The psycho-social plight of widows in Binga District in Zimbabwe: The efficacy of Social Work intervention.

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DECLARATION

I, Misheck Dube, do hereby declare that **The psycho-social plight of widows in Binga District in Zimbabwe: The efficacy of Social Work intervention** is entirely my own work, with the exception of quotations and references which have been attributed to their authors. This thesis has not been submitted to this or any other university elsewhere for the award of a degree.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother Mrs D. Mumpande who worked hard and prayed and toiled every day to see me progress throughout my academic career despite the vicissitudes along this arduous journey. My mother supported me endlessly. *Nditii kubazyali boonse kuzyala nkulyoolola!*

ABSTRACT

Widows in Zimbabwe experience a host of psycho-social challenges in their daily lives after the death of their husbands. These challenges, experienced at individual and immediate environmental level, negatively impact on the widows' ability to cope.

This study focused on the psycho-social challenges experienced by widows in Binga District, principally by emphasising the importance of Social Work intervention. The aim of the study was to investigate the psycho-social challenges of the widows in Binga District and to then develop a Social Work intervention model. The literature reviewed in the study was drawn from government resources, non-governmental and humanitarian organisations documents and much of the lieterature was from related fields such as law, psychology and nursing due to the paucity of literature from on widowhood in the field of social work. The feminist and ecological theories incorporated in the framework helped in conceptualising widowhood whilst the rights theory and the empowerment approach helped in conceptualising interventions for the psycho-social challenges experienced by the widows.

The study is basic research utilising a qualitative approach and a phenomenological design. Data were collected from thirty-four participants: ten widows using individual interviews, two focus group discussions with each having seven widows as participants making a total of twenty four widows for focus group discussions, and using the key informant interviews with nine participants who were social service providers. Qualitative thematic data analysis was used and presentation is textual in the form of thick descriptions as opposed to quantitative presentation.

The findings of the study include that widows experience a host of psycho-social challenges and these result from struggling with coping from loss of their husbands and abuse from their in-laws over property and asset inheritance. Interventions for the challenges the widows experienced was minimally sought from mainly traditional leaders as opposed to professionals which is either unknown to the widows or costly and often inaccessible.

The study makes recommendations and develops a useful intervention model for social workers in practice.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARV	Antiretroviral
BN	Binga North
BS	Binga South
CADEC	Catholic Development Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women
CDT	Community Development Trust
DHS	Demographic Health Survey
ECD	Early Child Development
GII	Gender Inequality Index
HBP	High Blood Pressure
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
IRIN	International Regional Information Networks
LAMA	Legal Age of Majority Act
NASSA	National Social Security Agency
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
USA	United States of America
WILSA	Women and Law in Southern Africa
Zimstats	Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

CHAPTER ONE

ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The worldwide suffering of women is well documented and of great concern to humanitarian agencies and professionals. Women in many societies face a host of challenges and they have been largely under different kinds of oppression and exclusion from socio-economic and political activities since time immemorial (Lomba, 2014:34, Thomson, 2006:1, Wojtczak, 2009:1). The challenges women confront cut across demographics such as: racial and ethnic groupings, religion, age and socio-economic status – implying the heterogeneity and diversity of the myriad challenges that women encounter. This means that individual challenges cannot isolated, especially in the case of the universal woman who experiences patriarchal, economic and political oppression, marginalisation and discrimination.

This being the situation, the United Nations (UN), through human rights approaches (Mashiri, 2013:95), has made rigorous efforts to address the situation globally by mandating various states and governments to sign treaties and international human rights instruments aimed at averting the inhuman treatment of women and lessening the social challenges they face. The responses of states vary across the globe, with some states registering progress while others have become signatories to some of these international treaties, regulations and instruments, but are struggling, especially in respect of protecting widows who have become known as the most vulnerable group of women. Widows have been the hardest hit population of women with unjust treatment stemming not only from patriarchy but, to some extent, from other women too. This form of oppression, marginalisation and discrimination against widows dates back to an unrecorded past and still manifests itself in different ways in current societies. Additionally, the psycho-social challenges associated with widowhood have not spared them the agony and stigma.

Widowhood is a worldwide phenomenon that every society experiences. Worldwide widows make up approximately 16% of the adult women population and could be higher in some parts of the world (Trivedi, Sareen & Dhyani, 2009:2). In the developed parts of the world, the phenomenon of widowhood is mostly experienced

by older women above 60 years while in contrast, the developing nations have seen an increase in the number of young widows, from 15 years of age (Peterman 2010:5). The implication is that these young women, who have not as yet reached the majority age in most developing countries, tend to experience stress associated with widowhood at an early age, specifically the struggle to raise their children single-handedly and at the same time having to confront their personal challenges of growing up, in most cases without the help of their parents or immediate families.

In the United States of America (USA), widowed women constituted the largest section of marital status in 2008 with 42%, while in the United Kingdom (UK), the proportion was a little higher at 45% among older people above the age of 65 years (Keister & Destro, 2008:438). The main plight of these widows was found to be grief and depression resulting from bereavement and loss of their partners within a period of two years. They were also found to lose morale, have mood swings and often felt sad above their loss of a spouse. Socially, widows were found to experience loss of friends, especially among the married ones and friendship was sought among other widows (Keister & Destro, 2008:438). This finding is similar to that on widows in Australia. Another study indicates that in Italy, widows experienced problems of personal identity and economic challenges as well as struggling with raising children all by themselves (Nadin & Popoli, 2010:21).

Widows in Africa have seen a markedly different face of widowhood. This has been mainly ascribed to the many stereotypical factors that characterise the continent. In Nigeria, West Africa for instance, other women subject the widow to cultural practices such as separating the widow from others and limiting their movement before the burial has taken place. The widow is forced to remain bare footed and cannot bath nor change clothes as long as she is in confinement during the period of mourning. This is done because it is believed that the widow is not yet separated from the dead husband. This is in disregard of the widows' personal health and the punitive practice is extended until the widow is believed to be in "total separation with the dead" (Idialu, 2012:6). This experience of widowhood cannot only be described as discriminatory, but it is also abusive, inhumane, unjust and unfair.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Peterman (2010:6) points out that about 44% of widows are above 60 years of age and approximately 16% of widows are between 45 and 56

years with a prediction that this figure will increase due to the pandemic caused by Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). Peterman (2012:2) also found out that widows are discriminated against and property is taken away from them, leading to incipient poverty and an inability to support their children. Using a Demographic Health Survey (DHS) data from countries such as Tanzania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Benin, Congo/ Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Guinea, Mali, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda and Zambia, Peterman found that scores of widows could not inherit property, bearing in mind that property inheritance has implications for and significance in household income and long-term welfare. Research suggests that they are also left with no financial resources and nutrition needed to fight and mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS resulting in depression (Dube, 2011:6, Peterman, 2012:2, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:636).

In Zimbabwe, a Demographic Health Survey (DHS) conducted in 2010 found that between the ages of 15 and 49 years, approximately 9.06% of the women were widows (Peterman, 2010:5). This new scenario of the young widows in particular posed an insurmountable amount of stress on the bereaved, accompanied by direct loss of income emanating from the death of breadwinners, stigma, interpersonal problems, depression and oppression with minimal contributions from the women in decision making processes (Dube, 2011:6, Peterman, 2012:2, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:636).

A woman in most cases witnesses numerous inevitable negative life changes upon the death of her husband, often without any form of support either familial or professional. The experience of widowhood has profound consequences, especially with the deepening economic woes which have implications for their psycho-social wellbeing (Trivedi *et al.,* 2009:4). Different researchers agree that intervention by professional social workers is essential in safeguarding the individual worthiness of the widow and self-respect inherent in her humanness (Dube, 2011:3, Cummins, Sevel & Pedrick, 2012:9, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:636). It can be deduced that widowhood is a lonesome experience, often accompanied by untold psycho-social challenges which destabilises the welfare of the widowed woman.

The social work profession has a pertinent role to play in questions of social justice as this is one of its core values. At the centre of the core belief system of the social work profession is a society that is just and one where members share similar rights and have equal access to the available resources. Professional social workers are duty bound and mandated to ensure the distribution of social justice to the marginalised and disenfranchised populations such as women in general, the widows and their vulnerable children in particular (DuBois & Miley, 2014:136). It is against this background that that this study aimed and sought to examine the psycho-social plight of widows and building a social work intervention model for the psycho-social plight experienced by widows in Zimbabwe.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Discrimination against women in Zimbabwe poses a serious social problem. From personal observation as a community member and as a social worker, widows in Binga district, both North and South, the demarcated area of this study, are often isolated in the community of domicile on the grounds that they are unclean. Further, relatives of the deceased husband rarely involve the widows in decision-making processes related to division of estate, commonly taking advantage of some customary unions with the deceased husband were not legally recognised. Despite the problematic nature of such unregistered customary marriages for women in Zimbabwe, these customary marriages have been on the rise since 1997 with a staggering figure of 82% in 1997 (Dube, 2011:4) to 84% in 2013 (Share, 2013:1). Widows are also often blamed for having infected their intimate partners, especially when the death was on account of HIV and AIDS related symptoms.

There are other barriers that impede widows from claiming their rights to property ownership such as inheritance. Legislation used for intervention is inadequate, and inherently discriminatory, as well as inadequately interpreted, and enforced. For instance, indigenous interventions provided by traditional leaders commonly attempted by widows in dealing with their challenges have proved inadequate to offer sanity and redress (Banda, 2007:3, Ndlovu-Bhebhe, 2012:2) resulting in multi-dimensional psycho-social problems for the bereaved widows. Such indigenous interventions subject widows to patriarchal customary laws and apparently extend

discrimination in inheritance despite the enactment of the inheritance legislation in 1997 in Zimbabwe.

Attempted legal interventions seem also to be unable to yield favourable results based on their inadequate knowledge of how the system works and bias from the judiciary which is still predominantly male. This happens despite the availability of the Gender Policy of 2013 and the Intestate Succession Act (Act No. 81 of 1997) enacted on 1st November 1997 and in an era where massive support resides in various international human rights instruments that seek to combat all forms of discrimination and harmful traditional practices against women generally.

Furthermore, financial resources needed to access legal interventions are profoundly minimal, often non-existent for some widows, thus rendering them progressively susceptible to a point of re-living the traumatic experiences of the deaths of their intimate partners.

At the familial level in many instances, widows fail to meet their welfare needs and the needs of children under their care with such discrimination intact and unquestioned. This is exacerbated when the widow has to meet the health demands of being HIV positive, where in many instances even her children also test positive for the symptoms (Dube 2011:6, Izumi, 2006:2). These complex experiences expose widows to secondary victimisation, trauma and helplessness which results in powerlessness (DuBois & Miley, 2014:150). Peterman (2012:23) and Idialu (2012:7) agree in their writings that the plight of widows in the African context is complex and needs systematic investigation.This study therefore identifies an intervention gap that needs to be confirmed first by the widows as participants. The study develops an alternative intervention model that needs to address the psycho-social plight of widows in Binga district, in Zimbabwe.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In qualitative research, questions are used to guide the “design” and “the actual doing of research” (Braun & Clarke, 2013:44). Given the context of the research problem, the following research questions gave direction to the investigation:

- What are the psycho-social problems experienced by widows in rural communities?

- Which intervention measures are in place and in use to address the challenges widows face?
- What gaps exist in the available intervention measures?
- What is the efficacy of social work intervention in mitigating the plight of widows?
- Based on the gaps identified, which social work intervention model could be developed to address the plight of widows in Binga district, Zimbabwe?

For the answers to these questions to be obtained, an aim and related objectives were formulated to guide the study. The paragraph below discusses the aim and derivative objectives.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at examining the psycho-social plight of widows in Binga District in Zimbabwe and to then develope a relevant social work intervention model.

In order to accomplish this aim, a number of specific objectives were set. These objectives seek to:

- Analyse the psycho-social problems faced by widows in their communities;
- Appraise the intervention measures available and in use for addressing the challenges faced by the widows;
- Assess the gaps that exist in intervention measures used;
- Determine the efficacy of social work intervention for the plight of widows; and
- Develop a social work intervention model that will be used to address the plight of widows in Binga district in Zimbabwe.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is valuable in many ways as it will continue to influence **gender policies** and **laws** in general and those pertaining widows in particular such as **Inheritance and Succession Laws.** The study makes recommendations for inclusion in policies and legal frameworks. On the grounds that it is unique to the profession of social work, this research contributes significantly to the knowledge base of the profession as there is a paucity of literature on widowhood in the **field of social work and advances research**. Most significantly, the study develops a model of intervention from the theory of social work that informs and enhances **social work practice.** The study also provides significant information relevant to

policy that aims at empowering women generally and specifically widows who face the ordeals of abuse, marginalisation and disempowerment from various agents.

1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

To clarify issues, the following key terms are defined:

1.6.1 Psycho-social: refers to "interaction of environmental circumstances with functioning of the individual's mind' (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:176). In this study psycho-social refers to the interaction of the widow with the environment usually family members, community members, cultural practices, traditions and legal practices which impact on mental and physical coping abilities to the loss of her husband.

1.6.2 Widow: is a "woman whose husband died and who has not married again" (Idialu, 2012:6).This study defines a widow as a woman who experiences the death of her husband in a customary or civil marriage and has not married again.

1.6.3 Efficacy: means the "degree to which desired goals or projected outcomes are achieved", (Barker, 2003:138). For the purpose of this study, efficacy means the ability and extent to which social work intervention in the challenges of widows could be utilised.

1.6.4 Plight: refers to "a demonization, ostracism, discrimination and deprivation of human rights" suffered by widows (Totten, 2012:1). This study uses 'plight' to mean a difficult state of affairs and the myriad abuses faced by widows emanating from their immediate environment, causing depletion of coping resources.

1.6.5 Empowerment: refers to "the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals could take action to improve their life situation" (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2011:12). In this study, empowerment is regarded as the process of increasing the personal and interpersonal power, knowledge, psycho-social and needful resources so that widows can take action against the abuses they encounter.

1.6.6 Model: is a way of "presenting, logically and graphically some aspect of the world or phenomenon" (Saleeby, 2009:15). Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014:5) give a more elaborate explanation and assert that a model "is a representation,

replica or a copy of an existing thing or of a proposed structure. It is indicative of a particular design or style. For social sciences, it is a description of the most prominent aspects of a phenomenon." In this study, a model means a logical description of interventions that social workers could use as a way of mitigating against the challenges that widows face.

1.6.7 Intervention includes processes in which "social workers initiate actions to achieve specific planned goals." In this process, a social worker counsels, negotiates, advocates, plays the broker role, does social planning, community organisation, finds and develops resources, and many other activities that help widows to deal with their problems (Cummins *et al.,* 2012:3). Barker (2003:226) defines intervention as "interceding in or coming in between groups of people, events, planning activities, or an individual's internal conflicts". This study uses the term intervention to mean specific steps and activities used by a social service practitioner to assist widows to cope with the challenges they encounter in their environments.

1.7 BASIC THEORETICAL STATEMENT

Whilst it is acknowledged in this study that current interventions in the plight of widows carried out by Village Heads, Chiefs and magistrates follow the legal protocol, with little regard for social work interntion in Binga District. However, the position of this study is that social work has a central role to play in providing empathic and comprehensive interventions.

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a brief overview of relevant literature reviewed, and it is noteworthy that chapters two and three of the study provide comprehensive coverage of the literature reviewed.

1.8.1 The phenomenon of widowhood

The phenomenon of widowhood is spread across the globe, ages, races and ethnic groups. The paragraphs below indicate how the phenomenon is experienced in various parts of the world.

1.8.2 The plight of widows in non-African states

In Western countries, such as the United States of America and the United Kingdom, the widowhood phenomenon is concentrated in the aged populations, above the age of 65 years. The challenges faced by widows in the developed world are individualistic and come in the form of loneliness and loss of esteem related to living alone (Trivedi *et al.,* 2009:3). Further, high levels of depression and generalised psychological problems are common challenges for first world widows. Trivedi *et al.* (2009:3) argue that this is worsened by financial difficulties that overwhelm these widows. Despite the fact that widows are lonely in many Western countries, a contradiction exists in countries like Germany, where the society and the families are supportive and see widowhood as normal as any other social status (Thien & Stiftung, 2010:20).

In Asia, (India and Nepal), Devi and Rotti (2012:1) described widows as "physically alive and socially dead" in that they are secluded from many social circles and are barely visible in claiming their rights including custody of their children. The Women for Human Rights Single Women Group (2010:21) revealed that the plight of widows include "socio-cultural discrimination, economic deprivation and emotional crisis" and in Nepal, a worse situation experienced in these nations is that widowhood is seen as a curse.

1.8.3 The plight of widows in Sub-Saharan Africa

The countries in the Sub-Saharan African region expose the widows to a host of cultural practices that dehumanise them. Malawians for example, force widows to have unprotected sex with the deceased husband's relative as a way of exorcising the spirit of the dead husband (Lomba, 2014:34).

Disinheritance of property is a major problem facing widows in Sub-Saharan Africa due to discrimination. This has economic consequences in that widows fail to adequately support their children due to reduced income and livelihoods (Izumi, 2006:52). In Zambia, widows lose land which is used for food production unless they have kinship ties to village authorities (Chapoto, Jayne & Manson, 2007:3). Due to the dietary demands of HIV and AIDS infected widows' health is compromised as they are left with no resources needed to fight and mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS.

1.8.4 Widowhood in Zimbabwe

Widowhood is a common phenomenon in Zimbabwe. The 2010 Demographic Health Survey (DHS) carried out in Zimbabwe found that between the ages of 15 to 49 years, approximately 9.06% of the women were widows (Peterman, 2010:5). The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstats, 2013:17) indicated a higher mortality rate among men than females. Matabeleland North of Zimbabwe, where Binga District the target of the study is located, has a total population of 749017 with widows making up 15% and widowers 2% of the total population. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Zimstats, 2012:4) report highlighted that the majority of the population in the province live in Binga District. Here, the total population as at the 2012 census stood at 139 092, with 63 736 males whilst the majority 75 356 were females (Zimstats, 2012:4). The district has been affected by the unprecedented death of male population leaving behind widows. Zimstats (2012:22) reports that widows make up 8.3% of the total population of the area. Taking into account that the majority of the population is young in Matabeleland North Province with 44% being aged 15 years, it follows that the majority of the widows in the district are young with a host of social problems that adversely affect their lives – a situation calling for an investigation.

1.8.5 Forms of abuse experienced by widows in Zimbabwe

The death of a woman's husband leaves her in very precarious circumstances. Women are subjected to a host of abuses as if abuse is what defines widowhood. Even though intervention measures are not well documented in literature, there is evidence in some literature that abuse of widows continues to take place. In Zimbabwe, measures to prevent abuse of widows and women in general are in place. Ironically and in juxtaposition, women in Zimbabwe continue to be abused in the country, suggesting incongruence of policies with practice.

Prominent amongst the forms of abuse, is property disinheritance and economic abuse. Maphosa (2013:1) quotes one widow in Bulawayo city who had this to say:

"When my husband passed away, we had a house in Mpopoma, a car and a house in Gwanda. When he died in a car accident at work, all this vanished".

