“I was also given a “muthi” called “bolebatša”. I drank this for about two weeks and it was to help me to slowly forget my child who had passed on and not feel like I hear him cry.” (Participant 8, female, 43 years old)

“They also made to lick ash and gave me “bolebatša” after the death of the child which they said will help me them to forget about the deceased and move on with life.” (Participant 9, male, 44 years old)

“So after the rituals are performed and people have been traditionally treated, there is something called “molebatša”, they pour water in a bucket and mix with muthi and then every family member take turns drinking “molebatša”. Even though you will remember the deceased, this helps that not to be often and with a painful heart.” (Participant 10, female, 60 years old)

As indicated in the extracts above, the majority of the participant highlighted the importance of the herb provided to help them with slowly forgetting about the deceased referred to as “molebatša” or “bolebatša”. Although it is also acknowledged that forgetting the deceased will not be an easy task, the effects of “molebatša” or “bolebatša” are spoken highly off by the participants as the participants specifically indicate that “not missing them with a painful heart”. Other participants also highlighted that for younger children who have lost their parent (s) traditional beaded bands and necklaces are also used to assist the children with the process of forgetting about the deceased.

4.3.3.2 Strengthening the bereaved

The participants highlighted that the performance of mourning rituals assist in strengthening them to be able to cope and continue with life after the death of a loved one. Below are the extracts to support this:

“After the cleansing and steaming ceremonies, then they strengthened me by knocking my body joints, they hit me with hit the whole body so that my body and mind to be able to continue with life.” (Participant 3, male, 46 years old)

“After I was cleansed, then the traditional healer used the back of the knife to knock me the whole body, because they said it will make me strong and be able to cope with the death of my wife.” (Participant 4, male, 49 years old)

“After the cleansing ceremonies are completed I was knocked on the head down to the back so that the bereaved may be strong.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

“If you don’t perform the rituals you won’t have strength and will always feel weak. So they must cleanse you so that the dirty blood can come out for you to feel strengthened.” (Participant 8, female, 43 years old)

“The siblings are also cleansed but this is just to strengthen them, so that they may also not experience any health complains and be able to cope with the death of their loved one.” (Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

The extracts above highlighted that some rituals assist with strengthening the bereaved after the loss of their loved ones. This is also believed to be helping the bereaved with being able to cope and continue with their lives.

4.3.3.3 Healing and acceptance

The findings of the study showed that the participants accept the death of a loved one and move on with life after the performance of the mourning rituals. The participants also acknowledged the importance of mourning rituals in helping them to forget slowly about the pain of losing a loved one, as illustrated in the following extracts:

“After the traditional healer divines and tell you what had happened to the deceased and then performs the rituals for the deceased’s soul to rest in peace then you are able to be satisfied, find closure, accept and move on with life.” (Participant 2, male, 58 years old)

“Once you have been cleansed and steamed even your heart becomes free and accept that indeed the person has passed away. Although it will take time and you will miss them but you have accepted. That is why the traditional healer also gives you what is called “molebatša”, to help you forget the person who has passed away but not that you will forget them completely but that they will not appear a lot to you.” (Participant 4, male, 49 years old)

“The rituals help because they ease the pain you feel after the death and also they help you forget the deceased because there is muthi that the traditional healer gives you called “molebatšša” helps you forget slowly about the deceased.” **(Participant 5, male, 60 years old)**

“The rituals are important because they ease the pain you feel after the death and also they help you forget the deceased and be able to move on with life.”
Participant 9, male, 44 years old)

“If it is a young child who has lost a parent, a mixed beads necklace which is smeared with herbs is tied on the neck, the they take the a tree root at the mother or father’s grave and is boiled, mixed with “molebatšša” and then given to the child to drink. All these is done to help the child not to have sleep problem/sleep a lot and also to forget about the death of the parent.”
(Participant 6, female, 59 years old)

This participant highlighted that the mourning rituals also assist the bereaved to heal emotionally. Below is the extracts that explains this:

“These rituals really heal emotionally because there is traditional muthi that is given by the traditional healer to help you forget about the death of a loved one and also to heal emotionally. My last born child is given a traditional bead band to wear and this also will help him forget about the death of his father.”
(Participant 1, female, 58 years old)

The extracts above highlight that the importance of consulting a traditional healer to enquire about the nature of the deceased’s death and also to get assistance in getting the deceased’s soul to rest in peace seems to have significance as the bereaved become healed emotionally, satisfied, accept and comforted that their loved ones’ souls are resting in peace.

In summary, the following subthemes emerged from the results of the present study: a) coping with the death of a loved one, b) strengthening the bereaved, and c) healing and acceptance. The findings from the subthemes showed that the participants regarded the mourning rituals important because they assist them in coping and carrying on with life after the death of a loved one. Furthermore the

findings of the study showed that the mourning rituals assist the participants not to be weak but strengthen them creating a sense of hope to be able to carry on with life. The findings of the subthemes discussed indicate that the participants perform the mourning rituals because it will assist in healing the painful emotions that they experience after the loss of a loved one. The findings of the study further showed that the mourning rituals assist the bereaved to accept the death of a loved one.

4.4 Concluding remarks

The present study comprised ten (10) participants who are residents of Mphakane village, Botlokwa, Limpopo province. The participants' ages ranged from 41 to 60 and the participants' mourning period is within the two year period. All the participants were Sepedi (Setlokwa) speaking. It is clear from the present study that the participants performed various mourning rituals after the death of a loved. The participants also deemed the rituals as significant for the mourning process. It is also clear from the findings of the study that the reasons of consulting the traditional healer varied amongst the participants. For other participants, this ritual is performed to have protection and security during the funeral process. Other participants however highlighted that performing this ritual provides clarity regarding the nature of the deceased's death and to assist in resting the deceased's soul in peace. From the findings of the present study, it appears that there are mourning rituals that are performed with consideration of gender issues and also the relationship with the deceased. The participants highlighted that the cleansing rituals involved activities such as steaming, pricking of the skin and applying "*muthi*" on the skin. It is highlighted also in the findings of the study that the cleansing rituals are dependent of the relationship of the bereaved and the deceased. These rituals appear to remove the dark cloud that is considered to cover the bereaved after the death of a loved one, and also to strengthen the deceased.

The findings of the study also suggest that the mourning clothes that are worn after the death of a loved one are also specific to gender and relationship with the deceased. The mourning clothes appear to be important to the bereaved as it is indicated that it is to show that one is in mourning and is respecting the deceased. From the findings of the study the participants also highlighted restrictions in terms of social behaviour and interaction which are also dependent of the gender and the

relationship with the deceased. It is clear from the participants that the social interaction restrictions assist them to re-integrate them into the society and to facilitate the grieving and healing process. From the findings of the present study, the participants also had different preferences about the time when the distribution of the deceased's clothes should be done.

When it comes to the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals observed after the death of a loved one, the findings of the study suggests that the participants consider the mourning rituals as significant in the mourning process because they are the knowledge that their elders have passed on from generations to generation. The findings of the study also indicate that the performance of mourning rituals is believed to appease the ancestors and to avoid illnesses and misfortunes. The participants further highlighted that the mourning rituals are performed in order to cleanse the contaminated spirits and remove the bad luck which the bereaved are considered to have after the death of a loved one.

It was indicated by the some participants from the present study that the performance of mourning rituals is significant in their ability to cope and carry on with life after the death of a loved one. Furthermore, the participants also highlighted that the importance of mourning rituals in providing strength and hope for the bereaved. From the findings of the present study, it is also indicated that mourning rituals are significant in assisting the bereaved heal from the turmoil of emotions they experience after losing a loved one and to accept the death of the deceased.

From the findings of the study it can be suggested that the mourning rituals that the bereaved perform have psychological significance during the mourning process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the researcher discusses the themes that emerged in the context of the existing literature. Specifically, the following themes are discussed: the types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one, the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals performed and psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved.

5.2. The types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the death of a loved one

5.2.1 Consulting a traditional healer

The present study highlights that the bereaved consult a traditional healer after the death of a loved one to enquire about the nature of the death, and also to get their loved one's souls to rest in peace. This ritual is also done in order to help in resting the deceased's soul in peace. Depending on the nature of the deceased's death certain or additional rituals may need to be performed. In line with the finding of the present study Eyetsemitan (2002) noted that when death occurs, divination as to the cause of death is sought from dead ancestors with causes usually attributed to spiritual elements (witchcraft, offending one's ancestors, or gods) rather than medical or physical reasons. Ross (2012) also stated that traditional healing seeks to bring back harmony, stability and equilibrium, not only by easing physical symptoms, but also by re-integrating the person with his or her community, the earth and the spiritual world. As a result of this belief, some families in the present study consulted with traditional healers in order to manage the deceased's body and the grave.

It appears from the findings of the present study that consulting the traditional healer provides protection and security to both the deceased and the bereaved against evil forces. Kgatla (2014) indicated that family members who fail to appease their ancestors through performance of rituals run the risk of being left unprotected, and thus, becoming vulnerable to sinister forces or evil spells that can inflict pain or even death. For the traditional African people when people die, they transcend to the spirit world to be in the company of the living dead or ancestors and they are believed to be living in the world of the invisible intangible beings (King, 2013).

Wiredu (1995) also asserted that funeral rites are performed for the purpose of ensuring that the deceased would be able to join the ancestral spirits because in African tradition, when a person dies, it is believed that his spirit cannot reach the destination to the land of the “living dead” before the performance of death rituals. Failure to perform rituals, or performing them inappropriately may lead to the deceased’s spirit being trapped in the intermediate world as a wandering spirit and such a spirit may be very troublesome. Such a spirit is capable of making the bereaved family members to have bad-luck or continue to demand from the family that the death rituals be corrected or be performed again. (Makgahlela, 2015, Mkhize 2004)

5.2.2 Cleansing

The present study results indicated that there are differences in the mourning rituals, depending on who has passed away and the nature of the bereaved relationship with the deceased. There are differences noted in the cleansing rituals based on the relationship one has with the deceased. As indicated in some extracts there is a “chief mourner”. The results are in accord with the literature by Baloyi (2008) and Cohen (2002) that indicates that different rituals are performed depending on who the deceased is and how they have died. All societies prescribe a period of mourning for close relatives and other kin of the deceased and the duration depends upon tire relationship with the dead. The closer the connection, the longer the mourning period.