The in-laws, which include the father in-law, mother in-law. Sisters in-law, bothers in-law and other relatives to the deceased husband, are mostly the perpetrators of the widows in all such cases. This is contrary to the inheritance laws in Zimbabwe which protect against property grabbing. The Intestate Succession Act, enacted in 1997 while noble on paper, seems to be practically unable to combat property grabbing across the country.

Sexual abuse is another form of abuse widows are subjected to upon the death of their husbands. This is common in cultural activities called sexual cleansing in the belief that this will remove the bad spirit of the dead husband. A widow is forced to have unprotected sex with a relative of the deceased husband (Widows Empowerment Trust, 2015:1). Some widows, especially the young ones, are even forced in levirate marriages. This has direct consequences for the psychological and emotional well-being of the widows and hence constitutes psychological and emotional abuse.

In other instances, widows are physically abused. This happens especially where resistance to orders to vacate the home or property is the case. Furthermore, a widow is abused physically in instances where there is suspicion of bewitching the late husband from the in-laws. Izumi (2006:43) found that in Seke site in Zimbabwe widows and their orphaned children were routinely ordered to leave the accrued property to join their natal families with threats of physical abuse. In Buhera, five widows were beaten while others were given orders to leave their possessions by the relatives of their deceased husbands (Izumi, 2006:27).

Widows are at the receiving end of many abuses in Zimbabwe. The Intetstae Succession Act (Act No. 81) of 1997 law has been put in place to protect women in property disputes and against any form of abuse. Furthermore the National Gender Policy 2013 was formulated in order to affirm protection of women. To one's dismay, the laws and policies seem not to work in favour of women in general. This creates a clear need for alternative intervention measures to be put in place to assist widows cope with their experiences.

1.8.6 Widowhood and Social work intervention

Social work has adequate literature on many social problems; however, widowhood has received limited attention in available literature. The scanty discourses on

widowhood have been mainly confined to a human development perspective. To this effect, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:150) explain that widowhood usually happens in old age with common challenges being aloneliness and depression. This contrasts the phenomenon of widowhood in the African context where many widows are young with different social problems to be addressed such as discrimination and oppression.

Inferences can also be made from the discourses on social injustices by DuBois and Miley (2014:137) to the effect that the plight of widows this study examines can be understood in the context of social injustices but not directly referred to in the texts. From the writers' descriptions on sexism as a social injustice, it is a practice that 'favours men, confers power and authority on men and relegates women to a second-class status and sexist structures devalues women, discriminate against them economically' (DuBois & Miley, 2014:139). Based on the descriptions of these social injustice, the researcher argues that a new social injustice called "widowism" can be a new concept which is directly an offshoot of sexism. "Widowism" then can be explained as a practice which dehumanises, devalues, discriminates and views widows with suspicion resulting in exclusion from socioeconomically beneficial activities and exposing them to socially harmful practices.

The quest for intervention in the plight of widows in social work needs priority interest. This is largely because social justice is a value in social work and a practice imperative. A further requirement is that social workers need to change repressive circumstances through empowerment (Dubois & Miley, 2014:155). With the widespread challenges and abuse of widows, two very important questions need answers.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is a need to comprehend these challenges facing widows from many theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain their experiences. Appelrouth and Edles (2011:2) explain theory as 'a system of generalised statements or propositions about a phenomenon'. Theory helps to explain and guess about the phenomenon under study.

In order to elucidate on the undeserved exposure of widows to social ills, Johnson (2008:2) agrees with the explanations of the Feminist theory and the ecological

theory that the partrichal environment should be condemned for the abuse of widows. The theoretical perspectives will be used to conceptualise sources of the problem while the rights theory together with the empowerment perspective will be used to build a model for intervention.

1.9.1 Feminist theories

Feminism has gained momentum and many branches have risen from its original roots. Feminist branches such as Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism and Socialist feminism are common today. The rationale for the use of the feminists theories is to analyse satisfactorily the plight of the widows in a partiachal society which the feminist theorists condemn for the continued abuse of women in general whcich feminist argue that needs to be changed. Thus the focus of Liberal feminism is social change through construction of laws and better employment approaches and practices.

Radical feminist theorists (such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon) maintain that women are the most oppressed group and that this oppression is deep, cuts across races, culture, economic classes and results in most suffering (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:18). In their argument, these theorists assert that men in patriarchal societies control norms and structures used by society to control women and there is need to speak against such structures and change them for the advancement of women is society.

Since other Feminist theories such as Marxist feminist, Social feminists, and Liberal feminists are regarded as offshoots from Radical feminism, the researcher sees the Radical feminist theory as suitable and an overarching theory and other Feminist theories as offshoots.

This research views Radical feminism as appropriate in explaining unfair and unjust treatment of the widows as a result of oppressive powers of patriarchy inherent in the communities since time immemorial and widows seem unable to challenge the status quo. To add substance to the researcher's view, Graff (2012:3) and Lewis (2015:1) agree that subjugation of women is inherent in patriarchy and has been accepted in the daily lives of the people. Hence the Radical feminist theory is

appropriate in shaping perspectives for comprehensive understanding and methodologies for ultimate intervention.

1.9.2 Ecological theory

The position of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory, (Johnson, 2008:2), in this study is crucial. The theory provides a critical explanation of how women transact with the environment they live in. The ecological theory in this study provides an analysis of how widows interact with the environment which relates to people and resources around them. The transactions can either have positive or negative results and provides the lens through which to view the sources of the problems of widows in the communities. According to Johnson (2008:2), the Ecological theory provides a clear understanding of how people relate to their environment which affects them and also how they affect the same environment. Emphasis is on the interactions of systems such as individuals, groups, communities and culture as major incumbents of the positive and negative results of such interaction (Johnson, 2008:3).

This study regards the Ecological theory as critical in comprehending the unpleasant experiences of widows such as stigmatization and property stripping (Dube, 2011:29).

1.9.3 The Rights theory

Dominant eurocentric approaches of an individual's rights have greatly influenced the the Rights theory has been used in this study to assist in formulating the interventions for the plight of widows from a rights perspective as many nations have signed the global treaties and human rights instruments and understand that widows need not to be discriminated against as this constitutes a violation of their rights (Dube, 2011:16, United Nations, 2014:9). With their backbone on international human rights instruments, the Rights theories' main proposition is to motivate the process that will help eliminate patriarchy's dictations so as to concentrate on changing social circumstances that violate women's rights and be treated as equals to their male counterparts. The rights approach rightly conforms to values of social work and the intervention measures appropriate to deal with women abuse; this is the essence of this study and hence very important for this research.

1.9.4 Empowerment approach

The empowerment approach has been widely utilised in social work and considers clients' innate strengths rather than the deficit approach to their problems (Saleeby, 2009:13). For this research, the approach is central as it influences the formulation of the social work model to help the widows use their inner abilities towards adjustment. Anderson, Cowger and Snively (2009:183) and Saleeby (2009:12) endorse this view. The empowerment approach is central and has directly shaped a model of intervention that takes into account the abilities of the victims. This study utilised the empowerment approach to build a model of intervention befitting the social work profession.

1.10 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study gathered the experiences of the widows on the abuse that they continue to experience after losing their husbands. The study brought to light their experiences and their silenced suffering by enabling the widows to freely express themselves during fieldwork for this study; an opportunity that might be rare for them. It also enabled the service providers to give account of what they also have experienced in service provision directed to widows. This has been regarded as crucial, relevant and helpful for structuring and developing a formidable model of intervention.

The study however, touched on life ordeals of the widows. The researcher anticipated hesitation and reluctance by the widows in opening up with their stories. Since this was an anticipation, the researcher was ready to provide full details and information about the study beforehand and to explain the study as an academic research exercise and that the information would be used to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and possibly influence existing discriminatory intervention mechanisms. There are assurances of confidentiality and anonymity that is explained in detail in the sections that follow.

1.11 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology explained here is a synopsis of the research methodology that is further explained in detail in chapter four of the study. The discussion below is a brief explanation of the methodology of the study.

1.11.1 Research approach

This basic research adopted a qualitative approach in order to get into detail about the abuse and challenges experienced by the widows. The qualitative approach depends strongly “on people who are articulate and introspective enough to provide rich descriptions of their experiences” (Padgett, 2008:53). This approach enabled the researcher to get significant and elaborate descriptions and interpretations of what the participants told.

1.11.2 Demarcation of the study

The study was conducted in the Binga District, in Matabeleland North Province, a poverty stricken region, in Zimbabwe. It is noteworthy that the province has a critical shortage of services for women to deal with their issues. Zimbabwe has a total of 10 provinces. The entire Matabeleland North Province has a total of 9 Social Welfare officers who are all males and a total of 16 Gender officers comprising of 10 males and 6 females (Zimstats, 2012:60).

From this poor province, Binga District has been of particular interest to the researcher due to demographic and sociocultural conditions that are peculiar with the district. The district is predominantly inhabited by the BaTonga tribe and has the highest population in the province with a higher mortality rate among the males than the females (Zimstats, 2012:4). Access to formal education among the people is minimal, especially among women of all age groups, a factor which studies agree to have implications for women’s social position and welfare (Dube, 2011:4, Gunga, 2009:11, Trivedi *et al.,* 2009:1).The BaTonga people in the district have a strong adherence to their socio-cultural practices and do not concede easily to unfamiliar external influence towards change. The practice of polygamy and levirate (inheriting a widow by a husband’s relative) marriages is still common and resilient traditional practices among community members still obtain in spite of the HIV and AIDS scourge. In the same district, traditionally arranged marriages are widespread among the people with women in the families commonly occupying secondary roles and viewed as a subordinate population due to the male dominated societal structure (Dube, 2011:2). From time to time widows in the Binga district face the challenge of abuse from in-laws leaving them distressed. This has become a catalyst for this study, which built a befitting intervention model for social work.

1.11.3 Sampling

The population (Welman, Kruge & Mitchell, 2005:126) of the study included widows and social service providers in Binga District in Matabeleland North where a sample was selected. In this study, a non-probability homogeneous purposive sampling strategy was employed. In non-probability sampling people are selected to the sample on the basis of "experience or the fact that they might be unusual or different from the norm; their selection is not a matter of pure chance" (Denscombe, 2010:25). Purposive sampling involves "selecting respondents based on their ability to provide needed information" (Padgett, 2008:53). Purposive sampling is consistent with phenomenological research in which participants "share common experiences so that detailed patterns of meaning and relationships can be identified" (Gray, 2014:208).

In the study, widows were selected for both individual in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews. Hennink, Hunter and Baily (2011:109) define an interview as "a conversation with a purpose" and an in-depth interview as "a one-to-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth". A focus group discussion is a collaborative discussion with "six to eight pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focusing on a specific set of issue's" (Hennink *et al.,* (2011:136). Key informants also participated in the study. These are individuals involved in intervention for the plight of the widows. Padgett (2008:105) described key informants interviews as "elite and expert interviews" which involve "highly regarded practitioners or public figures" in the interviews.

Homogeneous purposive sampling was adjudged most suitable for selecting widows because it provided certainty that the widows participating in the interviews were victims of abuse and could share real accounts and experiences.

Purposive sampling of key informants guaranteed the involvement of experts with known services provision to widows who befall victims of abuse. Their role in intervening in the circumstances of the widows made them appropriate participants in the study. These interviewees fully comprehended the widows' needs and challenges. Other sampling strategies may not have guaranteed this.

1.11.3.1 Sample size

Padgett (2008:56) suggests that when determining the sample size, a smaller number is desirable for collection of intense information to enable “intensity” and “homogeneity”, In the current study, a total of thirty-three participants were selected to participate in the study. Twenty-four widows and nine key informants. Widows participated in individual in-depth and focus group interviews while fourteen widows participated in two separate focus group interviews while social service providers participated in key informant interviews.

The participants were selected from Binga North and Binga South as explained in the eligibility criteria in 10.6.2. The researcher was vigilant that the number of participants among widows would also be influenced by data saturation point which was not reached because of the diversity of circumstances of the participants. A saturation point is reached when ‘new interviews seem to yield little additional information’ (Engel & Schutt, 2013:289). At the point of data saturation, it is not necessary to interview new participants in the study.

1.11.4 Data collection methods

In terms of “tools for data collection” (Denscombe, 2010:4), one-on-one interviews, (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:109), were utilised to gather data from the widows who befell victims of abuse. The interviews enabled the widows to describe their experiences in their own words. An interview, according to Stinger (2014:105) enables the participant to engage in a “reflective process” and “explore his or her experience in detail and reveal the many features of that experience…”

Interviewing as a data collection technique is congruous with “feminist research” (Dube, 2011:12) that informed this study. While the interviews unfolded, the researcher acknowledged the participants as experts in telling their stories.

In the second phase of the study, the widows participated in focus group interviews (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:136). The value of focus groups interviews in this study is that they enabled the researcher to gather information that would otherwise have been missed during the one-on-one interviews with the widows. Focus groups also allowed for solid responses in that participants also “discussed and commented on personal experiences” (Hardwick & Worsely, 2011:85). Further quality in responses

was enhanced in that participants interacted and communicated during responses in order to get several shared experiences and opinions that individual interviews could not provide. The “empowering nature” (Hardwick & Worsely, 2011:85) of focus group interviews was important to gather information from abused participants and was critical for this study and consistent with the therapeutic nature of the profession of social work.

The third phase of the data collection process engaged expert key informant interviews (defined by Padgett, 2008:105, in 10.6). The rationale and value of engaging key informants in the study was that they have expert knowledge and information on the abuse experiences of widows from their work experience. They provided their expert opinions to supplement data collected in phases one and two of the data collection process. This enriched the data needed for the study and enabled the researcher to have complete information needed for formulation of the model for social work intervention.

1.11.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the fact that “the results of the study are believable and worth paying attention to” (Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008:1). In order to enhance trustworthiness, three different data collection instruments (see annexures C, D and E) were formulated on relevant significant themes to facilitate the systematic data collection process. Collection of data was done in three phases. Firstly, individual semi-structured interviews with the widows were done to get first-hand information. In the second phase of the interviews, widows were engaged in focus group interviews in order to gather information that could have been missed in the individual interviews. The third phase involved participation of the experts, key informants in interviews in order to gather their expert knowledge on the abuse experiences and needs of the widows. Mechanical and personal interpreting of the data was done by the researcher according to the themes. This enabled the researcher to pay special attention to the collected data which was then procedurally reduced to create meaning and make sense of it. Follow up questions and prompts were used during the interviews to enable significant issues to be discussed in depth with the participants so that important information was not left out. The interviews were recorded so that all the information was captured. Using three different data

collection instruments in three phases of the study ensured quality, objectivity, dependability and credibility which enhance trustworthiness of the results (D'Cruz & Johns, 2014; Zamboni, 2015:1). The results are therefore a true reflection of the experiences of the widows from whom the sample was drawn.

1.11.6 Research instruments

Three interview schedules were utilised in this study. One interview schedule guided individual interviews with the widows (See Annexure C), the other one guided focus groups interviews in the second phase of the data collection process (See Annexure D). While the third interview schedule guided interviews with the key informants (See Annexure E).The interview questions for the three interview schedules were organised around particular relevant themes to enable respondents to share in-depth what they experienced.

Prompts were used by the researcher to enable participants to share as much as possible about their experiences enabling the researcher to have insight about their challenges. One-to-one individual interviews and focus group interviews were conducted in chiTonga, the language spoken by community members of Binga to enable widows to tell their stories without communication difficulties. The key informant interviews were conducted in the language that the participants were comfortable with, that is ChiTonga and English. All the interviews would be recorded on audio tapes and later be transcribed verbatim and be labelled Annexure G. Translations of transcriptions was done from chiTonga into English for purposes of analysing and interpreting the findings. The researcher did not test the research instruments (interview guides) since the topic is sensitive and emotionally trying.

1.11.7 Data analysis

Hardwick and Worsely (2011:114) describe data analysis as "creating order from chaos". In this study, the researcher used the thematic data analysis method. Whittaker (2012:96) defines thematic data analysis as "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) in data".

Upon collecting the data, the researcher transcribed it verbatim by directly listening to the audio recorded interviews of the participants to make meaning of their stories. This then led to data reduction by reading the answers to the questions again and

filtereing the information; removing information that was not relevant to the study questions (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234). The researcher then **described** the data textually as obtained from the participants to create meaning.

Data obtained were **compared** to observe patterns in the issues participants shared with the researcher (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234). The data were then **categorised** according to the themes that emerged and this helped to produce concepts that aided in the development of a model of intervention. The themes aided in logical data **display** as well (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234)**.**

1.11.8 Ethical considerations

The researcher observed ethics during the study. To explain the concept of ethics, Brynard *et al.,* (2014:94) enlightens us that ethics relate to what conduct is "right or wrong" on the part of the researcher. In this regard, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from the North-West University Ethics Committee after meeting the requirements of ethical research of the institution (Annexure A). In agreement with the ethical obligations of academic research in the field, the researcher observed the research ethics in the following ways:

- **Gaining access**

Access to the participants was negotiated as an important step in research in that it increases the credibility of the study (D'Cruz & Jones, 2014:104, Silverman, 2010:203). In accessing the participants, the researcher first contacted the Local Government offices, the District Council and the Ministry of Women's Affairs in Binga District. These form authoritative government structures of the district. Further, the former Community Mobilisation Officer working for the Community Development Trust in Ntengwe, Binga District, was contacted before interviews could commence. She worked for the CDT organisation which at the time was implementing programmes for widows in the Ntengwe district. The former Community Mobilisation Officer helped in identifying eligible widows who participated in the individual and focus group interviews. Further, permission was sought from Village Heads and Chiefs before interviewing the participants.

- **Informed consent**

Congruous with the requirements for getting consent that is informed from the participants, the researcher explained to the participants what the study aimed to achieve and the possible time their participation would take. Further, the participants were told of their freedom to participate or not in the study (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011:34), and that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time and that such withdrawal carried no penalty. Additionally, the intention of the research to build a social work intervention model was shared with the study participants. The study participants were made aware of the fact that the study could be emotionally trying, and that interviews would be recorded to ensure that all the conversations and discussions could be accurately captured. Finally, the participants each signed an informed consent form (See Annexure B).

- **The right to privacy**

The privacy of the participants was ensured through observing confidentiality and anonymity. Confidentiality ensured that the "information collected from the participants of the study is not revealed in a form that it can be linked or traced back to the individuals" (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011:35). To ensure anonymity, the names, personal contacts and physical addresses of the participants were not sought. Instead, pseudonyms were used for individual interviewees and letters of the alphabet and numerals were used for transcribing and reporting focus group interviews instead of real names. In the key informant interviews, titles were used instead of personal details of the participants. In all the three phases of the interviews processes, the participants were made aware that the information they provided would be used for academic purposes only.

- **Deception of participants**

In order to avoid deceiving the study participants, all facts pertaining to processes of the study were explained to them. The information about the goal of the study, the participants' role, and the academic nature of this study were explained before conducting the study.

- **Distress and emotional harm**

Padgett (2008:69) warns that researchers need to avoid harm to the participants, especially where sensitive and emotional topics are involved. In this study, the researcher avoided questions that could evoke emotions. Questions that had the potential to evoke the emotions were used sparingly especially given that the study focused on widowhood and the inevitable sense of nostalgic loss that would be stoked during the interviews. The researcher had made arrangements with social workers for counselling in unforeseen cases where unintentionally participants' emotions would be evoked.

1.12 STUDY OUTLINE

This study is made up of the chapters outlined below:

CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter provides an orientation and background to the entire study, which includes problem statement, aim and objectives of the study, definition of terms, basic theoretical statement, synopsis of the literature review, research methodology, and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks.

CHAPTER TWO: UNDERSTANDING WIDOWHOOD AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

The second chapter reviews literature on understanding of widowhood. This literature covers the psycho-social challenges experienced by widows and interventions. The chapter closes with a review of selected theoretical perspectives.

CHAPTER THREE: WIDOWHOOD, SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE AND INTERVENTION

Chapter three explores widowhood in the context of social work interventions, with emphasis on what roles social workers play.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter four provides a detailed account of the research methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter five presents the findings of the study, the interpretation of the findings and the analyses made.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This is the chapter which concludes the study. It offers a discussion of findings, conclusions and then makes recommendations based on the study findings.

1.13 SUMMARY

This chapter has introduced the study and defined major concepts. The chapter states the research problem which generated for this study, the research questions and the aim and objectives of the study. Further, a preliminary literature review was done which is covered in greater detail in chapters two and three. The methodology of the study is also briefly explained in this chapter and is further expanded in chapter four. The next chapter in this study explores the concept of widowhood, associated challenges and interventions.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING WIDOWHOOD AND ASSOCIATED CHALLENGES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of widowhood and its associated challenges are broadly reviewed in different literature. Whittaker (2012:24) defines literature review as "a comprehensive summary and critical appraisal of the literature that is relevant to a research topic." Literature that conceptualises matters of abuse of widows and related interventions was sourced from government resources, non-governmental organisations documents and various disciplines such as law, psychology and nursing due to lack of discipline-specific literature on widowhood in the field of social work. Available literature documented by the humanitarian and implementing agencies of gender sensitive programmes such as the United Nations (UN) was taken into account. The library databases such as Ebscohost and Ebrary have been used for in-depth literature review for this research.

The phenomenon of widowhood is not new globally. The understanding of widowhood and discourses of literature on widowhood have been confined to the specific purposes of researchers and specific disciplines, government and humanitarian programmes. Disciplines such as psychology, sociology and the nursing profession, and humanitarian organisations like the UN have attempted to pay some attention to the phenomenon of widowhood. Governments, such as the South African, Zambian and specificalkly Zimbabwean government, have ratified international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women of 1979 and the Beijing Platform of Action of 1995, and have also put legal frameworks in place to protect women in general yet little has been specifically devoted to in-depth studies on widows. Similarly, the discipline of social work needs additional literature to deal with the paucity of theoretical frameworks that seek to guide social workers in addressing the psycho-social plight of widows. The appalling humanitarian circumstances and conditions faced by many widows create enough quests for intense literature in the profession of social work in order to inform practice.

Widowhood has been described as one of the world's "epidemics," (Widows for Widows, 2011:5) as it cuts across continents, regions, countries, provinces, districts

and municipalities in the geographic sense. Demographically, widowhood is a phenomenon experienced by every race, age cohort, and ethnic group, tribal and religious group. According to Widows for Widows (2011:5), there are approximately "245 million widows in the world with 115 million living in extreme poverty." Further, the widows' children are at the receiving end of the experiences of their mothers. An estimated 500 million children of widows exist worldwide and they are prone to kidnapping by their fathers' relatives and an alarming total of 1,5 million of these children die before the age of five (Widows for Widows 2011:6), making the phenomenon of widowhood a true epidemic. Due to the hardships experienced by widows, the UN, on 23rd of June 2011, officially declared 23rd June an International Widows' Day.

In Gabon, in Africa, the Sylvia Bongo Ondimba Foundation, serves to bear testimony to the need for formal interventions for the psycho-social problems of widows. The Rwandan Genocide, wars in Angola and in Mozambique and the HIV and AIDS pandemic have all combined to swell the numbers of widows in African, especially the Sub-Saharan Region (Lampe, 2015:2). This is an example the extent to which the phenomenon of widowhood affects all societies and communities and hence extensive literature on this world epidemic deserves dynamic interrogative approaches which are overdue in the humanitarian and social justice goal-oriented profession of social work.

2.2 UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD

A widow is a "woman whose husband died and who has not married again" (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 2005:1683). According to Keister and Destro (2008:438) "a widow is a woman whose spouse has died…" As opposed to the general normative understanding that widowhood is a phenomenon common to adults, young people also experience widowhood in especially Africa and Asia (Holden, Kim & Novak, 2010:2; Peterman, 2010:5; Trivedi *et al.,* 2008:37). This brings a new dimension and definition regarding who could be described as a widow. A comprehensive definition that this study holds is that "a widow is a girl, a young woman or an older woman whose husband has died and has not re-married."

The widowhood position is adorned by individuals who did not remarry after the death of the spouse (Martin-Matthews 2011:340). The process of widowhood needs

to be understood as involving a series of events that begin from the time a partner gets ill through to death of the spouse, burial and mourning, grieving and acceptance of the loss, to the time one finds ways of moving forward with life (Martin-Matthews 2011:340). To fully understand the phenomenon of widowhood, it is important to understand the various psycho-social and also the economic and health challenges related to the phenomenon of widowhood. As shown below literature has indicated that widowhood has psychological, social, economic and health challenges.

2.2.1 The psychological challenges of widowhood

The death of a spouse brings myriad psychological problems to widows. Widows display a lack of organisation due to trauma. Trivedi *et al.* (2008:38) have noted that a great majority of widows experience mental problems more than those that are still married and widows also have swings of depression and anxiety. In instances where a young woman becomes a widow, most likely she is "less prepared emotionally and practically unable to cope with the loss" (Trivedi *et al.,* 2008:38).The researchers have also concluded that to a large extent, problems of widowhood are emotional in nature. Despite the fact that the widow might not have been in a happy marriage, the loss of a husband makes the widow feel more intensely the loss and absence of the loved one. Gunga (2009:170) characterizes widowhood with a lot of pain inflicted on the widow and personal psychological challenges and the possibility of an onset of depression. Raveis (2008:22) acknowledges that widows still have an emotional attachment to the deceased and hence they need help to reach ultimate emotional withdrawal from the deceased.

2.2.2 The social challenges of widowhood

In terms of social functioning, widowhood brings loneliness (Trivedi *et al.,* 2008:38). The place of a spouse in the widow's life is lost and the widow experiences loneliness again after spending some time with a partner. Each day, the widow misses relating to the person she was used to. Contact with other people is adversely affected and normally lost. The widow finds herself withdrawn and becomes less approachable. For widows that are young, they lack peers to relate to which contributes to isolation (Trivedi *et al,* 2008:38). Martin-Matthews (2011:345) states that widows should lose rather than gain close social ties with other people as a necessity for them to experience and adapt to their new social roles. This is in total

contrast to what other writers found, for example, Trivedi *et al* (2008:38), who established that widows needed social support in order to cope with their social circumstances. There is a difference in the contexts to which these writers make reference. Martin-Matthews (2011:345) writes about the social position of the widows from a developed nation's perspective while Trivedi *et al* (2008:38) writes from a developing nation's and Asian perspective. It is expected that widows from these different parts of the world fair differently with states of widowhood. This study aims ultimately to bring an African perspective to facilitate seeing another dimension of the social component of widowhood.

2.2.3 The economic challenges of widowhood

Many widows find themselves financially unstable soon after the death of their spouses. The main reasons for this is that in many cultures, especially in the African context, men are providers and women are responsible for taking care of the children at home (van de Walle, 2011:6). This is why in many African communities land is appropriated to men for cultivation and settlement basically because women are expected to manage matters of the home without other major roles expected of them. The position of men as providers creates financial strain on widowed women because the man who was a sole and reliable source of income has died (Trivedi *et al,* 2008:38).

2.2.4 The health challenges of widowhood

The often appalling socio-economic conditions of widows leave them vulnerable to many opportunistic infections and diseases which attack people living in poor conditions. Health problems may seem to be far-fetched in terms of problems emanating from widowhood which many scholars seem to agree with. Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger and Burke (2006:476) argue that the loss of a spouse has serious consequential implications on the health and wellbeing of the surviving partner. Additionally, Devi and Rotti (2012:1) found that widows have health problems with the commonest being tuberculosis and asthma attacks. Many of these diseases are concentrated among rural women because of their deplorable living conditions. Other authors established that once a woman is widowed, she begins to have health problems and frequently visits a physician for health conditions associated with the loss of her spouse (Choi & Vasunilashorn, 2013:2; Raveis, 2008:27). Raveis

(2008:27) found that for older women, there is a possibility of death within the next year following her bereavement. In Africa, mainly the Sub-Saharan region, widows struggle with health conditions related to infection by HIV and AIDS which has caused many deaths in the region (Izumi, 2006:34).

2.3 THE LEVELS OF THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PLIGHT OF WIDOWS

The plight of widows connects to problems they experience after the death of their husbands. In the view of Teater (2010:26), these form part of what are called the "life stressors" as they exert pressure on the coping mechanisms of the widow. From an extensive review of literature, the researcher classified the experiences of widowhood and hardships into two broad classes according to how they are experienced. Firstly, widowhood is experienced at an individual level and secondly at the immediate environmental level.

2.3.1 The individual level of the psycho-social plight of widows

At an individual level, widowhood should be understood to refer to a stage characterised by processes that widows undergo after the death of their husband without any tangible influence from other people and cultural practices. In a normative traditional way, the state of being widowed brings dreadful stress as dramatic changes in the woman's life take course.

Martin-Matthews (2011:345) asserts that widows experience bereavement, loss and grief which contribute significantly to disturbances in the normal functioning in their lives. These terms are crucial in understanding what widows experience at an individual level. Bereavement is "what a person goes through when someone close to them dies and the state of having suffered a loss" (American Cancer Society, 2015:1). Loss is the severing of an attachment that offered love and security, any significant change in one's life (American Cancer Society, 2015:1). Another important term to understand is grief. According to Stroebe and Schut, (2010: 275) grief encompasses:

> …the cognitive process of confronting the reality of a loss through death, of going over events that occurred before and at the time of death, and of focusing on memories and working toward detachment from (or relocating) the deceased.

It is crucial to understand that widows do not experience grief as a once off event, but rather they experience a long term emotional process of coping with the loss. It presents itself with many vacillations, making it hard for the widow to deal completely with the loss. Feelings of the loss swing like a pendulum from one extreme to another, and such swings batter the widow. Martin-Matthews (2011:335) describes it as 'elevated depression' in the outcomes of the bereavement studies.

The American Cancer Society (2015:2) posits that people go through various emotional stages including a feeling of numbness and shock. From that perspective a common phenomenon among the widows is the emotional turmoil that comes at the stage of numbness and shock. The widow begins to experience anger, loneliness, uncertainty and denial. When emotional turmoil passes, the last phase of the emotional process that the widow experiences at individual level is her acceptance of the reality of the loss.

Accepting the loss and adjusting to it does not suggest that the widow's pain is over. It is worth noting that when the widow grieves, this grief includes also a shut down on future expectations that the widow might have had with the deceased husband. This forms part of mourning where the actual sense of loss for the widow could last for decades (American Cancer Society 2015:2). At times mourning does not happen in a normal time and the widow continues to mourn for a lengthy period. If this happens, the widow is said to have "complicated grief" (American Cancer Society 2015:2).

The researcher sees grief culminating into depression among the widows in African communities. The main reason for this condition is the fact that widows suffer a solitary experience during the grieving process due to lack of necessary support and professional intervention. Further, the society's lack of receptiveness and the absence of desperately needed social support for widows increases their susceptibility to depression.

The most important individual experience of the widows is coping with loss and bereavement. Stroebe and Schut, (2010:274) define coping as 'processes, strategies, or styles of managing (reducing, mastering, tolerating) the situation in which bereavement places the individual.' From the perspective of Stroebe and Schut, (2010:274), coping is perceived to have much effect on the way the bereaved adapts to bereavement. To expand on this observation, it can be asserted that a

widow who has managed to cope with loss could experience reduced sorrow, a psychological and physical consequence associated with bereavement.

A closer analysis of literature makes this study hold that the experience of widowhood at individual level is further influenced by the immediate environment. What the widow goes through when she is adjusting to bereavement and loss is also dependant on the stressors she gets from the immediate environment. The level and extent and time taken to cope with bereavement and loss in the view of the researcher is also influenced by and dependant on the conditions external to her.

Taking this argument further, a negative “person: environment fit” is experienced in which the widow fails to get resources for coping; rather she experiences stress (Teater, 2010:27). Stress is the “outcome of a perceived imbalance between environmental demands and capacity to manage them with available internal and individual resources” (Teater, 2010:27). Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:29) explain this from the negative transactional processes between people and the environment. From that understanding, it can be argued that a widow fails to cope when a negative transaction has resulted from her interactions with the environment. In their descriptions of transactions, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, (2013:29) maintain that the fit or misfit refers to how people communicate and interact with others in their environment and the results are active and dynamic because something is communicated or exchanged. The analysis of the plight of widows at an individual level posits tasks for the practice of social work in understanding the dynamics involved in an attempt to assist widows to cope with their experiences of loss and bereavement. The question that remains is how social workers could intervene to assist the widows cope with the challenge they experience at individual level.

2.3.2 The immediate environmental level of the psycho-social plight of widows

The immediate environment of the widow influences her experiences of widowhood to a great extent. By immediate environment level, the researcher refers to how people close to the widow during the time of loss and bereavement influence and impact upon her life and adjustment potential. Further, the concept of immediate environmental level encapsulates the rituals, religious and cultural expectations and dictations that the widow is subjected to. These have a profound impact on the experiences of widowhood and often create very difficult conditions for the widow to

deal with. It is worth observing that in all this the widow has limited individual control over the religious, customary and ritual expectations. In line with this point of departure, Teater (2010:27) agrees that external environmental forces need to be analysed by social workers in order to understand how these are perceived by the person in the situation in a bid to determine how they cope with these demands.

Upon the death of their husbands, widows' environments exert great influence on their lives. The widows are often exposed to cultural and ritualistic practices that are inhumane in nature despite the fact that they have experienced loss that they never recover from. Over and above the punitive cultural practices and rituals that they get exposed to, widows are likely to be treated unfairly by people close to them who instead ought to be providing them with a supportive environment.

To show how the immediate environment affects widows, soon after the death of the husband, the widowed woman is considered to be unclean and should therefore be cleansed (Lomba, 2014:34). This practice comes from a cultural and ritualistic perspective which cuts across many nations in Africa. Mourning in Swaziland for example, takes a period of six months in which a widow is not allowed to leave her home. In this mourning period, the Swazi widow cannot even do any kind of work to support her children (Brewer, 2011:12). In Lesotho, this confinement of the widow is longer and takes a period of one and a half years. Due to the fact that widows are seen as unclean, they cannot stand for elections in Swaziland if a period of two years has not lapsed from the time their husband would have died. Furthermore, they cannot visit the Royal family as widows are feared for bringing a bad spell to the royal family (Brewer, 2011:12). Magagula (2012:7) confirms the extent to which widows' uncleanliness is seriously considered by reaffirming that widows who are still mourning and wearing the *tinzilo* (mourning gowns) cannot enter the offices of the Human Rights Commission in Swaziland. This indicates that widows in Swaziland find it even more difficult to report cases of raw and current abuse and victimisation. This extremely affects the way they cope with loss and bereavement.

A different dynamism in culture and rituals happens in Nigeria. Supposedly, women should protect one another in the case that a fellow woman has lost a husband. Ironically, Nigerian women subject the widow to tough cultural practices in which the woman is confined, kept bare footed and under the guard of other women until the

funeral of her dead husband passes (Idialu, 2012:6). The widow is expected to stay in the room where the body of the husband was kept, usually on the floor. Movement is restricted for the widow for at least four months. Idialu (2012:6) writes that the widow is "not even permitted to go to the toilet unaccompanied." When the burial has passed, another year of mourning is observed by the widow in which she wears purely black clothes and she must not wear anything on her feet.

Among the baTonga people of Binga District in Zimbabwe, similar practices with a slight difference from that of the Nigerian community are witnessed. The baTonga people subject the widow to a year-long mourning period during which putting on a black cloth on her head signifies the mourning. During this time, the property of the deceased cannot be touched. It is kept in the closet where no one, including the widow herself, can use it. The death of her husband entails also that she has to shave her hair to scalp until the year-long mourning period passes. This justifies the radical feminist theory's contention that women are more than men an oppressed group wherein cultural prescriptions seem to compound the oppressive practices (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:18.) The deprecating manner in the way women are treated gives prominence to social feminists' claim that the home is the primary source of oppression for women (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:21).

In the view of the researcher, such practices decrease drastically the resources needed for the widow to cope with the daily demands of life, especially considering that many widows in the African communities depend on the resources they accrued together with the husband for survival. Therefore keeping property accrued in closets means that there is little concern about the welfare of the widow and her children; rather the focus is shifted onto overly respecting the dead and their property.

Basing his argument of the unfair treatment of women on historical underpinnings, Mashiri (2013:94) asserts that the abuse of women is rooted in the history of Zimbabwe which privileges men while women are seen as a subordinate population. With regards to violence on women in general, particularly in Matabeleland Province, Mashiri (2013:95) alleges that the civil war disturbances of the 1980s played a significant role in perpetuating abuse of woman. Women were defenceless victims in the wars and as such this study posits that insensitivity to the abuse of women

further grew from the civil war torture of women, extending their victimisation from an already entrenched patriarchy. This exacerbated the targeted abuse of women in the province during the civil unrest of the 1980s in Zimbabwe.

2.4 THE ABUSE EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS

Widows undergo innumerable abuses compared to other women in the communities. The abuse of women is generally acknowledged as normal and part of socialisation in patriarchal communities, but the plight of widows has been given a blind eye and continues to be a threat to their well-being. The succeeding paragraphs discuss the abuses widows experience in various African communities.

2.4.1 Economic abuse

Widows' economic wellbeing is greatly affected when their husbands die. In most cases men are established as providers for the women and their children but upon the death of these men, the economic resources automatically dwindle.

The economic base in most African communities and in Zimbabwe in particular is defined by accrued property, finances and the land used for producing food for the family. It is unfortunate that widows battle to retain their accrued economic resources in Zimbabwe and other countries in the Sub-Saharan region. Maphosa (2013:1) comments on a woman in Bulawayo, a city in Zimbabwe, who lost a number of her houses and property to in-laws who grabbed them. These were the possessions they had accrued in communion, and these could have helped the widow in her family welfare. Not only the widows from marginalised sections of the society fail to inherit property in Zimbabwe, but the elites are also affected as in-laws are apparently more influential and decisive in the administration of the deceased's property, despite the fact that such sequestration is against the law.