The findings of the present study also showed that mourning rituals included cleansing rituals such as the steaming, pricking of the skin using razor blades and also applying *muthi* on ones' skin. It was also highlighted that the aims for performing the cleansing rituals is to remove the dark cloud, to rid the bereaved of "dirty blood" and the deceased's shadows and to also make the bereaved sweat out the deceased's sweat.

Hutchings (2007) further noted that in Zulu culture, death is considered a highly intensified form of pollution that emanates from the corpse itself, and the relatives of the dead are thought to be not only in a position of danger themselves and in need of fortification, but also to a source of pollution to the society. Thus they may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified after the mourning period, which is always longest for the nearest relatives. After several months of mourning, a cleansing ritual is performed to cleanse the bereaved and the belongings of the deceased, and in a case of the widow, she is given herbs in order to take away the bad luck. After a year or two after death another ritual is performed and a mixture of medicine is used to cleanse the bereaved of "*isinyama*" that is, a dark shade at the death of their loved one. The other purpose of the cleansing ritual is to assist the family to process their grief (Maloka 1998, Manyedi, 2003, Ngubane, 2004, Nel 2007).

Selepe and Edwards (2008) reported that in traditional African cultures, funerals and bereavement rituals help in the purification of the mourners who are believed to be polluted or contaminated from contact with the dead. Therefore, the community members participate in ceremonies that are considered to be essential for the removal of contaminated spirit from the mourners and allow the mourners to re-enter society and return to the process of living. Mkhize (2008) also explained that in most African societies, when a death is announced, the family is immediately regarded as 'polluted' (*isinyama*) or '*sefifi*' in Setswana, which implies a negative shadow which also means that the family is thrown into a state of disequilibrium.

5.2.3 Mourning clothes

From the findings of the present study, it appears that the mourning clothes worn also differ based on gender as most females wear either a shawl, black *doek* and dress whereas the males clip or wear a black cloth on the arm or wear a beanie to show that they are in mourning. The period of wearing mourning clothes is also dependent on who has passed away and the nature of the relationship with the bereaved.

It is also highlighted by the participants that wearing mourning clothes is not only to show that the bereaved is in mourning but also as a sign of respect to the deceased. Baloyi (2008) indicated that in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribe believe that when a married man dies, his widow wears black clothes. The black clothes symbolise the dark cloud, death which is associated with loss and pain (*bohloko*) in Sepedi. Furthermore in a study conducted by Martin, van Wijk, Hans-Arendse and Makhaba (2013) that investigated the significance of bodies in African bereavement rituals the results showed that bereavement rituals can be differentiated by gender in African traditional contexts. Setsiba (2012) noted that in performing the mourning rituals, the bereaved families show the community and the public that they are grieving. In a way, this calls for community support and acknowledgement. The dress code becomes a symbol of accepting new social status and they carry a message that the person is now in mourning. Consistent with the findings of the present study Manyedi (2003) noted that if the bereaved is a man, he is supposed to put a strip of a black cloth. The children are also expected to put on the black strip for a specific period. However, widows are expected to wear black mourning clothes.

The findings of the study also highlighted that some rituals that were performed in the olden days are currently being left behind due to modernisation of the African people. The participants acknowledged that despite other mourning rituals being retained, there are other individuals within the Batlokwa tribe, particularly young people, who think that performing mourning rituals is no longer important. This was indicated by a phrase that most participants used, namely: "*Di a ila o hwile*" or "taboo is dead". The ritual shaving of hair as a sign of mourning in particular appears to be losing popularity amongst the Batlokwa people. Literature by Yawa (2010) and Ritcher (2006) indicated that the other process of bereavement that is undergone in

the Zulu culture is that after the burial the bereaved are required to shave their heads or at least a lock of their hair is cut off and the hair is burnt together with the deceased clothes.

However, Khosa (2009) pointed out that cultural and ritual practices come to pass with time but is only those which are seen as relevant to the present generation which is passed on to the next generation. The new generation will also accept only those which they see fit and relevant to their lifestyle. Kipuri (2010) also noted that indigenous people place a great deal of importance on passing this knowledge on to future generations, not only for the sake of preserving the knowledge, but also for preserving their own cultures and identities.

5.2.4 Social interaction restrictions

The participants highlighted that there are restrictions the bereaved are subjected to in terms of social interactions and behaviour and are based on the belief that after death the bereaved are covered with the deceased's shadow and are contaminated. The bereaved are often restricted to going to certain places for a period of time, talking in a loud voice, arriving home before sun set or engaging in intimate relationships. The restrictions also differ on the gender and the nature of the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved. The literature review by Baloyi (2008) indicated that in case of the wife dying, the widower is also forbidden from having an intimate affair before a stipulated period, usually six months to one year depending on the cultural group concerned. He is also barred from arriving home after sun set. There are different practices which vary from different ethnic groups and they all have symbolic significance.

Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2013) in South Africa some of the Bapedi tribe[s] believe that when a married man dies, his widow is forbidden from arriving home after sunset, visiting neighbours, attending family and community functions. Also when a death has occurred, everything needs to be done in moderation; talking loud is not allowed, eating too much, laughing or even being angry. During that time, the widow and other bereaved members stay at home and are not allowed any social contact or even sexual contact. They do not participate in any social activities or public gatherings like weddings, funerals, parties and church services as they are

believed to be contaminated (Magudu, 2004, Setsiba (2012)). Setsiba (2012) further noted that the bereaved may not take part in the normal life of the society until they have been purified or cleansed through performance of a ritual. There is a mourning period which usually takes longer for the family of the deceased. This mourning period prescribes to the family what acceptable behaviours are and what are not until the stipulated end of the mourning period.

Selepe and Edwards (2008) the community members participate in ceremonies that are considered to be essential for the removal of contaminated spirit from the mourners and allow the mourners to re-enter society and return to the process of living. However the findings of the present study further showed that there is an emergency assistance in case the bereaved needs to go to other people's yards where a plant called "*Mmale*" is used to cleanse the bereaved off the deceased's shadows and evil spirits, therefore be safe to enter other people's yards even prior the lapsing of the restriction period. Similar to the study results Dlukulu (2010) and Hutchings (2007) also noted that reference has also been made to a plant called *Lippia javanica* or *umsuzwane* in Zulu, as a plant that is used in Zulu burials for washing of hands or cleansing. After the burial, the community will be invited to go back to the family of the deceased for a meal. All the community members must wash their hands with water that has special cut aloe leaves. This appears to be similar to the plant called "*mmale*" that the participants alluded to in the study.

The participants in the present study highlighted that these restrictions were advised by their ancestors indicating the importance of ancestors in the mourning process. Ancestors protect and provide guidance to those in the material realm and therefore are highly respected, venerated and very important to the community of the living (King, 2013). Setsiba (2012) also stated that within an African context, the dead are regarded as ancestors and they are treated with great respect as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living. Proper rites and ceremonies performed following the death of a loved one reflect this belief. Any deviation from the above could be perceived as a sign of disrespect for the ancestors and bad luck could befall anyone who does not adhere to the stipulated practices. Setsiba (2012) further indicated that the practice of the death rituals is symbolic of the relationship that people have with the ancestors. In the context of death of a loved one, all the rituals

of death are symbolic of giving the respect due to the ancestors, to the bereaved and to the deceased member of the family.

5.2.5 Distribution of the deceased's clothes

The present study further highlights that deceased's clothes are immediately put away after their his/her death as they are believed to be covered by the dark cloud. They are cleansed by the traditional healer immediately or a couple of months after the death to remove the dark cloud before they can be used or distributed to family members, friends or relatives. The Healthcare Chaplaincy (2009) indicated that after a person dies, some cultures will not touch a deceased person's clothes or belongings. Shiino (1997) noted that the Luo people in Kenya perform a ritual called "*keyo nyinyo*" where the family and relatives divide among themselves articles left by the deceased, such as clothes, furniture, dishes, calabashes, and cooking pots.

The results are however in contrast to the findings of the study conducted by Yawa (2010) that all three ethnic groups (i.e. Xhosa, Zulu and Tswana) the mourning period ends after a year whereby the family members of the deceased all partake in the ritual of burning clothes of the deceased. The results of the present study show that the Batlokwa people instead embark on a cleansing ceremony for the deceased clothes and clothes are then distributed amongst family members and relatives.

5.3. Subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals

5.3.1 Knowledge passed on by elders

The findings of the present study highlighted that the performance of the mourning rituals is important to the bereaved because it is knowledge passed on from generation to generation by their elders and it is culture. Khosa (2009) described culture as accumulated knowledge and achievements that have through the passage of time been passed from one generation to another through performance. According to Kipuri (2010) indigenous communities have kept their cultures alive by passing on their worldview, their knowledge and know-how, their arts, rituals and performances from one generation to the next. Indigenous people place a great deal of importance on passing this knowledge on to future generations, not only for the sake of preserving the knowledge, but also for preserving their own cultures and identities.

5.3.2 Appeasing the ancestors and avoiding illnesses and misfortunes

Furthermore the participants highlighted that the performance of rituals assisted appeasing the ancestors again indicating the importance of ancestors in the mourning process. Setsiba (2012) also stated that within an African context, the dead are regarded as ancestors and they are treated with great respect as they are believed to have a special relationship with the living. Any deviation from the performance of mourning and burial rites could be perceived as a sign of disrespect for the ancestors and bad luck could befall anyone who does not adhere to the stipulated practices. Setsiba (2012) further indicated that the practice of the death rituals is symbolic of the relationship that people have with the ancestors. In the context of death of a loved one, all the rituals of death are symbolic of giving the respect due to the ancestors, to the bereaved and to the deceased member of the family. The participants also highlighted a various illnesses and misfortunes that one may experience as a result of not performing the mourning rituals. These included somatic and psychological difficulties such as having bad luck and misfortunes, general body weakness and pains, paralysis, infertility and deafness.