A media story of the Zimbabwean Regional Integration Minister, Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga, highlighted the extent of the dilemma women face in Zimbabwe when she was unable to inherit property after the death of her husband (Rusere, 2010:1). The Minister admitted that she would not pursue the case of inheriting her husband's property, Doctor Christopher Mushonga. This high profile case indicates the extent to which traditional attitudes and an entrenched culture

militate against the inheritance laws of this country. Further, tradition seems to supersede the law where the two clash. Observing tradition is important in every society or community, but the question is whether or not a culture that disadvantages its own people can still be respected and be preserved. This dilemma of observing culture that violates the rights of women contravenes the provisions of the new constitution of Zimbabwe passed in 2013, under section 4.28, which abolishes such practices. Considering the current state of affairs in Zimbabwe, it can be anticipated that a lot needs to be done in implementing the law and monitoring the extent of its implementation (Social Institutions & Gender Index, 2015:4). This study gathered evidence from Binga district to demonstrate the extent to which vigorous implementation of the law is essential in enforcing the tenets of property inheritance and distribution to the widows in Zimbabwe.

Not only do widows lose property, they also lose land which is a source of livelihood, sustenance and a major economic base for most of the women population in Zimbabwe (International Regional Information Networks (IRIN, 2015:1)). An estimated 86% of women in Zimbabwe survive on farming (IRIN 2015:1). Land is a reliable economic base in the country. The loss of land signifies the loss of a lifelong reliable economic base. It is noteworthy that land allocation to women is in contradiction to the traditional approach in which Chiefs allocate land to male heads of households (Chapoto, *et al.,* 2007:2). This has direct implications for the acquisition of land when the male counterpart eligible for traditional land ownership dies.

2.4.2 Sexual abuse

Widows also suffer immense sexual abuse. This is a common form of abuse among communities perpetrated in the context of ‘sexual cleansing’ of the widow. It is commonly believed in such communities that a widow must have unprotected sex with one of the relatives of the deceased to cleanse her from the spirit of the dead. Lomba (2014:34) asserts that the exercise of sexually cleansing a widow cuts across nations and is considered as discrimination since women feel the pain of being intruded upon and violated without consent. In some societies this performative violence is not seen as harmful but is actually considered protective to the widow’s future sexual life. It is important to note that sexual cleansing is usually done without

the consent of the widow whose sexual life allegedly needs cleansing. Sex is seen as very crucial to cleansing in certain cultures and is performed by an experienced person in a ritual (Gunga, 2009:170). In Malawi, Gunga (2009:170) observes that it is what qualifies a widow into the guardianship of a relative of the deceased. The sad part is that this sexual cleansing is obligatory to the widow and it is performed by somebody from the clan. This means that the widow is left without choice but to conform to this practice. If somebody from the clan cannot be found to perform this ritual, Gunga (2009:170) points out that:

> …a sexual pervert, or psychopath capable of doing what normal human beings cannot do, is persuaded to perform a sexual cord cutting ritual to separate the widow from her deceased husband, so that the widow may be free to re-marry or to be inherited.

The application of the widowhood cleansing rituals is normally tasked to married women who have been psychologically conditioned to believe that it benefits the widow and her children. Young widows are then expected to respect the ritual and they are assumed willing participants in such rituals. When this practice is analysed from another perspective, it poses danger to the widow and the male relative of the deceased involved in unprotected sexual cleansing as the scourge of HIV and AIDS has adversely affected the Sub-Saharan region and therefore the practice may not be safe anymore.

Besides forcing widows into participating in sexual cleansing, another version of sexual force is experienced by widows. Widows are forced into levirate marriages where she is expected to be inherited by one of the relatives of the deceased husband (Ogolla, 2014:277). The practice is intended to prevent exogamous unions in which marriage outside the clan is not allowed. The word levirate comes from the Latin *word Levir* meaning a “brother in law”, (Samuel, 2013:5), meaning the brother’s wife would be protected from poverty. The concept was initially a noble idea as it protected the widow and her children from suffering in destitution. However, a shift in the original purpose saw the widows at the receiving end of a worsening practice. The problem with this practice is that the widow has no say in it and she is regarded as property and reduced to an object (Samuel, 2013:6). The widow has no choice about her sexual life and she already has an allocated husband. In Zimbabwe, this

practice is targeted at young beautiful widows (IRIN 2015:2), not only to take control of their sexual life but also to inherit the property that was left behind by the deceased husband.

Even though there is a general agreement by other authors, (Gunga, 2009:169; Samuel, 2013:6), that the widow is given no choice in this marriage arrangement, Ogolla (2014:288), regards it as a misconception of how the levirate marriage works. The researcher suggests that women have choices in marriages. These contrasting ideas point to the fact that this study intends to establish how this practice works and how it is understood by people in Binga district.

Conflict and wars also contribute to sexual abuse of widows. Kabul has approximately 50 000 widows and in Iraq there are about 3 million widows due to war. These are targets for rape by soldiers who use no protection in these sexual orgies and affliction (Brewer, 2011:2). It is clear that sexual violence against widows goes unabated in both peaceful and conflict-ridden communities.

2.4.3 Physical abuse

Studies have also exposed physical aggression experienced by widows. Classical cases of physical abuse of widows were recorded in Seke and Buhera districts of Zimbabwe (Izumi, 2006:43). Izumi (2006:27) found that the Buhera community beat five widows, ordering them to vacate the homes that were left behind by their deceased husbands. In a critical analysis of the cases involved, widows attempted to resist eviction from the property, hence the reason they were physically abused.

It may be an understatement to regard physical abuse of widows rampant in Zimbabwe alone; other communities outside Africa subject widows to physical abuse as well. Mughal (2010:101) recorded the case of Badria in Pakistan who was beaten by her in-laws until she lost four of her teeth after refusing to be forced into a levirate marriage. This case is a clear indication of how limited the options of the widows are in society. If they are not faced with one form of abuse, they are then subjected to another, all indicating that abuse of widows is a sore part of their life experiential package.

2.4.4 Emotional abuse

Emotional abuse is commonplace among widows. Although it is commonly perpetrated against the widows, it is subtle and difficult to detect.

Emotional abuse is synonymous with “psychological abuse which relates to a pattern of behaviour that impairs an individual’s emotional state and development or sense of self-worth” (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013:4). Behaviour such as criticism, threats and not giving support constitute versions of emotional abuse. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013:4) asserts that when any other forms of abuse are present and detected on the victim, emotional abuse is also present. This emphasises the fact that though not easily detected, emotional abuse of widows is always present and cannot be downplayed as it forms a critical component of the widow’s wellbeing.

It is surprising also how emotional abuse of the widows cannot be easily prevented. SOS Children’s Villages (2013:1) in Bindura, Zimbabwe, documents the story of Mary who was in a tussle for property with her brother-in-law. When Mary won the case through the intervention of law, the brother in-law cursed the property and the house to an extent that Mary could not live in it with her children but rented it out to other people because it was deemed haunted. In this case, in as much as property grabbing was prevented, emotional abuse of the widow was not.

Lomba (2014:34) comments on the experiences of widows in Malawi noting that as a way of exorcising the spirit of the dead, the widow is expected to “neglect her bodily hygiene, bare her shoulders, and publicly wail - in order to keep away the ghost of her dead husband.” Besides this practice contributing to health threats, it constitutes outright torture and has severe impact on the emotional wellbeing of the widow, taking into consideration that she has lost her beloved one and is in desperate need of already extinct emotional support.

Brewer (201:15) notes that some cultures inflict emotional pain on the widows during widowhood cleansing. Cameroonian culture of widow cleansing forbids a woman from wearing clothes except for dirty and torn clothes. At times she is expected to remove her clothes before men to show them that she has shaved all the hair on all parts of the body to prove that she is clean. This public humiliation and exhibition exposes the widow to public indecency and humiliation (Brewer, 2011:15). With all

the emotional support and comfort the widow needs, she experiences social isolation including her belongings for a gruelling seven week period. The cruellest form of abuse of widows is documented in India by Brewer (2011:14) where “widows may be forced to drink the water their dead husbands have been washed in; they may be forced to sit with their husband’s dead body for days.” At this point the widow lapses into emotional and psychological trauma in the period of the cleansing ritual.

2.5 CURRENT INTERVENTION MEASURES FOR THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PLIGHT OF WIDOWS IN ZIMBABWE

Interventions on the plight of widows seems to be a global challenge. Widows experience extensive stigmatization, poverty and general weekenesses and failure of judiciary systems to protect them from human rights abuses. The alarming worldwide abuses of widows has necessitated the commemoration of the International Widows Day on 23rd of June each year (United Nations, 2011:3) to conscientise communities on the plight and rights widows across the world.

In Zimbabwe, it is uncommon that the widow seeks recourse for unjust treatment she experiences after the death of her husband. This significantly applies to widows in both rural and urban areas due to systematised exclusion and stigmatisation of widows in the country. Intervention is a critical process to enable widows to cope with their circumstances. As Garthwait (2012:32) describes it from a social work perspective, intervention is “the overall term used to describe all activities by social workers on behalf of and in collaboration with their clients, including activities at the following levels of practice: micro, mezzo and macro levels.” At micro level, the social worker intervenes at individual and family level, at mezzo, intervention is directed at groups and organisations while at macro level emphasis of intervention is on entire communities and societies (Garthwait, 2012:32).

Whilst the definition provided by Garthwait (2012:32) describes intervention within the parameters of the profession of social work, the actual remit of intervention may not be confined to the activities of social work in addressing the problems experienced by the widows. Following that line of thought, a more holistic and comprehensive approach is adopted in this discussion to bring into context a myriad activities and people that provide care and support to widows in their time of need. The discussion considers help at both professional and indigenous non-professional

levels. Further, an examination is made of the reasons widows seek help from these people and the extent to which such help might be provided.

2.5.1 The natal family

The natal family refers the family from which the widow was born. This is the family of origin or orientation. The natal family provides help to the widows in the form of comfort and safety. The natal family does not necessarily intervene to end violence against the widow or to recover some property when it has been grabbed by in-laws. The natal family becomes a safe place for widows and their children for emotional and social support and for provision of her immediate needs and those of her orphaned children. Izumi (2006:41) found that out of 143 widows who participated in a study in Zimbabwe, 43 returned to their natal homes after being evicted by in-laws from the land and houses they owned with their deceased husbands. The natal family's village heads usually allocates some land for the widow to start over her life again.

While returning to the natal homes seems to be a comfortable solution for the widows, the researcher sees the possibility of the fate of some widows whose parents have died and the natal family does not exist. The question is who becomes the natal family of the widows and provides comfort for such widows who are themselves orphans.

Families differ and some may not be as receptive as others. Some families subscribe to the notion that a widow is dirty and unclean. Accepting the widow back in such families is associated with bringing bad spirits to the home and family, especially when mourning and cleansing has not been done. Dube (2011:104) recorded the case of Sophia, a widow, who could not re-join her natal home. She was chased away together with her orphaned children and her hope for help and comfort immediately sank. This experience is in line with and bears testimony to social feminists' argument that the home needs to be scrutinised and fully understood as a source of oppression for women (Lord *et al.,* 2012:22).

2.5.2 Friends

The importance of friendship cannot be underplayed. Friends should be friends in times of happiness and in times of need. Beyond the family, other people in the neighbourhood who have a good relationship with the widow usually help and offer comfort to the widow. Widows are open to seek and accept help offered by friends and neighbours. SOS Children's Village (2013:1) in Bindura, Zimbabwe, gives an account of the story of Mary who was disowned of a house by her brother-in-law. A caring neighbour, after seeing what Mary experienced, tracked her down together with her children and alerted her of the SOS Children's Village to contact them for help. This is where the widow got help for both her immediate needs and finally repossessing her house.

Sometimes neighbours wish to help, but circumstances and lack of knowledge on how to help the widow constitute a major stumbling block. The willingness to assist the widow may exist in the neighbourhood but the researcher is also mindful of lack of resources and the fear of being out-cast by other community members and such fear may restrain friends' and neighbours' ability to offer help to the widows.

2.5.3 Religious leaders

This study recognises the diversity of religious beliefs but makes reference to church leaders in this discussion of religion and widowhood for a specific reason. The reason is that the study is situated within a community in which Christianity is the dominant faith. The role of church leaders in the lives of abused widows is critical. Widows report cases of abuse perpetrated against them, and often the church leaders and other members take up the responsibility of comforting widows from a biblical perspective and see this as their social responsibility and duty. Maririmba (2015:1) recorded an example of how Victor and Anna (widower and widow) were helped to make a living by the Christ Alive Gospel Ministries chaired by Bishop Tichaona Maume in Zimbabwe. This was an indication of the value intervention by the church in the lives of widows.

There is a direct connection between the Christian beliefs and social work. Christians ideally believe in doing charitable work and affirming justice as core values that oppose corrupt social policies and institutions (Canda & Furman, 2010:387). The central principles of social work such as acceptance and self-determination are

anchored on Christian ethos. There is a general consensus that Christianity has been very instrumental for the emergence of the current practice of social work (Canda & Furman, 2010:388).

Whilst church leaders play a very fundamental role in assisting widows to adjust to their conditions, this study notes the potential limitations in their social services to widows. Church leaders can assist with burial, charity work like food, clothes, housing as well as spiritual issues. Given the fact that widows need information on issues of sexuality and HIV, this study sees the dilemma of dealing with such issues where necessary information for the widows may not be provided. This assertion is supported by Ndlovu (2013:48) who sees churches as struggling with the moral question when it concerns widows' sexuality and sexual alternatives, especially in the wake of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

2.5.4 Village Heads

The Village Heads in Zimbabwe are very close to the people in the villages and live with them. Muwaniri (2014:1) explains that these village heads work with the Chiefs and are second in the traditional hierarchy of leadership after the chiefs. Appointment of the Village Head is according to lineage and is usually for life and they are usually called *Sibbuku* in chiTonga language in Binga, meaning that they keep names of community members in their books. Muwaniri (2014:1) adds that "they record birth and deaths" in the communities and hence regarded as are very important in rural communities. They are legally recognised, for example, through the Traditional Leaders Act of 1998 (Act No. 25) which gives them power to lead in the villages. Their recognition, availability and quick response to community and domestic affairs makes the community report grave matters to them (Muwaniri, 2014:2) and hence widows in most cases report their abuse incidents to them.

Besides the role of maintaining records of births and deaths, these village heads have the responsibility of maintaining peace and stability in the communities and settling disputes. This role is critical for this study as widows seek help when they are destabilised by instances of death of their husbands and seek recourse to justice in the village setting. In Chimanimani village of Zimbabwe, Izumi (2006:41) acknowledges the work of a strong and assertive village head who stopped the eviction of widows from their homes and land by in-laws.

Looking at the rampant abuse of women in rural communities of Zimbabwe, the researcher questions the capacity of the village heads to deal with widows' matters satisfactorily and even fairly. Further, if the village heads are traditional leaders who are largely custodians of culture, traditional norms and customs, to what extent are they able to deal with issues of abuses of widows as culturally these practices are sanitised and taken for granted and cannot be deemed harmful to the widows? Can conflict of interest be avoided between tradition and justly settling matters relating to widows' problems in gender sensitive conditions?

2.5.5 Chiefs

In rural areas in Zimbabwe, chiefs' positions are respected. They are in the top leadership of the community and are political leaders and custodians of customary law, culture, traditions and norms of the community (Muwaniri, 2014:1). The positioon of Chiefs is constitutional in Zimbabwe and the Traditional Leaders Act 1998 (Act No.25) prescribes Chiefs' operating powers. Widows seek help from chiefs because the chiefs have ultimate power and play a pivotal role in maintaining order in the community and providing measures for dispute resolution in domestic matters. If the matter is not within the powers of *Sibbuku*, then the next referral level for such matters is the chief who has the powers to preside over matters affecting community members that have not been solved at the village level by the *Sibbuku*.

Whilst chiefs could be very instrumental in assisting widows and maintaining order in the communities, they can also be sources of pain for the widows with their strict adherence to traditional precepts. Beauty Moyo, a widow in Mberengwa district of Zimbabwe, was fined one cow and nine goats for failing to adhere to customary procedures when she unveiled the tombstone of her late husband without alerting all the family members and relatives (News 24, 2015:1). The Chief also made attempts to sell the property attached to the widow until the court blocked him from selling the only property the widow had.

From an analytical point of view, the researcher holds that Chiefs' strong adherence to traditional practices and custody of culture overshadows their sense of compassion and responsibility for the widows. Even the observance of the rights of women and widows in particular is in jeopardy due to the traditional orientations which oppress widows. The chiefs' enduring and domineering conservative ethos,

(DuBois & Miley, 2014:253), their connections to culture and traditions make it hard to embrace a paradigm shift towards a liberalist orientation which is what the liberal feminist theory advocates (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011:316). Further, most chiefs are old in terms of chronological age and are likely to be lacking formal and contemporary knowledge about the rights of people, including widows in particular. If training in the human rights discourses is not provided, especially about constitutional changes and the rights of widows, the likelihood is that chiefs might continue perpetuating traditionally informed adjudications in cases where widows are desecrated.

2.5.6 Police

The mandate of the police is to enforce the national laws and maintain order. They are the state organs of law observance and enforcement and therefore any person found to be breaking the law could be arrested. Police officers are the entry point into the judiciary system with regards matters of breaking the law and access to magistrates' courts (Teodori, 2015:5). Community social matters are particularly dealt with by the community liaison officers within the police force. Widows usually seek help from the police in the hope of settling down matters that pertain to their abuse. The expectation is that there would be punishment of perpetrators of abuse. However, it is not uncommon that women decide not to report their abuses to the police because they are ill-informed regarding how the police and the law works pertaining to property inheritance matters. Widows may also decide to endure abuses rather than to undergo the lengthy paper work associated with police processes and interrogation. To corroborate this observation, Teodori (2013:5) writes that "many victims are afraid to report their cases for fear of being judged and interrogated by the police." One can also add the fear of widows being abused secondarily through the emotionless police apparent emotionless questioning styles.

2.5.7 Gender Officers

The gender officers in Zimbabwe have a profound role to play in women's issues. With the widespread reports on gender issues and violation of women's rights, it is practically their duty to educate and ensure that the Gender policy of Zimbabwe is implemented in promoting gender equality and protection of women's rights. The duties of the gender officers are overseen by the Ministry of Women Affairs Gender

and Community Development (United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) Zimbabwe, 2011:2). The gender officers, through the Ministry of Women Affairs and Community Development, are responsible for providing resources for women's community development projects. This is critical for widows as they lack resources needed for them to improve their lives. Widows only appear to seek assistance from the gender officers in order to embark on income generating and related livelihood projects.

Although the gender office is cardinal for women's projects and protecting such women from abuse, it lacks the necessary resources for implementing and advancing steps to improve women's lives. The personnel who work on implementing gender sensitive projects and programmes is sorely lacking in Matabeleland North Province, with males dominating (Zimstats, 2012:60). The human resources are below the essential workforce to implement gender projects in the eight districts of the province given the extent of gender sensitive programmes to deal with violence against women and poverty levels in the districts, particularly Binga district (Dube, 2011:2).

Further, the gender officers lack the capacity to deal with sensitive matters for women in general and for widows in particular that require professional counselling. Their educational level is low to deal with sensitive matters and these gender officers are unable to handle community projects which pose a challenge with regards the needs of widows. The gender imbalance in hiring professionals is also a matter of concern given the history of abuse of women being perpetrated by men in Zimbabwe. Zimstats (2012:60) has shown that there are more males than females hired to deal with sensitive gender matters. For abused widows hesitation to seek help is probable.