Worden (2009) stated that bereaved individuals may experience different reactions to grief such as somatic or bodily distress of some type, guilt relating to the deceased or circumstances of the death, the inability to function as one had before the loss, weakness in the muscles, lack of energy sleep and appetite disturbances, absentmindedness and social withdrawal. Marks (2004) noted that mourning may be understood as the manner of undergoing the psychological, emotional, behavioural, social and physical reactions to the experience of loss. According to Stroebe and Stroebe (2007) bereavement is associated with various psychological symptoms and illnesses and these psychological reactions to bereavement are diverse, varying between individuals, between cultures and ethnic groups as well as the type of relationship lost.

The participants consistently described an illness that appeared prominent known as “*makgoma*” which manifests in terms of physical and psychological symptoms. Makgahlela (2015) described “*makgoma*” as a contagious culture bound bereavement illness afflicting the bereaved spouse, parents, and the first and last born children bereaved of a parent.

Furthermore Makgahlela (2015) indicated that the Northern Sotho community members characterised “*makgoma*” to present with both debilitating physical and psychological symptoms. The symptoms described, ranged from constipation, bulging tummy, accumulation of water in the head, swollen lower limbs, feeling cold in the spine, and feeling as if one’s blood is hot, loss of appetite, losing weight, vomiting and diarrhoea. However as with other previous studies (Tsiane, 2006, Malatji, 2007 as cited in Makgahlela, 2015) some participants” regarded “*makgoma*” as HIV. One participant alluded that nowadays people regard “*makgoma*” as AIDS while another participant indicated that “*makgoma*” eventually turns into AIDS if not treated.

5.3.3 Cleansing the contaminated spirit and the removal of bad luck

The findings of the present study also suggest that the performance of mourning rituals assist in the cleansing of the contaminated spirit and removing bad luck. Setsiba (2012) also noted that this is due the belief that death hovers over them like a shade until such a time that they undergo a purification rite. Failure to cleanse or purify as required by tradition is believed to bring bad luck (i.e. misfortune) or evil to the family or people close to the deceased. Therefore the community members participate in ceremonies that are considered to be essential for the removal of contaminated spirit from the mourners and allow the mourners to re-enter society and return to the process of living. Shoko (2007) also indicated that in the Karanga belief, burial ritual practices are important, otherwise the deceased would be disappointed and inflict the family concerned with illnesses, diseases, misfortunes and deaths. The rituals thus serve the purpose of eliminating danger and enhancing the well-being of both the living and the dead. Some-post death burial rituals include the ritual of honour and appeasement. These are held because there are many ills of life which confront the Karanga people in Zimbabwe and which necessitate an appeal to spiritual forces through ritual action. These include illnesses, diseases,

dangers, misfortunes, deaths and in fact all matters which threaten the well-being of the living.

Failure to follow through with certain traditional practices or rituals after death of a person can have a devastating impact on the family of the deceased and can result in an experience of unresolved loss and lack of closure. To be in the world of the dead is to have supernatural powers over those in the world of the living and such powers include the ability to bless or to curse, and to give life or to take life (Eyetsemitan, 2002, Waliggo, 2006).

5.4. Psychological meaning embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved

5.4.1 Coping with the death of a loved one

The findings of the present study highlighted that the mourning rituals performed have psychological significance in the lives of the bereaved. The importance of enquiring from a traditional healer about the nature of the deceased's death, getting protection for the funeral arrangements and getting the deceased's soul to rest in peace appears to have significance as the bereaved become satisfied and comforted that their loved ones' souls are resting in peace. It is outlined by the participants that they are able to cope with the death of a loved one. The repetitive and prescriptive nature of rituals usually ease feelings of anxiety in that they provide structure and order in times of chaos and disorder in the family that is mourning. Psychological consequences of loss also vary based on the cause of death and varies widely based on the nature of the death, the relationship, and the bereaved person's resources and risk factors and the rituals facilitate adjustment to present change in role and in status of the deceased (Carr, 2012, Radzilani, 2010, Setsiba, 2012).

Taylor (1980) also stated that rituals represent a symbolic affirmation of values by means of culturally standardized utterances and actions. Rituals play a therapeutic role to bring back the healthy status to the bereaved members. Furthermore, the participants outlined the importance of a "*muthi*" provided to help them with slowly forgetting about the deceased called "*molebatšša*". Although some participants were able to acknowledge that forgetting the deceased will not be an easy task, the effects of "*molebatšša*" are spoken highly of by the participants which is also believed to ease

the pain of losing a loved one and assist the bereaved to have less painful memories of the deceased. This is indicative of the emotions the bereaved experience after the death of a loved one and the traditional management thereof. In the study conducted by Makgahlela (2015) the findings showed that the bereaved may be given “*bolebatša*” or “*tšhidi*”, which are traditional herbs that are crushed, wrapped and licked at intervals until the sachet is complete. These herbs are important as they are believed to help the bereaved to forget about the deceased, and to ease the emotional pain of grief.

The findings of the present study further showed that for younger children who have lost their parent(s), traditional beaded wrists bands and necklaces are also used to assist the children with the process of dealing with the death and forgetting about the deceased. According to Kgatla (2014) one of the primary effects of death rituals is to facilitate and enable the management of emotions during a time of transition.

This is however in contrast with the literature by Richter (2005:1007) that amaZulu do not work through the death of a loved one emotionally but instead involve themselves in the funeral rituals surrounding the actual burial. The purpose of this concentration on ritualism is to protect people from becoming absorbed emotionally. The focus is diverted from the current problem by engaging the bereaved in the complexity of rituals. The Batlokwa people, however acknowledged the presence of intense emotions after experiencing the death of a loved one and the significance of mourning rituals in containing and managing those emotions. This is also consistent with the study conducted by Stephen, Mwanja, and Muola (2014) aimed at establishing how mourning rituals contribute to the psychological well-being of the bereaved for the Batsotso tribe in Kenya. The study found that most of the Batsotso mourning rituals have therapeutic value and some of the psychological benefits of these rituals include helping the bereaved to release and process their emotions, to feel supported, to accept the death, readjust to live life where the deceased is absent and to move on with life. Furthermore the removal of the darkness that had stricken the family due to bereavement has now been uplifted through rituals, can be associated with a sense of catharsis for the bereaved. The experience of catharsis is secondary to the bereaved believing that they have now been purified and protected (Pears, 2012 as cited in Makgahlela, 2015).

5.4.2 Strengthening the bereaved

The present study further highlighted that some mourning rituals assist with strengthening the bereaved after the loss of their loved ones. This is also believed to be helping the bereaved with being able to cope and carry with their lives. The cleansing appears to be a therapeutic process that entails steaming, sniffing and bathing with water mixed with traditional herbs. In some cases, the traditional healer knocks the bereaved on their joints with “*ditsheme*”, which is meant to strengthen the bereaved. The bereaved will then be incised on their joints, traditional herbs rubbed on the incisions (Letsosa & Semanya, 2011 in Makgahlela, 2015). According to Ngonyama ka Sigogo and Modipa (2004), certain socio-cultural rituals bring a sense of relief and wellbeing into communities. Such rituals may act as a psychological means of adjustment in the face of misfortunes. Makatu, Wagner and Ruane (2008:573) stated that healing is one positive effect of mourning rituals. Since death has a negative impact on the bereaved, rituals are considered to have therapeutic value that assists the griever in moving on with her life.’ Doka (2002) described eight therapeutic benefits to be gained by mourners from a ritual, such as a funeral, following bereavement. These benefits are: to confirm the reality of the death, assist in the expression of grief, stimulate recollections of the deceased, focus emotional energy on a structured activity, provide social support to the grievers, provide a sense of meaning to the loss, reaffirm the social order and the place of death in that order and bring a sense of finality to the loss.

5.4.3 Healing and acceptance

The participants also highlighted the importance of mourning rituals in assisting with healing and acceptance after the death of a loved one. Setsiba (2012) indicated that in the traditional African religious cultural practices, mourning rituals serve both the needs of the individual and of the community because people come to terms with the reality of death when the funeral and the community traditional, ethnic or religious identity is reaffirmed. According to Selepe and Edwards (2008), in an African context, there are culturally unique rituals and mourning practices for specific ethnic groups, clans and kinships that facilitate the process of grieving. The rituals and mourning practices observed often serve many purposes to the bereaved and accomplish different emotional and psychological needs.

As indicated above a study conducted by Stephen et al. (2014) found that for most of the Batsotso tribe, in Kenya mourning rituals have therapeutic value and some of the psychological benefits of these rituals include helping the bereaved to release and process their emotions, to feel supported, to accept the death, readjust to live life where the deceased is absent and to move on with life.

5.5 Conclusion

From the findings of the presented above, it is evident that the mourning rituals are significant within the Batlokwa culture during the mourning process. Furthermore the above results show that different individuals attach different meanings to the experience of performing mourning rituals. Despite the different subjective meanings the participants attached to the performance of mourning rituals there were similarities in their cultural descriptions as indicated by the derived themes. The psychological significance of mourning rituals may be understood according to the themes that emerged from the study results. Themes such as coping, strengthening, healing and accepting the death of a loved one and carrying on with life emerged.

It is evident from the above results that the mourning rituals are also performed to show respect and preserve their culture and also due to the belief in the culture. For some, failure to adhere to these rituals meant that misfortunes and illnesses will befall them. Some participants alluded that the performance of these rituals brought about comfort and freedom after the mourning period.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Summary of findings

The aim of the study was to explore the psychological meaning of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community, Limpopo Province. The objectives of the study were (a) to identify and describe the types of mourning rituals observed and performed after the loss of a loved one, (b) to determine the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals and (c) to identify and articulate the psychological meanings embedded in the mourning rituals observed and performed by the bereaved. A qualitative research approach was used in the study. Using purposive sampling, a total of 10 community members (male = 5; female = 5) were identified and selected to participate in the study.