2.5.8 Magistrates

The magistrate and their courts rank high in resolving problems that widows encounter in Zimbabwe. Their capacity to resolve conflicts pertaining to the abuse of widows is well documented and known both in the rural and urban areas. Many cases of abuse of widows have been successfully resolved at magistrates' courts as they are custodians of the law and implement the Intestate Succession Act and

Administration of Estates Amendment Act 1997 where disputes arise in property succession and administration (Ndlovu-Bhebhe 2012:2).

Mainly widows seek help from the magistrates in disputes with their in-laws and other individuals, who are either ignorant of the law or are not willing to cooperate in matters linked to property inheritance. A magistrate helped Beauty Moyo in Mberengwa district in Zimbabwe by blocking the Chief who wanted to sell the property attached to the widow citing contempt of customary procedures in unveiling her husband's tombstone (News 24, 2015:1). Whilst the role of the magistrates in resolving disputes has been widely recognised, lack of power on the part of the widow to pursue the cases, costs involved in legal proceedings, the unfriendly environment and the paper work involved in processing matters usually frustrate the widows to a point where they resign themselves to the cruel fate of traditional edicts (Dube, 2011:108).

2.5.9 Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

Non-governmental organisations according to the World Bank (Sowers and Rowe 2007:217) "are private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interest of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development." The NGO sector has always been very important in providing widows with such critical services.

NGOs help the government sector in services that the government cannot provide or lack necessary resources to do so. They also become implementing sub-sectors to help the government reach its social intervention targets. In Zimbabwe, UNFPA plays a critical role in strengthening institutional capacity and practices from a social and cultural dimension to encourage and safeguard the rights of women in general and the widows in particular (UNIFPA Zimbabwe, 2011:1). The main thrust of UNIFPA is to advocate for the rights of women and collect data that informs practice and implementation of legal mechanisms. UNIFPA Zimbabwe collaborates with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development which has a national mandate of coordinating gender programming in Zimbabwe (UNIFPA Zimbabwe, 2011:2). Other important NGOs that work together with UNIFPA Zimbabwe include the Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association which seeks to provide legal services to women, *Padare*, an anti-sexism organisation for men and

Musasa project which provides services where gender-based violence is involved (UNIFPA Zimbabwe, 2011:2).

In Binga District, Ntengwe for Community Development Trust provides critical services for women as it services the entire district on widows' rights issues and helps by educating widows on their rights including property rights (Dube, 2011:12) which is a topical issue in the Sub-Saharan African region. Widows seek help from Ntengwe for Community Development Trust on rights, income generating projects and livelihood initiatives such as gardening projects that provide valuable nutrition for the widows, especially those that are HIV positive.

Whilst the NGO sector plays a critical role for women's programmes in Zimbabwe, this study notes a decline in the NGO activities due to the massive withdrawal of funders in the context of the political and economic crisis in the country. This has seen the closing down of many helpful programmes in the country. The government of Zimbabwe has overtly criticised the NGO sector for masterminding what it terms "regime change" pronunciations, agendas and fomenting political instability. Further, the NGOs have been seen as a channel through which the West funds opposition parties for political activities (Chakawarika, 2011:10). Due to this suspicious and unfriendly climate for the NGO sector in Zimbabwe, many of them have closed down despite the important role they played for widows and their orphaned children and the essential services they provided that have been lost currently.

2.5.10 Social Workers

Since the advent of the profession of social work, social workers globally have been at the forefront in assisting the marginalised, poverty-stricken and the unfortunate population groups such as widows. The work of social workers with these population groups has been mainly inclined towards advocacy work (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:517). To define advocacy, Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:516) assert that it means 'directly representing, defending, intervening, supporting, or recommending a course of action on behalf of a client system.' In this regard, social work practice revolves around "empowerment, specifically creating support to enhance functioning and fostering identity and control" (Monds-Watson, 2013:57).

Globally, a brief history of social work advocacy dates back to the period 1895 to 1915 where there was massive social action taking place (Kirst-Ashman & Hull,

2010:516). With Charity Organizations also involved in advocacy, ‘case advocacy (for individuals, families or groups) and class advocacy (for large groups of people sharing common characteristics or advocating for social legislation), were common (Kirst-Ashman & Hull 2010:516). The Great Depression, especially in the 1930s, also necessitated advocacy work by social workers to ease the consequences of unemployment of that time. From that time to date, social workers have worked tirelessly in advocacy activities in many ways to assist clients meet their needs.

Besides advocacy work, social workers provide psycho-social support such as counselling to widows and their orphaned children (Lindsay, 2013:3). Bereavement, loss and abuses experienced by widows present unprecedented stress which requires psycho-social services. Lindsay (2013:9) views the term psycho-social as referring to “a number of theories which combine concern with psychological development and the interaction between the individual and the social environment.” To address the needs of the widows, social workers’ approach is linked to their unique principles. Social workers assist widows while working in a partnership in order to empower them in implementing plans based on their needs (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:5).

Social work in Zimbabwe has generally little recognition among other professions in the country. Social workers in the country are known as “Welfare Officers” (Chogugudza, 2011:1), with very low popularity in professional circles. The approach to social work is developmental in nature in response to prevailing conditions in Zimbabwe. The profession is less attractive due to remuneration which is below normal. Many public sector social work employees practice in the Department of Social Welfare and local authorities doing work that does not require special training (Chogugudza, 2011:1). There is a grey area in what social workers must do and the activities of para-professionals. It is also concerning that about 50% of the posts for social workers in the Department of Social Welfare are vacant as at 2010 (Chogugudza, 2011:5) owing to the exodus of the social workers seeking greener pastures elsewhere and also freezing of posts by the government.

Professionally trained social workers are now being absorbed by the NGO sector which has seen the need for employing them. Agencies such as “World Vision, Plan International, Care, Save the Children and Help Age” are among the many NGOs

requiring the services of social workers (Chogugudza, 2011:5). From a critical perspective, it is worth noting that NGO activities are censored in a politically sensitive country such as Zimbabwe. Despite the view that the NGO sector and its social work professional teams are rendering important services for the widows and their children, their activities are subject to scrutiny by the politically sensitive government and hence the human rights orientation of the social work profession is not practised to its full application. This drastically reduces the provision of services needed by the widows as a vulnerable and marginalised population group.

2. 6 INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL LEGAL INTERVENTIONS FOR THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWS IN ZIMBABWE

Legal response has always been prominent for protecting widows from abuse. There are various legal protection measures for widows that have been put in place both at international level and at the national level. International instruments have been ratified by many state parties and then translated into law and policies in their respective countries. For the protection of women, specific legal and international instruments have been ratified by Zimbabwe agreeing to enforce these into law and policies as well.

2.6.1 The international instruments for protecting widows in Zimbabwe

This study notes that there are many international instruments that articulate measures to protect women and Zimbabwe has ratified these instruments to protect women. However, for the purpose of this study, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), The Beijing Platform of Action (1995), Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2002/49 and the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Women in Africa (2003) are discussed. These instruments are key to women's rights and hence a closer look at them is critical for the current study.

2.6.1.1 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)

The rights of women are well articulated in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) of 1979, as well as other human rights instruments. CEDAW is normally described as "the international bill of rights

for women" (Sowera & Rowe, 2007:81). In Article 2 of CEDAW, it has been well articulated that states are mandated to "agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of elimination of discrimination against women." Brewer (2011:1) quotes Article1 of CEDAW, stating that the word discrimination refers to:

> …any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field.

Since the adoption of the CEDAW in the thirty-six years that have passed, the international world, together with state parties, have greatly improved the social conditions of women globally.

The CEDAW resolution in Article 5 (a) urges the states to remarkably take specific measures to remove "traditional practices, conduct, stereotypes and prejudices" that subject women and view them as inferior.

During the 15th Session of the of the United Nations held on the 1st of October 2010, the Human Rights Council tasked all state parties to repeal all laws that continue to violate human rights and discriminate people on the basis of their gender. This was intended to ensure that women are treated fairly in the whole world.

Even though CEDAW was ratified by many states, including Zimbabwe, a loophole exists in this international instrument. There is a generalisation of protection of women and a particular article that speaks to the plight and fair treatment of widows was overlooked. Such an article is critical and would have gone a long way to protect widows from any form of discrimination. However, on the need to address the plight of widows, Article 16 (1) (h) gives a general recommendation on property inheritance that should be considered in marriage (Brewer, 2011:20).. At the policy level, the convention was critical as it initiated international consciousness and paved the way for the global need to fairly treat women and enact reformation laws that enhance the women's global respect.

2.6.1.2 The Beijing Platform for Action (1995)

Critically important is the Beijing Platform for Action (1995) which is respected for its remarkable stand on women's rights (Sowers & Rowe, 2007:82). Despite the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, widespread abuse of women continued to exist. There grew a need to call on all state parties, civil society and the NGO sector to accelerate strategic measures aimed at ending the abuse of women.

There was a clear indication in strategic objective A.2 that laws needed to be revised in such a way that women could acquire needed economic resources and be given equal rights through government laws. It was revealed also in the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 that failure of women to acquire economic resources is linked to the widespread poverty of women which is generally noticeable today in our society. Inability to inherit property by women contributes also to the on-going suffering of women in Africa as it reduces their economic resources to abate economic pressures. The state parties, intergovernmental organisations, and academics have been called upon to develop gender-based research methods and address feminisation of poverty hence this research is conducted to address some aspects of suffering among widows brought about by unfair treatment and to model interventions that could be put in place for the profession of social work.

2.6.1.3 Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2002/49

A comprehensive approach to the protection of women was seen as crucial by agencies fighting for universal human rights. There was need to reinforce the rights of women due to their continual abuse in the various corners of the world. A further institutional reform was proposed to the Commission on Human Rights. Resolution 2002/49 places emphasis on equality in land ownership. Access and control of land also focused on property ownership and housing. According to the Commission on Human Rights resolution 2002/49, the Human Rights commission emphasised that there must be condemnation of "laws, policies and traditions that prevent women from inheriting land." Concerns were raised also on the general exclusion of women from owning property as well as housing and that this state of affairs had negative implications for women's involvement in material development.

Affirmation was made by the Commission on Human Rights that legal discrimination against women from having land ownership, property and housing are a gross violation of their human rights entitlements. The state parties were then urged to observe these resolutions and initiate active responses to protect women against abuse and human rights violations.

The Commission's emphasis was that all State parties needed to band together in transforming customs and traditions that repress women and progressively block them from accessing land for tenure. The equality of owning property with their male counter parts became a focal point. If State parties observed this, the Commission was optimistic that the position of women would be greatly improved and human rights violations drastically reduced.

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

African States made remarkable strides to improve the status of women in Africa. The African states realised the need to protect women from abuse and unfair treatment which then necessitated the need for international human rights instruments to protect women. The Protocol of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (2003) was seen as an important instrument to specifically address women's rights in the African contexts. This protocol accentuates the philosophy of prevention of discrimination and calls for national governments to endorse and efficiently put in place laws and policies that would prevent segregation of any nature against women, as proposed under Article 2. This protocol was also concerned about laws that could encourage monogamy as a marriage of choice and that all marriages needed to be recorded to ensure that they are legally recognised, (Article 6).

This protocol is very critical within the African context should it be operationalized as it would enable protection of women who are in unregistered marriages. Many marriages in Zimbabwe, for example, are unregistered and women are vulnerable to abuse upon the death of their husbands since most of the marriages are not legally recognised in the country. This reality subjects widows to a host of psychosocial dilemmas.

To regulate the psycho-social problems associated with property inheritance of widows, the protocol mandates governments to put in place relevant measures that increase widows access to necessary and productive resources, especially to guarantee them access to land and property (Article 19).

Of all international conventions, Article 20 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights is hailed for clearly urging governments to be prudent in observing laws that protect widows and calls on states to ensure:

> a) That widows are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating and degrading treatment;
>
> b) That a widow shall automatically become the guardian and custodian of her children, after the death of her husband, unless this is contrary to the interests and the welfare of the children;
>
> c) That a widow shall have the right to remarry, and in that event, to marry a person of her choice.

Again a landmark stipulation from the protocol was its ruling on the widows in Article 21 that:

> …a widow shall have the right to an equitable share in the inheritance of property of her husband. A widow shall have the right to continue to live in the matrimonial house. In case of remarriage, she shall retain this right to live in the house if the house belongs to her or she has inherited it.

Due to the hallmarks of this protocol, Brewer (2011:20) concludes that other regional, commonwealth and international conventions need to be harsh on penalties for human injustices to deter people from committing crimes against widows. On the same note, the writer is alarmed that few cases have been brought to court and perpetrators are free from any form of lawsuit. The writer's conclusion is clear on the fact that in all important conventions, the lawful sociocultural issues of women need to take centre stage. This indicates that this protocol also makes provisions for future advocacy on these issues. Such a protocol is therefore very important for social work practice within the African context. It constitutes the legal basis on which advocacy

initiatives may make reference to many societies in Africa which are practically ill-informed on widows' rights.

As outlined in the discussions in the preceding paragraphs, the international instruments have urged African governments to embark on legal reforms in order to enable women to acquire full rights and be treated as equals with men. Many nations then implemented the instruments as law in their constitutions. However, ratification and legal reforms cannot easily translate into implementation. This is the case with Zimbabwe and many other African states were women's rights are still undermined. This is a clear indication that ratification of the conventions by the African nations like Zimbabwe was an easy task as opposed to the actual implementation of the laws.

The respect for culture and the ever enduring scuffle for legal implementation have perpetuated repressive practices against widows. The results are a pervasive inability to handle with sensitivity matters relating to the needs and rights of widows resulting in untold psychosocial problems and ill-being. This study gathered confirmation from the widows in Binga district to support the contentions that widows suffer psycho-socially due to inability to get protection from the laws of the country.

2.6.2 National legal protection of widows in Zimbabwe

Following ratification of international instruments by Zimbabwe, the government initiated steps to protect women against unfairness. Widows' psycho-social suffering has been a widespread and topical issue in the country. Their exposure to hard-to-crack entrenched patriarchy has been in evidence. Women's organisations and activists have been working hard at campaigning for women's voices to be heard. The discussion below deals with laws that aim at protecting widows in Zimbabwe.

2.6.2.1 The General Law and protection of the widows

General laws constitute a critical aspect of legal position in terms of ruling in matters that relate to civil marriages in Zimbabwe. Under the general laws, marriage should be registered under the Marriages Act, formerly called Chapter 37. When partners enter into this kind or marriage, there is legal recognition and a marriage certificate is issued at the magistrate's court to the couple which legitimises the union. Upon the death of a spouse, the General Law allows the surviving spouse to inherit accrued property. This protects the widows from property grabbing, (Dube, 2013:6), which is

a problematic psychosocial issue in Zimbabwe. Despite all its advantages to the widows after the death of their husbands, civil marriage is not popular in Zimbabwe, especially in rural communities; instead customary marriages are the preferred unions and are on the rise yet ironically continue to create many problems for couples in the event of death of a spouse (Africa for Women's Rights, 2015:2).

2.6.2.2 Customary Law and protection of widows

Generally, the customary laws are at the helm of the psycho-social problems of widows in Zimbabwe. Following the Customary Marriages Act of 2001 in Zimbabwe, the concerned families devolve property according to their traditions and customs which are repressive to the widows. Each ethnic group and family in the country decides on how the property is shared and the widow suffers in the end (Pfumorodze, 2010:41).

Traditions and customs in Zimbabwe prohibit widows and girls from benefiting from the property of the deceased despite the fact the widow acquired the property during a marriage union with the deceased. The striking point is that there are disparities in the way different ethnicities handle property inheritance and therefore great inconsistences and dissimilarities exist from tribe to tribe. These disparities consequently expose widows to property grabbing (Pfumorodze, 2010:41). This means that many widows are exposed to deprivation of property without recourse to any consistent legal or traditional anchor and ultimately this results in reduced economic resources allotted to widows to take care of themselves and their needy children.

The Ndebele culture in Zimbabwe for example, respects more the eldest son in the family than the widows. Upon the death of the husband, the property that is left behind in this culture is given to the eldest son as an heir despite the presence of his widowed mother (Pfumorodze, 2010:41). Contrary to that Ndebele inheritance practice, the Shona people on the other hand give back the cow paid for *lobola* (*mombe yeumai*) to the brothers of the widow. Although there are apparent dissimilarities in the two ethnic groups, this means in both the Ndebele and the Shona culture, the widow is insignificant and is not recognised in material inheritance matters.

While these two tribes comprise the two major ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, many other smaller tribes exist. Given that customary law allows each ethnic group to devolve property in their own cultural and traditional way, each section of the society in the country follows its own cultural means in connection with administration of property, with widows suffering in all instances.

Due to the problems experienced by women in Zimbabwe, the government has considered enacting more laws that would see women fully protected in the country. The Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982, the Administration of Estates Amendment Act, 1997, and the Intestate Succession Act No. 6 of 1997, were all enacted specifically to address issues relating to equality of women and men before the law and in relation to appropriation of property upon the death of a spouse.

2.6.2.3 Protection of widows through the Legal Age of Majority Act of 1982

Soon after independence, the government of Zimbabwe attempted to make men and women equal before the law to avert the position that was held by the colonial government that women were perpetual minors before the colonial laws of the country. The colonial government's position on women was that they hold the position of minors before the law, and this certainly is the pinnacle of abuse of women in general and of widows in particular**.**

As Dube (2011:29) has put it, the enactment of the Legal Age of Majority (LAMA) of 1982 in Zimbabwe became a "beacon of hope" in that the minority status of women would be eliminated and that they would now be equal to their male counterparts before the law. The fact that women and men were now treated as equals before the law generated hope that widowed women would also acquire and attain full equality of treatment before the law.

As an ostensible product of the end of colonial rule, LAMA brought about dramatic changes in the legal position of women. This instrument sought to address eminent matters of the unjust treatment of women brought about by African customary law which applied to Africans only. LAMA would allow women to have legal capacity, which they did not have before giving consent. The law extended rights in signing contracts and taking decisions without consulting first their male counterparts (Dube, 2011:29). Even though women attained adult status before this law, their full protection from abuse however remained not fully realised. The law raised false

hope in the lives of women as there were still structural impediments, largely remnants of the colonial era. Because of a lack of exactness and succinctness in the treatment of widows, the interpretation and application of the laws was inconsistent throughout the judiciary which remained predominantly male. This has created an uncertain environment particularly for the less educated people in some sectors of society such as the rural areas as the general populace of women. Women and widows still remained unaware of the legal changes and the implications thereof. Still at this time, widows specifically were excluded from enjoying legal protection as the law protected women in general and was not specific about widowed women. The danger with this precarious position of women was that any legal practitioner would interpret the law according to their understanding, usually making reference to the vague previous colonial position of the law on widows and misinterpreting the law to the widows' peril.

Close to the full enjoyment of legal protection of widowed women was the enactment of the Administration of Estates Amendment Act, 1997. There were gaps seen in the previous laws and the government put further steps to redress such inconsistencies by enacting this law.