The findings of the study suggest that the mourning rituals performed by the Batlokwa people have some significant psychological meanings. These include assisting the bereaved to cope with the death of a loved one, strengthening the bereaved and ensuring that the bereaved are healed and accept the death of a loved one. In addition, death of a family member appears to trigger the following series of behaviours which are intended to help deal with the pain associated with the loss: a). consultation of a traditional healer, b). cleansing, c). wearing mourning clothes, d). social interaction restrictions, and e). distributions of the deceased's clothes. The study results further showed the subjective meanings that the bereaved attach to the mourning rituals performed. While other participants highlighted the importance of performing the mourning rituals as they have passed on to them by their elders, other participants performed the mourning rituals to ensure that the deceased's soul rests in peace. Furthermore the findings of the study suggest that the participants performed mourning rituals in order to prevent themselves from misfortunes, illnesses, bad luck and removes the "dark cloud". Particularly an illness called "*makgoma*" was described by the participants as arising from the refusal to perform the mourning rituals.

The findings of the study suggest that the bereaved benefit psychologically from performing the mourning rituals. These include the bereaved finding peace knowing

that their loved one's soul is resting in peace and that they are also protected from any sinister plans after consulting the traditional healer. Furthermore the ability to cope, ease the emotional pain and have less painful memories about the deceased is also highlighted in rituals such as the provision of the herb called "*molebatsa*" or "*bolebatsa*" to the bereaved. Strengthening of the bereaved is also one of the benefits of rituals such as provision of herbs and knocking of the bereaved joints.

6.2 Limitations of the study

The following limitations were identified in this study:

- The sample size was very small. Therefore, the sample cannot be considered to be representative of the entire Batlokwa community. Consequently, the results of the present study cannot be generalisable beyond this study.
- Some participants may have been initially reluctant to open up about their experiences as grief is a sensitive topic. This means that there is a possibility that some of the participants may not have fully disclosed their experiences.

The study focused on general mourning rituals and therefore differences existed in terms of specific practices of the rituals. In some instances certain rituals are performed based on factors such as relationships between the bereaved and therefore cannot be generalised to the larger population.

6.3 Recommendations

- More studies using larger samples should be undertaken before generalisation regarding the psychological meaning of mourning rituals of the Batlokwa community in Mphakane village could be made.
- Psychologists working in South Africa are exposed to clientele from different cultures. It is therefore recommended that psychologists familiarise themselves with different cultural groups and different ways of grieving and mourning within different cultures in order to better understand clients' different mourning processes.
- It is further recommended that psychologists develop intervention plans that are culturally informed and appropriate to their clients' worldviews.
- It is also recommended that institutions training psychologists consider introducing literature on African ways of mourning.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethical clearance letter



University of Limpopo
Department of Research Administration and Development
Private Bag X1106, Sovenga, 0727, South Africa
Tel: (015) 268 2212, Fax: (015) 268 2306, Email:noko.monene@ul.ac.za

**TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS
COMMITTEE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

MEETING: 05 November 2015

PROJECT NUMBER: TREC/186/2015: PG

PROJECT:

Title: The psychological meaning of mourning rituals in Botlokwa Community, Limpopo Province
Researcher: Ms ML Seretlo-Rangata
Supervisor: Prof T Sodi
Co-Supervisor: N/A
Department: Psychology
School: Social Sciences
Degree: Masters in Clinical Psychology


PROF. TAB MASHEGO
CHAIRPERSON: TURFLOOP RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

The Turfloop Research Ethics Committee (TREC) is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council, Registration Number: REC-0310111-031

Note:

- i) Should any departure be contemplated from the research procedure as approved, the researcher(s) must re-submit the protocol to the committee.
- ii) The budget for the research will be considered separately from the protocol.
PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER IN ALL ENQUIRIES.

Appendix 2(a): Semi- structured interview schedule

Interview Guide

Questions (probing will take place dependent on the answers provided by the participants).

1. Kindly share with me your understanding of the mourning rituals that are performed after the loss of a loved one?
2. Can you describe to me the types of mourning rituals that you engaged in after the loss of a loved one?
3. Can you describe to me what these mourning rituals mean to you and your family?
4. In your understanding, what will happen if these mourning rituals are either not performed, or are not observed?

Appendix 2(b): Interview guide in Northern Sotho

Tlhahli ya potšološišo

Dipotšišo (dinyakišišo di tla hlahlwa ke dikarabo tša bakgathatema)

1. Hle abelana le nna kwišišo ya gago ya meetlo ya lehu yeo e phethwago morago ga go tlogelwa ke wa leloko ka gae.
2. Ka kgopelo nhlalosešše mehuta ya meetlo ya lehu ye le e phethago morago ga go tlogelwa ke wa leloko ka gae.
3. Ka kgopelo hlaloša gore meetlo ye e ra go reng go wena le ba lelapa la gago.
4. Go ya kwišišo ya gago, go tla diregang ge motho a ka se ele hloko, ase latele go ba go se phethe meetlo ye ya lehu?