2.6.2.4 Protection of widows though the Administration of Estates Amendment Act of 1997

This crucial step was taken by the government of Zimbabwe in 1997, moving women's issues to another level. The Administration of Estate Amendment Act was enacted to respond to the inheritance of property by widowed women (Pfumorodze, 2010:44). This Act was put in place to close apparent gaps in the previous laws that were not consistent with general international laws on women and the needs of widows in Zimbabwe. Further hope for widows rested on this law that they would now be legal heirs to property upon the death of their husbands.

In Dube's (2011:30) opinion, the Administration of Estates Amendment Act in itself was meant to banish the laws of succession that were discriminatory against women. The Amendment sought to uphold the principles of equality in terms of property inheritance between men and women. This means that the surviving spouse and the children were now legally recognised and entitled to the property upon the death of their husband and father. This law clearly paved an important roadmap towards

widows' and their children's welfare. However, it is not to be forgotten at this stage that the customary law was still constitutional and operational: it had not been repealed. The customs and traditions of people are still protected by the constitution and hence observed. Clearly, the existence of this new law alongside a constitutionally acceptable customary law meant legal friction and grey areas within the adjudication of property and protection of widows before the law. The onus to apply the contradictory laws was levied on the judiciary system, again commonly leaving widows at the mercy of adjudicators' interpretation of sections of the contesting instruments.

2.6.2.5 The Intestate Succession Act No. 6 of 1997

The government of Zimbabwe further regulated administration of estates in cases where the deceased does not leave a written will (Justice for Children's Rights, 2006:1). This was basically put in place to prevent grabbing of property where inheritance of property was made problematic due to lack of a written will. The Act promotes fairness in the distribution of estates. It was observed that inheriting property of the deceased was always a problem and this Intestate Succession Act No. 6 of 1997 provided the basis and guide on how the property could be distributed.

The Justice for Children's Rights (2006:1) adds that an executor needs to be "appointed to carry out the obligations of the deceased." The Intestate Succession Act caters for all surviving heirs: spouses, including children both born in marriage and those born out of wedlock. The Act is comprehensive in guiding administration of estates in that all terms of reference in inheriting property are considered, including proportional calculations to be inherited by each individual considered legible to inherit the property of the deceased.

Despite the clear guidelines set out in this Act, widows remain disadvantaged even before the courts. They are excluded from inheritance of property on discriminatory grounds due to an unbending respect for tradition and culture. Due to difficulties in the administration of property and complications arising from the patriarchal nature of Zimbabwean tribal and ethnic diversity, Pfumorodze (2010:41) concludes that "the courts had to construct their own version of customary law which sadly has been particularly harsh to women and children," meaning that implementation of the law is

also difficult on the part of legal practitioners. This connects to the fact that even before the law, widows are not fully protected in Zimbabwe.

2.6.2.6 Protection of widows through the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Amendment 20) of 2013

The Constitution is the supreme legal document of any country. It provides ultimate ruling on legal issues in a country. Zimbabwe, like any other country, has a constitutional legal frame work which rules on matters relating to women. Chapter 4 of the constitution, which is the Bill of Rights, specifies the rights of people of Zimbabwe contained in the constitution to which legal practitioners can make reference.

Section 56 (2) of the Constitution states that "women and men have the right to equal treatment, including the right to equal opportunities in political, economic, cultural and social spheres.".Further, the Constitution in section 56 (6) adds that "the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures to promote the achievement of equality and to protect and advance people or classes of people who have been disadvantaged by unfair discrimination."

Whilst the constitution protects women in general, there is no exact ruling on protection of vulnerable populations such as widows from abuse and harmful cultural practices. The onus lies on each legal practitioner to correctly interpret the law for application in cases submitted by widows. Even on the most contentious issue of property inheritance by widows, the constitution is silent, meaning that protection of widows may not be challenged constitutionally.

Another loophole exists in the Zimbabwean Constitution in Chapter 15 where it stipulates the roles of traditional leaders in the communities and areas of jurisdiction. Their constitutional functions outlined in Section 282, subsection 1 states that traditional leaders should:

a) Promote and uphold the cultural values of their communities and in particular promote sound family values,
b) Take measures to preserve the culture, traditions, history and heritage of their communities, including sacred shrines.

From this constitutional standpoint, widows are generally susceptible to abuse on the grounds that people in the communities observe their cultural values as contained in the constitution and traditional leaders present in the communities seeking to address the plight of widows have no legal grounds to protect them. In fact, traditional leaders are the custodians of those cultural practices that are oppressive to women and widows in particular. Drawing a line with regards which culture should be observed and which one should be abolished is intuitive to the traditional leaders as there is no constitutional dicta that guide them on how to protect the widows from harmful cultural practices.

2.6.2.7 Protection of widows through the Gender Policy of Zimbabwe of 2013

Gender issues remain contentious in Zimbabwe and as such a gender policy to rule and guide implementation of gender programmes was put in place. The Gender Policy was put in place in 2000 initially and this was amended in 2004 and later, due to changes in the constitution, it was finally reviewed and amended in 2013. This policy also responds to the demands of the international instruments that urge state parties to reach gender parity in all spheres of life. The Gender Policy also is influenced by the Gender Inequality Index (GII) which is currently at 0.583, far from the ideal index of zero (Gender Policy of Zimbabwe, 2013:3).

The Gender Policy of Zimbabwe is a direct policy document under the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. This Ministry gets constitutional operational powers to oversee implementation of gender sensitive policies in the country that seek to attain gender balance based on Chapter 2 on national objectives and Chapter 4 which spells out equality between men and women. Due to emphasis placed on gender equality and the prevention of discrimination, the goal of the gender policy entails ensuring “eradication of gender discrimination and inequalities in all spheres of life and development” (Gender Policy of Zimbabwe, 2013:1). Objective number 7 of the Gender Policy of Zimbabwe (2013:13) aims to “identify harmful laws, cultures and traditional practices that infringe on women’s and girls’ rights and that impede the gender equality objectives and lobby for their elimination.”

Based on the analysis in the preceding paragraphs, it is clear that even the Gender Policy of 2013 in Zimbabwe has not made any direct mention of widows. The widows

are bracketed in the women category thereby not recognising their precarious and vulnerable position in a patriarchal society which demands and needs a solid policy position in terms of their protection. A gender policy of the country, worth its salt expected to addresses the practical problems as opposed to the general positions held by the constitution. In Zimbabwe, the policy still has loopholes in that it does not recognise the plight of widows in its objectives. It follows that gender offices in various provinces and districts such as Binga district lack the capacity to deal specifically with the plight of widows as the Gender Policy of Zimbabwe 2013 itself is not specific on how to tackle such problems. The results therefore directly translate into ineffective gender officers who have to deal with widows' property inheritance matters and others specifically connected to the abuse of these subjects.

2.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENON OF WIDOWHOOD

As a social phenomenon, widowhood needs to be understood from social theoretical positions that attempt to give privilege to the phenomenon. In the view of Appelrouth and Edles (2011:2) a theory could be described as 'a system of generalised statements or propositions about a phenomenon.' Theoretical explanations help in explaining the social phenomenon under study. This study uses feminist theories and the ecological theory to explain the phenomenon of widowhood. This is in line with the ideas of Johnson (2008:2) who agrees that in order to elucidate the undeserved exposure of widows to social ills, explanations of feminist theory and the ecological theory could be useful starting points in the full interrogation of the plight faced by widows.

2.7.1 Feminist theories

Feminist theory is crucial for social work practice as it addresses specific issues relating to women and children. The main focus of feminist theories is to address the differences between men and women and create an engaged awareness about the oppression of women thereby suggesting ways in which society could allow women to regain control of their lives (Teater, 2010:87). In the submissions of Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:475), feminism is seen as:

> ...the philosophy of equality between women and men that involves both attitudes and actions that infiltrates virtually all aspects of life,

> that often necessitates providing education and advocacy on behalf of women and that appreciates the existence of individual differences and personal accomplishments regardless of gender.

Feminism began in America in the abolitionist movement in the 1830's in Seneca Falls in New York. The movement was spearheaded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, with contemporary discourses on feminism taking centre stage in the 1960 in the United States (Lord, Greiter & Tursunovic, 2012:8). Notwithstanding, the works of Dorothy Smith on "phenomenological and ethnomethodological concepts and ideas", Patricia Hill Collins on "class and gender", Nancy Dorothy on "sex-gender dichotomy and biological differences on male and female", Raewyn Connell who studied "why men and boys are gatekeepers" and Judith Butter on "gender and sexual orientation" are fundamental in understanding the foundation of feminist theories (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011:316). Feminism's ultimate goal is to demonstrate the importance of women who have been constructed as historically subservient to men and try to advocate for equality of both sexes in society. To understand feminism, Teater (2010:87) suggests that there is need to understand the terms "sex" and "gender." In Teater's explanation, sex refers to the "biological difference between females and males while gender is used to refer to the sociological differences such as thoughts, beliefs and attitudes about women and men" (Teater, 2010:87). This therefore means that sex is biologically determined which in a way makes it natural, while gender is a social construct that can either be reconstructed and or deconstructed.

Feminism has gained momentum and many branches of reading and performing feminism have arisen. Feminist offshoots such as liberal feminism, radical feminism, Marxist feminism and socialist feminism are all in vogue today, further differentiating shades of a concern with gender equality. This study explains these theoretical orientations in order to understand the psychosocial plight of widows.

2.7.1.1 Liberal feminist theory

Liberal feminist such as advocated by Betty Friedan (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011:316), asserts that society needs to accord women their political, economic and social rights and that women can fully exercise these rights. The focus of liberal feminism is social change through the enactment of laws and better employment approaches

and practices (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111). This group of feminists was popular in the 1950s and 1960s when there was massive advocacy for the rights of women.

Liberal feminists also take a biblical approach that women and men are equal and were created by God and hence their need to receive equal treatment. These feminists blame patriarchal socialisation of men that renders them powerful over women but they vehemently argue that the capacity of men and women is equal given the same opportunities in all spheres (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111). This group of feminists has remarkably influenced legal changes that relate to women in society today.

However, it is important to note on this point that whilst the liberal feminists' blame on men is useful in understanding the oppression of women in general, another aspect which relates to how other women oppress widows in the African contexts is missing. Many widows in African nations such as Zimbabwe and Nigeria are oppressed by fellow women. Most importantly, the liberal feminists should have also incorporated that phenomenon in their mainstream argument on liberation of widows from cultures of patriarchy in which other women in Africa use culture to oppress their bereaved counterparts.

2.7.1.2 Marxist feminist theory

Marxist feminists concentrate on economics, arguing that division of labour is related to gender role expectations, likening men to the bourgeoisie and women to the proletariat (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111). Women are seen to have a greater role in giving birth while men work for the families. To advance their argument on this position, Marxist feminists suggest that in order to create equality between men who work outside the home and women who are predominantly at home and doing housework, there is a need for women to be paid equitable wages for their labour (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111). The other argument this group of feminists centre on is that society's capitalistic mind-set which is largely dominated by men devalues women. In their contention, there is need for changes and transformations in the current capitalistic societies so that wealth could be shared and spread to all social groups of society, including oppressed groups like women.

This capitalist mind-set of patriarchal societies which devalues women and advances men is, in the researcher's opinion, a major contested aspect in African communities which leads to property-grabbing from widows. Where heirship to property has to be determined, for example, a male heir is always the preferred option. For example, the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe prefer the eldest son in the family to inherit property as opposed to the female child even if she is the first born child in the family. In the same ethnic group,there is a total disregard of the surviving widow who should automatically assume heirship to her late husband's property and property inheritance as a whole.

2.7.1.3 Social feminist theory

In the preamble to the argument of the Socialist feminists is the contention that liberal feminists do not raise and understand the depth of the repression women experience. They allege that much work has been done and concentration has been given to the middle and upper classes (Graff, 2012:3) as opposed to lower classes where many women basically fall into. Social feminists see women's spheres of influence being around the home and their oppression stemming from the family. They argue that the private sphere, namely the household, is as important as the public sphere and needs to be interrogated as the source of entrenched oppression of women (Graff, 2012:3). In their argument, this group of theorists maintains that men are perceived as superior and are paid better in work places while women are confined to the domestic spheres where they face oppression from men. The theorists allege that all women across all races and ethnic groups face oppression and are reduced to lower class status simply because they are women.

Social feminists also add that men and women should work together to stem the segregation of women on the basis of gender. They also believe that for oppression of women to end, there is need to end class and gender ideologies.

2.7.1.4 Radical feminist theory

The origins of radical feminism, according to Roberts (2006:6), can be traced back to the United States of America's Civil Rights Movement, particularly the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. During that time, there were a number of feminist activists of the second wave such as Shulamith Firestone, Kathie Sarachild, Carol Hanisch, and Judith Brown who volunteered actively to wage a struggle against the

racist society of the 1960s in the United States of America. The main methodological approach to challenging racism was affirming and giving people relevant information which aimed at developing awareness of the discrepancies among the people.

Radical Feminist theorists (such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (1987)) centre their argument on male power as central to social relations arguing that sexism is a palpable factor in repressing women (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:18). Radical feminists maintain that women are the most oppressed group and that this oppression is deep, cuts across races, cultures, economic classes and results in acute suffering of women in particular (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:18). In their argument, these theorists assert that men in patriarchal societies control norms and structures used by society to control women and there is need to speak against such structures and change them for the advancement of women in all societies. Further, they strongly argue against social roles that contribute to the abuse of women.

A close analysis of radical feminist theory brings one to the conclusion that the chief constituent of patriarchy is a relationship of control, which enables males to dominate females and exploit them for personal benefit. A set of tools such as culture, norms and traditions are deployed conveniently in making females concede to male dominance and exploitative tendencies. The social system as a whole confers upon the males some resident control structure and methods that work to keep women suppressed and thus maintain male dominance.

The experiences of women can be explained in the broader sense only if one has the lens that examine the way in which patriarchy has inherently shaped the society they live in. African widows' psychosocial plight cannot be fully comprehended unless a closer look is made at how patriarchy has taken over and engulfed the African continent and a radical approach is taken to dismantle this entrenched status quo. To add substance to the researcher's view, Lewis (2015:1), agrees that subjugation of women is inherent in patriarchy and has been accepted in the daily lives of the people. This study approaches the plight of women with sensitivity and embraces this sensitive approach in understanding specifically the plight of widows in the rural communities of Binga, Zimbabwe.

From the researcher's standpoint, widows find it hard and inappropriate culturally, to stand up on their own against their massive repression from the community.

Women's subordinate roles in many African marriage arrangements have also significantly contributed to their inequality to men and forces them to relinquish their ability to voice their concerns (Graff, 2012:3). The radical feminist theory is well-suited and appropriate in shaping methodologies for social work intervention and in investigating the psycho-social plight of widows. In this study, other feminist theories such as liberal, Marxist and social feminists are seen as offshoots of the radical feminist theory.

Dube (2011:8) makes an important point in reiterating that the widespread and evident unfairness against women is also institutionalised, omnipresent and perpetuated through the vague laws that continue to expose women to unjust treatment in Zimbabwe. The classical legal outcome of Magaya versus Magaya, is noted in his work where Vennia Magaya lost heirship in the February 1999 court ruling because she was a woman. In the view of the researcher, such case rulings are glossed over by the radical feminist theory in the mainstream view of what constitutes violence against women in current societies. This study views such court rulings as typical institutionalised injustices against women resulting from the legacy of old colonial laws which continue to affect the current legal positions. This typical example among many repressive legal rulings have re-traumatised widows in Zimbabwe and justifies this study's position that a more than legal, and justifiably social work approach, is necessary to deal with the psycho-social plight of widows as a solid holistic recourse mechanism.

2.7.1.5 The relevance of feminist theory for Social Work in Zimbabwe

The most dominant plight of widows in Zimbabwe is oppression resulting from the patriarchal nature of the society and consequently manifesting in untold psychosocial problems such as powerlessness and hopelessness among widows. This has shown itself in inequalities in interpersonal relationships between the widows and other people as soon as the woman's husband dies. Teater (2010:87) agrees that in such an environment, the practice of feminist social work helps with "empowering women, viewing the person-in-the environment and to raise the consciousness of women and society as a whole in regard to structural gender inequalities". Feminist theory suggests that social workers in Zimbabwe need to understand that there is a need to

raise consciousness of women towards oppression of widows and most importantly facilitate the provision of ways to help the widows regain control of their lives.

Practitioners are therefore challenged to practice feminist social work which understands the unique pains experienced by widows and think towards what Teater (2010:91) termed “the relational-cultural model”. This model is crucial for social work practitioners in Zimbabwe in understanding the importance of positive relationships that need to be fostered between the widows and other community members. To concede to this assertion Teater (2010:91) puts it this way:

> A woman’s sense of identity and self-worth is based on the types of relationships that she encompasses. A growth-fostering connection or relationship will result in empowerment, a clear sense of self, the other and the relationship, better sense of self-worth and a desire for positive relationships.

Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:475) have noted that many people are not at comfort with feminism as they associate the word with the “radical ideology” denoting antagonism, opposition and fight. Feminism should not always be construed in that light but should mainly be understood in a positive developmental sense for widows in that there is need to understand their unique pain exerted by the Zimbabwean society on them and change the tides for enabling better association, increased community sensitivity and positive relationships and self-worth on the part of the widows. As a matter of fact, there is need to accept a critical observation that the society in Zimbabwe has bias towards men in terms of the social, legal and political spheres. It is therefore important to embrace what feminist term a fair, just and non-discriminatory approach towards affording widows “denied opportunities and choices” (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:475). Central to the understanding of the relevance of feminist social work practice in Zimbabwe is the orientation towards a much needed impartial treatment of widows, objective understanding and avoidance of stereotypes associated with widowhood.

2.7.2 The ecological perspective

The position of the ecological perspective, (Johnson, 2008:2), in this study is crucial. It provides needed lens to understand the importance of interactions between widows and the environment they are constantly in touch with. From this perspective,

it is envisaged that human beings owe their healthy living to meaningful and effective interactions with their social environment. Components of the social environment such as their homes, work, social rules and laws are critical in this perspective. Further and also important are “the individuals, groups, organisations, and systems which a person comes in contact” with (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:11). It means that widows’ welfare and psychosocial problems result directly from these components and therefore they have very significant influences in their lives and coping abilities.

Most important is the understanding of the “person-in-the environment”, (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:12, Teater, 2010:26), which stimulates understanding of the widows and their interactions with people, social systems like culture and the law and having either positive or negative results on them. In academic literature, these components are speculated to be the main incumbents of and contribute significantly towards widows’ experiences. In other terms, Teater (2010:25) preferred calling the relationships that widows have with their environment “interdependence of networks” denoting the importance of these relationships with their environment which have a bearing on their welfare (Johnson, 2008:2).

Equally important from the ecological perspective, is the understanding of the concepts of “input” and “output” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:12). From an analysis of these concepts, input would mean that people exert pressure and abuse on the widows which results in psychosocial problems for them. Their struggle and pursuit for dealing with their abuses takes away and depletes their coping skills which can be termed the output. This creates an important analysis in an attempt to address the psychosocial plight of widows which in this understanding means that there is a need to work on reducing the abuses and oppression of widows (input) into order to reduce the psychosocial problems associated with them (output).

From the ecological perspective, the understanding of the interface is also important. The interface refers to “the point at which the individual interacts with the environment” (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:12) which needs to be targeted and changed to create adjustment to the conditions of the widows. From this line of thought, this study holds that an understanding of being widowed (death of a husband) is needed as this is the catalyst of oppression and abuse of the widows in order to address problems associated with it. This in this study is the death of a husband (widowhood

status) is viewed as the interface of the widow and the social environment and proper understanding of this from both the widow as a person and the people interacting with the widow will create a better position to address the plight of widows.

Other important concepts to understand from the ecological perspective are adaptation and coping. These form the favourable conditions for widows but minimally achieved in Zimbabwe due to the lack of facilitative environments and atmosphere for the widows for adaptation and coping to be optimally achieved. Adaptation refers to “the capacity to adjust to the new conditions” whilst coping means “a form of human adaptation and implies a struggle to overcome problems” (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:12, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:30). For change to happen in the lives of widows, there is need for social workers to understand adaptation and coping as central to proper functioning of the widows in Zimbabwe and therefore social work practice must focus on the creation of a facilitative environment for the widows to adapt and cope with their psychosocial problems.

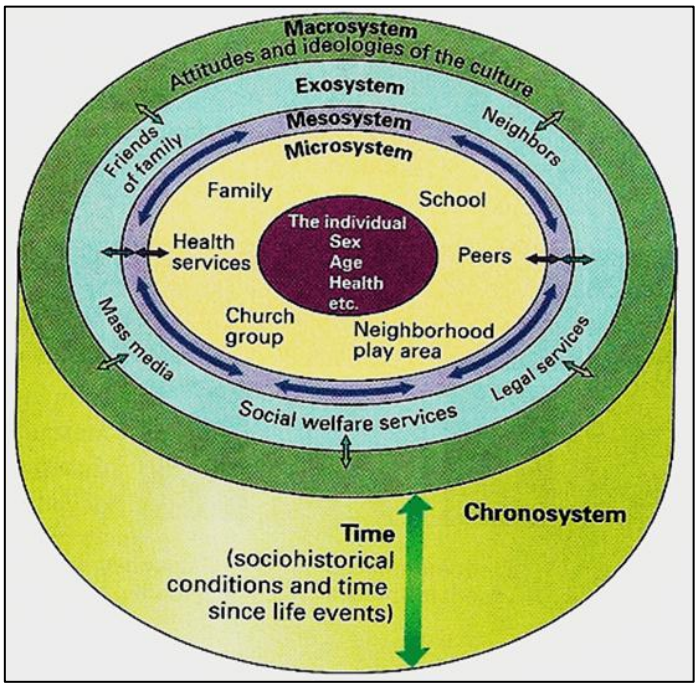
2.7.2.1 The relevance of the ecological perspective for Social Work in Zimbabwe

The ecological perspective is very important for guiding and helping social workers understand their clients’ problems. Its emphasis on the “person-in-the environment”, (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:11, Teater, 2010:27), enables practice wisdom on the social worker to comprehend how the environment affects the person. In Zimbabwe the ecological perspective is well-suited for social work practice to emphasise the person-in-the environment fit so that assessment can be done to determine how widows are affected or coping from the abuses they get from the environment. This entails the assessment and analysis of how death of a husband is understood from the individual widows, the community perspective and legal component to be able to understand how to structure relevant interventions that are tailored either for the widow, the community or the legal aspects as informed by the assessment. An evaluation of death of a husband as a life stressor for widows and families is critical for practitioners in the Zimbabwean practice context as this triggers critical psychosocial problems for the widows at personal level and the immediate environmental level which all contribute to reduced level of coping for the widows.

The ability of the social workers to define the stressors in the ecological perspective is key as this informs relevant interventions (Teater, 2010:27).

The ecological perspective enables social practice in Zimbabwe to focus on how to reduce the stress created by other members of the community on the widows and also pay essential focus on family relationships and reduce stress associated with widowhood. The use of the ecological perspective will help social workers to take a focus on the essential components of this perspective such as the individual widows, the families, and the communities including the legal system (See figure 1).

Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems practice perspective



Source: http://impactofspecialneeds.weebly.com/bronfenbrennerrsquous-ecological-systems-theory.html

The ecological perspective undoubtedly can assist social work professionals to locate and classify coping resources either as internal and external resources. These play a major role in understanding the complexities of widows' problems and possible interventions applicable to the profession of social work.

The ecological perspective should not only drive practitioners to focus on the sources of the problems of the widows in their environment. This perspective should

prompt and challenge the social workers in Zimbabwe to focus and emphasise on resources needed to deal with the psychosocial needs of the widows. With a proper analysis and look at the available resources and how widows can use the resources for dealing with their psychosocial plight is critical for empowerment and sustainable interventions in social work practice. Resources play a critical role in facilitating coping and adaptation mechanisms for widows and possible future improvements and alterations for tailoring effective social work interventions. Social workers need to use the ecological perspective to find a range of available and needed resources and those needed but lacking resources for widows to cope with the challenges they experience in Zimbabwe.

2.8 SUMMARY

This chapter has focused precisely on widowhood and interventions currently available for their psychosocial plight. Definitional issues of widowhood have been considered to give the reader an appreciation of how widowhood is defined by some scholars and most importantly from the perspective of this study so that the reader understands both the general and contectual definition definition of the concept.

The levels at which widowhood is experienced by women have been expounded to including discussions on coping factors that can possible have a significant impact on the widows. Further the study analysed various social interventions available for the plight of widows to create an understanding of how these interventions fail to meet psychological the needs of the widows. Legal intervention which is normally the common form of intervention available was also discussed. The chapter covers and analyses the international and national legal protection measures in place in Zimbabwe. Significant implications of the legal loopholes were laid out to create deeper understanding of the reasons social intervention measures are needed to supplement existing legal interventions.

Theories that explain the phenomenon of widowhood were also discoursed. An attempt was made to highlight the extent to which feminist theories conceptualise widowhood and what feminist theories lack in their discourse in the African context. It was clear also from the discussion how feminist theories relate to social work practice. Another important theory considered was the ecological perspective. The

study explained how this perspective can be useful in understanding widowhood and how it can be useful to the profession of social work.

This chapter has discoursed on the understanding of widowhood and related social and legal interventions. The chapter that follows will discuss social work and widowhood in order to understand the phenomenon of widowhood in relation to social work in depth.

CHAPTER THREE

WIDOWHOOD, SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE AND INTERVENTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The profession of social work has a legacy of serving people with distinction and has long been known for its humanistic approaches to social problems. Social work has devoted maximum effort towards ameliorating human suffering and reducing conditions and circumstances that bring unhappiness to humanity through professional interventions. Widowhood is one of the social problems that have risen to epidemic levels in African societies among the already underprivileged African women. The problems of widowhood among women in African communities are dire and require a gender sensitive, dedicated professional and empowering approach if interventions have to bear meaning for the adversely affected widows. The psychosocial problems associated with widowhood are very intense and bring a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness to widows. In these circumstances, there is a need for suitable approaches to address their challenges. The practice and intervention focus of social work is centred on empowerment of the clientele for effective social functioning and therefore suitable for widows' situations.

3.2 THE EMERGING TRENDS IN WIDOWHOOD

The normative understanding of widowhood is that it happens to the older people where one partner dies due to age leaving the other older spouse alone in distress during bereavement. The challenges faced by widowhood at this age are loneliness, health problems with possibilities of dying within the next two years after the death of her spouse and financial problems (Holden *et al.,* 2010:12).

As discussed earlier, widowhood happens in older ages in the West, whilst in the developing nations a new trend in widowhood has arisen. Here, studies have shown that girls and young women become widowed from such early ages as15 years (Brewer, 2011:2; Mughal, 2010:100; Peterman, 2010:5). The occurrence of widowhood at an early age has its own challenges for the young widow and should be understood differently from widowhood of the aged. Due to these age differences, the challenges faced by young widows tend to differ and as such an understanding of widowhood at an earlier age in developing nations would require sensitive social

work approaches to understand the psycho-social plight and needs of these young widows as well.

3.3 SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION IN THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PLIGHT OF WIDOWS

The term intervention is crucial in social work processes. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:236) sum up that "intervention encompasses treatment and other activities social workers use to solve and prevent or achieve goals." Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:6) see intervention as implementing an existing plan of action and as the "doing part of the process" of social work. Intervention in social work takes many dimensions and levels depending on the problem the practitioner is dealing with. Accordingly, intervention means working with an individual or working with a large organisation to change its policies or to better accommodate its clients' needs" (Zastrow &Kirst Ashman, 2013:6).

Cummins, *et al,* (2012:3) add that intervention includes processes in which social workers initiate actions to achieve specific planned goals. In this process, social workers counsel, negotiate, advocate, do social planning, community organisation, finding and developing resources, and many other activities to help widows deal with their problems. This study uses the term intervention to mean specific steps used to assist young and older widows to cope with the challenges they encounter in their everyday lives at individual and immediate environmental levels.

For the psycho-social challenges of the widows, the practitioner needs to understand and embrace the psycho-social approach to intervention. The value of this approach is that it underscores the importance of the psychological well-being and development and the interaction of the individual with the social environment (Lindsay, 2013:10). Psycho-social intervention focuses on "both improving individual competencies and introducing environmental changes" (Sowers & Rowe, 2007:131). This approach is applicable in social work intervention with widows as it focuses and places emphasis on disadvantaged people. The approach emphasises empowerment of the clients and minimizing the stigma the community has created about the clients, improves individual social competence and creates and maintains a long term system of support for the clients (Sowers & Rowe, 2007:131) The

approach considers the people's contextual situations in various environments to analyse the influence of the environment on the challenges faced by the clientele.

Consideration of the person and the environment is crucial in Social Work with widows as it enables a holistic understanding of the factors of the widow herself and the environmental factors that contribute to lack of coping or depleting coping mechanisms. Lindsay (2013:10) summarises succinctly that this approach prompts the social worker:

> ...to not just take into account the psychological state of the client but the social and economic pressures that are the reality of most clients' lives…working not only from the inner world of the thoughts and feelings of the individual but also the external world of issues and problems that arise out of the environment, social and material life.

Interaction of people with their environment cannot be overemphasised and has a direct link to the fundamentals of social work. The understanding of human beings in their social environment has always been regarded as the most crucial starting point for social work interventions. For Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer (2005:7), intervention in social work is understood to make meaningful changes to the lives of clients. Compton *et al.,* (2005:6) enlist and assert that the purposes of social work are:

1. To enhance the problem-solving, coping, and developmental capabilities of people;
2. To promote the effective and human operation of systems that provide people with resources and services; and
3. To link people with systems that provide them with resources, services, and opportunities.

For social workers' intervention to be appropriate and meaningful, it is further argued that the approach ought to be adapted to the needs, difficulties, desires and ambitions related to the problems of people by considering life transition issues, the milieu and "obstacles that impede successful accomplishment of transitional and environmental tasks" (Compton *et al.,* 2005:7). Such an approach to the challenges faced by the widows would be more appropriate as it adopts a comprehensive view and understanding of the widow first and the environment they live in which triggers

the problems they experience after the death of their husbands. Further the approach looks at the aspirations of the widows which is fundamental in activating their innate ability to deal with their problems.

3.4 CURRENT SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION WITH WIDOWS

Basically, two approaches are prominent in social work literature that discuss the psycho-social plight of the widows. The first approach adopts the developmental perspective to widowhood and the second one embraces the social justice perspective. These perspectives explain existing and current approaches to interventions to the psycho-social plight of widows.

3.4.1 The human developmental perspective to widowhood

Currently, social work intervention with widows has aligned itself with the human development perspective. This perspective has tended to discuss widowhood in the context of old age (Keister & Destro, 2008:438; Martin-Matthews, 2011:340; Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:636). The discourses of widowhood from the human developmental perspective have viewed widowhood as a normal human development curve where at some point in a woman's old age, a partner eventually dies leaving her widowed as part of the human development course.

In the developmental perspective, widows exist because men tend to die earlier than women as they are likely to marry younger women and in terms of general life expectancy, women tend to live longer than men. To enable adjustment to older widowhood, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:636) have noted that "keeping busy, doing volunteer work, taking new paying positions and taking part in community programmes" are better options for older widows. For socialization and interactional purposes, support groups for the aged are encouraged to facilitate adjustment and healing in the widows' problems.

While the human developmental perspective to the problems of widowhood provides an essential lens for intervention on widowhood, an evaluation of the human developmental perspective to current interventions of the plight of widows however lacks an additional and equally important focus on the young widows. It has focused only on the older widows which then may not be sufficient for social work practice in other contexts as the trends in widowhood have changed. There is a growing number of young widows, especially in the developing nations where girls and young

women are now widows. These require the essential services of social workers and literature on social work that addresses their plight is a prerequisite for structuring suitable intervention frameworks. From that line of thought, it is important to note this study endorses the importance of viewing widowhood from young age right through to the old age so that this phenomenon is understood comprehensively and relevant social work interventions are put in place.

3.4.2 The social justice perspective to widowhood

Social justice is described as the value of social work upon which the foundation of the profession is built (DuBois & Miley, 2014:135). A value refers to "the regard that something is held to deserve, the importance or preciousness of something" (Beckett & Maynard, 2005:6). Values in social work guide what social workers do. In this regard, social justice is regarded as of primary importance and beholden to the profession such that it should be embraced by practitioners to guide their professional conduct. This is significant in social work interventions in widows' challenges as justice is less experienced in their psycho-social predicaments. To indicate the importance of social justice to the profession of social work, the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) place social justice as a "practice imperative" (DuBois & Miley, 2014:155). The social workers' ethical code also mandates social workers to promote and commit themselves to social justice.

Whilst there is no agreement among authors on the definition of social justice, a common feature is that social justice centres on the fairness doctrine and principle. Some useful and relevant definitions of social justice are provided by Robinson and the National Pro Bono Resource Centre. Robinson (2015:1) sees social justice as:

> …promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity. It exists where all people share a common humanity and therefore a right to equitable treatment, support their human rights, and a fair allocation of community resources.

The National Pro Bono Resource Centre (2011:2) sensitises that social justice should be understood to be "fairness beyond individual justice." The primacy of these definitions is their emphasis on the concept of "fairness" which is a critical concept in relation to treatment of widows in the African context and in Zimbabwe where

widows receive differential treatment because of the stigma associated with widowhood.

National Pro Bono Resource Centre (2011:6) provides a critical analysis of what structural definitions of social justice should entail with specific mechanisms for governments in dealing with social justice by suggesting:

1. Fair redistribution of resources,
2. Equal access to opportunities,
3. Fair system of law and due process,
4. Protection of vulnerable and disadvantaged people.

This analysis of social justice provides a critical approach to addressing the plight of widows from a systematic structural institutional level which is one of the ineffective mechanisms in Zimbabwe. The responses to the plight of widows has not met optimal level to address their needs.

Whilst the structural level is important to understanding the concept of social justice, it is important also to understand the concept at individual level. The understanding of social justice at individual level provides a better understanding of the concept of social justice as justice or injustice is normally felt at individual level.

The National Pro Bono Resource Centre (2011:6) underscores the fact that individuals need to get what they deserve if social justice has to be achieved. This is in respect of the resources that are commensurate with people's social status and position. Further a consideration of those who are poor and excluded from resource allocation is important. The organisation also mentions the need for recognition of contributions made by the individual as important in determining their rightful share of resources. This is generally lacking in Zimbabwe where property inheritance is precarious for the widow and needs to be resolved no matter what contribution the widow has made in the acquisition of property in the marriage. Equally important is the determination of the individual capacity and personal characteristics in utilising available opportunities and resources. This could assist intervention efforts by social workers to mirror the capacities of the individual widows in attaining social justice.

3.4.2.1 Preventing social injustices to promote social justice

It is the social work mandate to prevent human suffering by preventing social injustices. The experience of widows in their everyday lives is what the profession of social work fights against. Social work exercises its professional mandate so that victims can live fulfilling lives. The injustices society exerts on people are known as "ISMS" normally defined as the "prejudicial attitudes directed against groups that society identifies as less capable, less productive and less normal" (DuBois & Miley, 2014:137). Some of the social injustices faced by certain groups of people in society are racism, elitism, heterosexism, ageism, handicapism and sexism. Whilst all social injustices should be prevented by social workers, this study focuses on "sexism" which in the researcher's view has significant contribution to the psycho-social plight of the widows.

- **Prevention of sexism to promote social justice for the widows**

The subornation of the female sex has an untraceable history. It has existed throughout human existence and continues to exist even today with an ever enduring presence. This societal state of affairs has been condemned by professional advocates of equality between sexes, such as social work professionals, and it is currently discussed as sexism. By means of definition, sexism is seen by DuBois and Miley (2014:139) as:

> …the belief that one sex is superior to the other. Sexism most frequently manifests as prejudicial attitudes toward and discriminatory actions against the females, giving gender privilege to men.

Sexism is blamed upon the process of socialization of children where boys are socialised differently from girls. DuBois and Miley (2014:139) perceive gender socialisation as a process that "confers power on men and relegates women to a second-class status". The operationalisation of sexism transcends human knowledge to cite biblical scriptures in order for men to secure maximum subservience from women by using the sacredness and power of religion.

Whilst it is not directly referred to in social work literature, sexism is directly linked to the suffering of widows and inferences can be made that the psycho-social plight of

widows stems from sexism which is very prevalent in many African societies, including Zimbabwe.

- **Widowism as a social injustice**

Literature reviewed has indicated that the existence of widows is a global phenomenon and an epidemic of its own. Further, there is widespread abuse and oppression of widows compared to widowers. Also, a widower finds it easy to re-marry than a widow (Johnson & Shyamala, 2012:196; Martin-Matthews, 2011:341) due to stigma attached to the female whose spouse has died.

Sexism can be viewed as a determinant in analyzing and drawing conclusions about the abuse of widows in Zimbabwe due to the widespread existence of sexism as a social injustice. Following that line of thought, the researcher then sees that a new social injustice, "widowism," can be coined. This, in the researcher's argument, is a direct offshoot from sexism. "Widowism" as a social injustice can then be explained as a practice which dehumanises, devalues, discriminates and views widows with suspicion resulting in exclusion in socio-economically beneficial activities and exposing them to socially harmful practices.The oppressive and dehumanizing experience of widows in the developing nations such as horrible widow cleansing, property grabbing, isolation, burning, witchcraft accusations and land evacuations, (Idialu, 2012:6; Mgbako & Glenn, 2011:400; Peterman, 2012:2), cannot be ignored and as such intervention by social workers is crucial for their psycho-social wellbeing.

3.4.2.2 The effects of social injustices on widows

An analysis of the effects of social injustices provides a crucial point of departure for social work to intervene and ameliorate the effects of social injustices on the widows. To this effect, an analysis of the effects of social injustices on the victims provided by DuBois and Miley (2014:150) is very helpful in providing a clear and significant understanding of widows' experiences of social injustices. From the writers' perspective, social injustices result in discrimination, oppression and victimization.