Appendix 3(a): Letter to Botlokwa Tribal Authority - English version

Department of Psychology
Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727

Botlokwa Traditional Authority
Mphakane Village
Limpopo
Date.....

Request for permission to interview community members

Dear Sir/Madam

My name is Mmakwena Linda Seretlo-Rangata. I am a master's student at the University of Limpopo. The research that I wish to conduct for my master's mini-dissertation focuses on psychology of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community in Limpopo Province. I am hereby seeking your permission to interview the members of your community.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Regards

Mmakwena Linda Seretlo-Rangata

Appendix 3(b): Letter to Botlokwa Tribal Authority – Northern Sotho version

Depatemente ya Psychology
Unibesithi ya Limpopo (Turfloop
Campus)
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727

Botlokwa Traditional Authority
Mphakane Village
Limpopo
Letšatšikgweedi

Thobela

Lebitšo la ka ke Mmakwena Linda Seretlo-Rangata. Ke moithuti wa masetase Unibesithing ya Limpopo. Ke dira nyakišišo ye e tsepeletšego saekholotši ya meetlo ya lehu yeo e phethwago morago ga go tlogelwa ke wa leloko ka gae mo setšhabeng sa Botlokwa Profenseng ya Limpopo. Ke kgopela tumello ya go ka botšološiša badudi ba naga ya lena mabapi le dinyakišišo tše.

Ke leboga nako ya lena

Wa lena ka mehla

Mmakwena Linda Seretlo-Rangata

Appendix 4(a): Participant consent letter and form: English version

**Department of Psychology
Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga, 0727**

Date: _____

Dear participant

Thank you for demonstrating interest in this study that focuses on psychology of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community in Limpopo Province.

Your responses to this individual interview will remain strictly confidential. The researcher will not attempt to identify you with your responses to the interview questions or to disclose your name as a participant in the study.

Please be advised that participating in this study is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time.

Kindly answer all the questions and reflect your true reaction .Your participation in this research is very important.

Thank you for your time

Sincerely

Seretlo-Rangata ML
Masters Student

Date

Prof T Sodi
Supervisor

Date

Appendix 4(b): Participant consent letter and form: Northern Sotho version

**Department of Psychology
University of Limpopo (Turfloop Campus)
Private Bag X1106
Sovenga
0727
Letšatšikgweedi: _____**

Mokgathatema a rategago

Ke leboga ge o laeditše kgahlego mo diphatišišong tša nyakišišo ye e tsepeletšego saekholotši ya meetlo ya lehu setšhabeng seo se bolelago Sesotho sa Lebowa Profenseng ya Limpopo.

Dikarabo tša gago go dipotšološišo tše tša motho ka o tee e tla ba sephiri. Monyakišiši a ka se go tswalantšhe le dikarabo goba go utolla maina a gago bjalo ka mokgathatema mo thutong ye.

Hle fahlogela gore go kgatha tema ga gago mo thutong ye ke ga boithaopo le gore o na le maloka a go ikgogela morago neng goba neng.

Ka potego araba dipotšišo ka moka mme o ntšhe sa mafahleng. Go kgatha tema ga gago mo nyakišišong ye go bohlokwa kudu.

Ke leboga nako ya gago.

Wa potego

Seretlo-Rangata ML
MoithutiwaMasetase

Prof T Sodi
Moeletši

Letšatšikgweedi

Letšatšikgweedi

Appendix 5(a): Consent form to be signed by participant: English version

CONSENT FORM

I _____ hereby agree to participate in a Masters Research project that focuses on the psychology of mourning rituals in Botlokwa community in Limpopo Province.

The purpose of the study has been fully explained to me. I further understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can withdraw my participation in this study at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project, whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally. I understand that my details as they appear in this consent form will not be linked to the interview schedule, and that my answers will remain confidential.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 5(b): Consent form to be signed by participant: Northern Sotho version

FOMO YA TUMELELANO

Nna, _____ ke dumela go kgatha tema mo phorotšekeng ya nyakišišo ya Masetase ye e tsepeletšego saekholotši ya meetlo ya lehu setšhabeng seo se bolelago Sesotho sa Lebowa Profenseng ya Limpopo.

Ke hlaloseditšwe maikemišetšo a thuto ye ka botlalo. Gape kekwešiša gore ke kgathatema ke lokologile ntle le go gapeletšwa ka mokgwa ofe goba ofe go dira bjalo. Gape ke kwišiša gore nka tlogela go kgatha tema thutong ye nako efe le efe ge ke nyaka go se sa tšwela pele le gore sephetho se seka se nkame go gogobe.

Ke kwišiša gore se ke phorotšeke ya nyakišišo, yeo maikemišetšo a yona e se bego go hola nna ka bonna. Ke kwešiša gore ditaba ka nna bjalo ka ge di bonala mo fomong ya tumelano di ka se kgokagantšhwe le lenaneo la dipotšološišo, le gore dikarabo tšaka e tla ba sephiri.

Mosaeno: _____

Letšatšikgweri: _____