- **Oppression of widows through discrimination**

Immediately a woman becomes a widow, unbalanced power between other community members and the widow exists. The widow experiences discrimination, subjugation and oppression (DuBois & Miley, 2014:150) through cultural practices from psychologically powerful and advantaged members of the community resulting in social and psychological domination. The widow then becomes so oppressed that she cannot stand up for her human rights, including the rights to economic resources. It is important to note the existence of differential power between the widows and the oppressor where the widow is always at the powerless end of the continuum of oppression.

- **Interpersonal dehumanisation**

A closer examination of the experiences of widows in Zimbabwe and other developing states brings to the argument that their ordeals equal interpersonal dehumanisation. People dehumanise others "by regarding others with cold detachment and showing indifference to human misery and dehumanisation obscures the inherent worth and dignity of personhood" (DuBois & Miley, 2014:150). At a more extreme level, dehumanisation projects other people as non-living objects.

From this point on dehumanisation, widows in Zimbabwe are reduced to objects as they cannot voice their concerns. The cultural dictates are so intense and powerful such that they obscure the legal protection of the widows from humiliating and dehumanising treatment (Johnson & Shyamala, 2012:196). As mentioned earlier, the story of the Regional Integration Minister Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga in Zimbabwe is one such example where she was a victim of property grabbing after the death of her husband Doctor Christopher Mushonga (Rusere, 2010:1). The Minister admitted that she could not pursue the case of inheriting her husband's property due to culture. This indicates the dominance of culture over law in Zimbabwe.

With reference to the Shona culture in Zimbabwe, Kambarami (2006:8) identifies the dehumanising treatment of widows when they are forced into levirate marriage upon the death of their husbands. Again in this context, their consent to marry the brother

of the deceased husband is a normative cultural expectation that cannot be contested or they risk being sent back to the natal family after being shamed. The dehumanising effects of widowhood create conditions in which widows find themselves less accepted as human beings deserving better treatment in the communities and even their own natal families.

- **Personal victimisation**

The process of personal victimisation is painful to the widows. Widows succumb to the negative labels and connotations (DuBois & Miley, 20014:151) that society ascribe to widowhood. This makes the widows to live up to the labels given to them. One such label is that once the spouse dies, the woman is said to be dirty and needs to be cleansed through traditional rituals. The widow herself succumbs to the fact that she is dirty by virtue of being a widow and such personal blame results in intense feelings of inferiority, dependency and rejection by the community (DuBois & Miley, 2014:151).

Psychologically, stigmatisation destroys a widow's self-esteem and engenders a sense of powerlessness. It can be argued that the widows at this point identify themselves with oppression and internalise it as acceptable, thereby reinscribing powerlessness in themselves. Due to this personal victimisation, widows then find themselves alienated and isolated from social circles. This is often the case in Zimbabwe where women's social networks and friends dwindle as soon as the status of widowhood sets in their lives.

3.4.2.3 Coping with the psychological effects of social injustice

As alluded to in the preceding paragraphs, a critical dimension to the analysis of the effects of social injustice is the understanding of the psychological effect that it has for the victims. A professional social worker is expected to understand these effects so that proper interventions can be put in place. An analysis of coping with the lasting psychological effects of social injustices is documented by Cohen (2007:263) who provides important dimensions that can be helpful in dealing with the effect of social injustices on the widows. The approach provides a critical and necessary point of departure in understanding the deep rooted effects of social injustices.

The approach provides psychological effects of social injustices and then basic coping mechanisms adopted by the widows as victims not necessarily an antidote that immediately cures the psychological effects of such social injustices. The bottom line is that social workers need to facilitate coping with social injustices in their approaches and that they need to understand these psychological effects. The discussion in the succeeding paragraphs highlights some helpful insights about the psychological effects of social injustices widows are exposed to.

- **Pain**

According to Cohen (2007:268), oppression and subordination produce pain resulting from the trauma associated with it. Pain in this regard is experienced physically and emotionally. Similarly widows experience torture that brings both emotional and physical pain. This pain experienced by the widows trains them to remain subordinate in the social system in order to avoid further pain associated with widowhood. The pain is experienced at individual psychic level and undermines the widow's personhood and transforms her into what Cohen (2007:269) terms a "pain-avoiding mechanism."

It is also important to note that the pain produced by social subordination of the widows can be dealt with in a similar way as with general trauma, but an important aspect is that it has effects of disempowerment and alienation upon the widows. Also most importantly is the fact that subornation of widows is socially legitimized and this further legitimizes pain and injuries inflicted onto the widows as a socially acceptable culture. Cohen (2007:269) suggests that dealing with such pain of the social injustices levied against the victims begins with "delegitimizing" such acts and "voicing" it. On the part of the widow as a victim, the starting point of the coping process is to understand and recognize that her experience is not what she deserves.

Principal to coping with pain brought about by the social injustices is the flexibility capacity of the social worker to facilitate "within-community support and solidarity" and meaningful relationships. The researcher calls the social workers intervention expertise "flexibility capacity" because the skills to be employed should be versatile and adaptive to different circumstances characterizing different communities. The

social worker needs also to enable the widows to voice the “unvoiceable” in order to facilitate community respect for the widows (Cohen, 2007:269).

- **Fear**

Fear, as a psychological output of social injustices, plays a significant role in maintaining subservience and subjugation of the widows. Fear in the widows to seek recourse and demand their rights maintains the social structures of oppression. This goes with rewards to the oppressor as there are minimal possibilities to overturn the status quo. In expressing how widows are gripped by fear to challenge their oppression, Cohen (2007:270) puts it well by describing fear as a “deterrence-based approach to maintaining social order.” This fear to challenge oppression by widows is not superficial and not to be taken lightly and blamed on them. It should be understood within the context of the socialisation process of the girl child in Zimbabwe and other many oppressive societies where she is culturally expected to be obedient and unquestioning to authority. This internalized socialisation transcends beyond the girl at home, to a wife and then to a widow.

In addressing this psychological fear, the social worker needs to possess special skills to provide the widows with a sense of comfort and security both physical and emotional (Cohen, 2007:270). There is also a need for social workers to activate some aspects of courage to face and accept the reality of widowhood. The widows have to be compelled to ignite and resuscitate innate abilities to cope with their challenges and reduce this manifestation of psychological fear.

- **Shame**

Shame is one lasting effect of social injustices experienced by widows. It is a direct result of social constructions of the widowhood status in that it is culturally understood to be the worst status a woman can find herself in. Noticeably in many studies, widows are described as unclean, sometimes blamed for killing their husbands, witchcraft, forced to sleep with the deceased body and are isolated from social circles (Brewer, 2011:12; Lomba, 2014:34; Mughal, 2010:99; Nwabueze, 2010:142). Powerlessness that the widows experience is unquestionably a profound source of shame as they lack the power to take control of their lives.

Social work interventions in cases of shame must centre on reducing shaming the widows, creating conditions of community acceptance and acknowledging the widowhood status by the people that are influential in their lives. Empowerment of widows can also be a crucial component of social work intervention.

- **Anger**

Cohen (2007:273) maintains that anger is a "natural by-product of social subordination, a natural result of emotions such as pain, fear, and shame." In other words, widows experience anger automatically for the pain inflicted upon them. They fear to challenge their oppression and the dehumanizing embarrassment they experience after the death of their husbands. Much of the anger is felt and noticeable when widows ask themselves rhetorical questions such as why they are being treated in that way and whether they are not as human as other people. Such rhetorical questions exacerbate the psychological pain and are derivatives of the injustices experienced by the widows.

Anger derived directly from the abuse and injustices inflicted on the widows is what Cohen (2007:273) termed "primary" anger. More than that primary form is another anger which results from lack of recourse to justice systems. This is profoundly common in African countries and other developing states. Oppressors inflict pain on the widows and no proper remedies are in place. Lack of recourse to justice makes the widows hopeless and produces "secondary" anger. This secondary anger becomes a source of danger to the lives of the widows and is a high predictor of self-injury commonly experienced as suicide.

Coping with such an injustice is not easy for widows. Widows have been seen to supplicate their plight to the spiritual realm, hoping that God righteously punishes the oppressor (Cohen, 2007:274). Possible community involvement in helping the widows to safely express their anger is crucial. Social workers could help widows also to vent out anger in a helpful manner which may be a source of empowerment and promote taking relevant action.

- **Despair**

This is one of the most difficult states of the psychic turmoil of widows usually synonymous with hopelessness and anguish. At conventional level, despair is thought to be tied to sadness but Cohen (2007:274) argues that it is "deeper and more lasting than sadness." Usually it is as a result of the understanding that this injustice is not going to end with the widow but further affects the widow's children where recourse is nigh improbable.

Coping with despair is understood to be a realization of the widows about what they can and are able to do with their social circumstances and widowhood. Because widowhood has already set in, Cohen (2007:280) warns that it is not helpful for them to struggle to change the situation, but rather to understand what they can do about their situation. Social work intervention therefore should centre on empowerment processes so that the widows understand their strengths and alternative ways of coping with their situation rather than succumb to despair.

3.5 LEVELS OF SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION FOR THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PLIGHT OF THE WIDOWS

Social Work intervenes in the problems of its clients systematically. The interventions are channeled towards clients' needs pegged at the level of intervention which the social worker sees as befitting the situation and the scale of impact intended. For the psycho-social plight of widows, this study argues that social work intervention can be helpful when provided at micro, mezzo and macro levels (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:32). These three levels of intervention are critical in providing a comprehensive approach to the plight of the widows in that they centre on methods of social work that have been used to provide services to clients. The three levels of intervention for the plight of widows provides familiar terrain of practice for social workers and intervention measures involve tapping into existing skills and competencies for the practitioners.

3.5.1 Micro level social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of widows

The deepest challenges that most widows experience in their lives are at an individual level. Their oppression by the communities affects them as individuals and

their unique situations adversely complicate their individual functioning. Social work intervention at individual level entails “direct intentional intervention of the social worker with the client” (Santos, 2006:1). Interpreted differently, intervention at this level means that the social worker deals with the client on an individual one-on-one basis. Whilst it is aimed at individual assistance of the clients, Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2010:22) give a helpful insight that such individualised help provides good grounds for working with larger groups and organisations.

At a more pragmatic and interventional level, it means that social workers counsel the individual widows and find helpful resources needed for them to cope with their situations. Fundamental to addressing the widow’s needs is paying particular attention to the problems of the widow and assessing her inner strengths to address her psycho-social plight. Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman (2013:32) therefore emphasise the importance of assessing the widow’s ability to address issues of concern, coming up with solutions and making the most suitable choices available.

Whilst there are many models of the casework method, this study endorses and subscribes to the generalist model which is based on the problem-solving model described by Farley, Smith and Boyle (2011:67). The generalist model emphasises the “person-in-environment perspective” (Farley *et al.,* 2011:67), which is an essential approach to understanding the widows’ psycho-social plight as it stems from their relationships with other people and their environment. Processes aligned to this model are an ability to identify the problem experienced by the widow, a subjective view of the widow in the problem situation, her importance in the problem, an exploration of ways to solve the problem, taking a decision and implementing it (Farley *et al.,* 2011:67). This casework approach to social work intervention provides essential guidelines in helping the widows. Farley *et al.,* (2011:68) write that the casework process entails the study, assessment, intervention and termination phases.

The study phase in casework with widows should entail the actual presentation of their problem to the worker who then documents their experiences. Information gathering is recommended at this stage in order to provide enough facts to be used for intervention. This phase provides for meaningful interaction between the widow

and the social worker in which also a working contract is agreed upon (Farley *et al*., 2011:68).

The assessment phase follows sequentially in the casework process. Here, the important process is planning for the intervention in the problems the widow has presented in the study phase. Described as “fluid and dynamic” to express its constantly changing nature, Farley *et al.,* (2011:70) maintain that this planning phase begins in the study phase and continues to the termination phase. An acute ability to make an assessment and finding of the strengths and the weaknesses of the widow in coping with her situation is essential at this stage (Cournoyer, 2011:297). Farley *et al.,* (2011:70) assert that assessment should focus on “strengths, capacities, limitations and opportunities as a guide to treatment planning.” This phase should culminate in goals that are agreed upon by the widow and the social worker involved in order to pave way for the intervention phase of the casework process.

Intervention is synonymous with treatment of the client and follows the assessment phase. Although this process begins in the first phase of the casework process, it makes it possible for the widow “to make changes in her life situation” (Farley *et al.,* (2011:72) using the relationship that has been developed between the client and the social worker. Intervention centres on the goals that have been agreed upon in the assessment phase. During this process, the worker is expected to be warm, genuine and their behaviour to conform with the promises made. Equally important at the intervention phase is the worker’s ability to interview, record, and refer widows for other services where possible and helping the widow to use her personal resources to deal with her situation.

The final phase of the casework process with the widow is the termination phase. It is formerly ending the processes that began in the study phase. Farley *et al.,* (2011:73) define termination as “the ending of a process that was commenced when the agency (worker) agreed to enter into the interventive processes aimed at delivering a service to a client with a problem.” At the termination phase, the widow must reflect on the intervention process and be satisfied with it for achieving the goals of the client-agent relationship. Growth should have taken place should the social worker have enabled the widow to deal with her psycho-social problems and the widow empowered to function on her own. A summary of achievements need to

be presented to the widow by the social worker, assuring her of her ability to move on with life. Cournoyer (2011:425) prefers the term “review” to refer to summarizing the process that took place at termination phase and roles that both the worker and the client must share in this review. Here, the widow is encouraged to express her feelings so that there could be “psychological separation, autonomy and independence” (Cournoyer, 2011:429) on the part of the widow.

3.5.1.1 Social work skills necessary at micro level intervention

The skills base for the profession of social work is diverse and the skills used in the intervention process depend on a particular situation that the social work practitioner is dealing with. There is acknowledgement of the various definitions of the term skill in social work. For the purpose of this study, Cournoyer’s (2011:7) definition is adopted that a skill is:

> …a circumscribed set of discrete cognitive and behavioural actions that are consistent and congruent with (1) research-based knowledge; (2) social work values, ethics, and obligations; (3) the essential facilitative qualitative qualities or “the conditions”,(4) the characteristics of professionalism; and (5) a legitimate social work purpose within the context of a phase or process.

This study posits that different phases of the intervention process require a repertoire of skills unique to that particular phase and the social worker is challenged to be skillful in applying prudently these skills to each of the phases outlined. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:51) share that the skills needed at micro level intervention “involve relationship building, the effectual use of verbal and non-verbal behaviour and proficiency in interviewing.” Focus is maintained on the social worker’s capability to interact with the client effectively. During the various phases of the casework process, such as the study, assessment, intervention and termination (Farley *et al.,* 2011:70), there is need for the use of “verbal and nonverbal skills” in establishing the necessary rapport and introducing the worker’s purpose and role (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:51).

- **Verbal communication skills**

The use of verbal skills is indispensable in casework process with the widows. This is noticeable through interviewing of the clients which is a fundamental process of sending and receiving information between the social worker and the client. Verbal skills of the casework process are embedded in interviewing skills which can be used "to engage, assess, intervene, and evaluate individuals" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:52).

The substantial value of interviewing in casework with widows entails enabling the problem-solving process, the promotion of the widow's growth and planning on the best approach intended to improving the widow's life. For Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:52), an interview is a critical verbal communication skill that enables reaching predetermined goals and helps in clarifying the roles of the social worker and those of the client.

Verbal responses the social worker uses when communicating with the widow enables the social worker to elicit further information with regards her present problem. Pertinent skills in the casework process include "encouragement, reflective responding, clarification, providing information, eliciting information and summarisation" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:64).

Encouragement of the widow to say more can be done by simple word responses such as "I see, uh-huh and mm-mm" while rephrasing is actually "stating what the client said in different words" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:64). Reflective responding enables the social worker to be empathetic and convey an understanding of the widow's unique situation. In clarification the social worker "attempts to elicit a more complete expression of the meaning of previous words or gestures" (Cournoyer, 2011:266). This helps in getting more elaborate information from the widow about her situation in order to plan for relevant interventions.

Another important skill is providing information to the widow. Most often, widows lack information on how they could get help for resolving their problems. Providing information to the widows has an educational component and an enlightenment element. Eliciting information from the widow is one essential skill. Here, the social

worker should encourage the widow to reach for and share information. This comes through skillful questioning. Also important is the skill to summarise. This entails going through what has been covered during the interview either at the end or a portion of that particular interview. The purpose is to focus on the main issue if it is done during the interview with the widow or changing subjects. However, when done at the end of the interview process it aids in termination (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:71).

- **Nonverbal communication skills**

Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:53) suggest that the use of “eye contact, attentive listening, facial expressions and body positioning” constitute critical nonverbal skills. With eye contact, it is necessary to have a background check of the widow so that only appropriate and comfortable eye contact is maintained. The important point with eye contact is that the widow feels listened to with interest by the social worker. Attentive listening is often lacking in investigations into the psycho-social plight of widows. The researcher argues that this is a principal skill which conveys a message of more than just hearing but rather getting the meaning of what the widow is saying. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:53) inform forcefully that attentive listening plays a critical role in eliminating barriers that might impact on listening on the part of the sender and the receiver of the message and the interpretation of the message thereof. It is therefore argued in this study that the social worker needs to concentrate and use a variety of interviewing skills in order to demonstrate optimal attentive listening.

Facial expressions are crucial. They are a medium for different feelings both to the client and the social worker. Also facial expressions may reinforce the information being conveyed. However, Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:54) warn that there is need to have correspondence between facial expressions and the message that the social worker sends to the client. Body positioning is another important skill which can communicate tension, relaxation, formal and informal scales of communication. The social worker in the casework process is advised to consider a balance of body communication depending on the situation.

3. 5.1.2 The roles of the social worker at micro level intervention

Various social work roles exist in intervention processes with various client systems. Whilst intervening at micro level with the widows, the social worker needs to play certain critical roles. The social work roles should be used in combination with the various other skills applied in assisting the widows. The roles that this study identifies as the most crucial ones for the social worker to play are those of the broker, enabler, mediator, educator and case manager (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:86, Zastrow, 2010:51).

The broker role involves connecting the widows with the assets in their environment useful in dealing with their problems (Garthwaith, 2012:10). Another important role is that of an enabler. Here, the social worker provides support, encourages and suggests to the widow how she may proceed and succeed in tackling her psycho-social problems using her own resources (Toseland & Rivers, 2012:285)

Usually in the myriad problems encountered by widows, conflict is involved, for example between the widow and the in-laws on property inheritance, to the extent that the mediator role occupies significant space in which the social worker helps in settling the dispute and reaches for compromise. The main aim in intervention is to reach compromise and settle the dispute (Toseland & Rivers, 2012:285). In occupying the educator role, the social worker seeks and disseminates needed information for the widow to deal with her situation. Using the role of case manager, the social worker mobilises resources, plans how they can be delivered, provides the services and monitors the progress (Garthwait, 2012:11).

3.5.2 Mezzo level social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of widows

Oppressed people like widows certainly require more than one level of social work intervention. The complexity of the widows' challenges suggests that an analysis and use of other levels of intervention other than micro level intervention is also needed. Mezzo social work practice is an important way of intervening in the psycho-social plight of the widows. At mezzo level, the social worker intervenes using the group work method in assisting widows to cope with their problems. Group work, according to Strydom and Strydom (2010:123), refers to:

> …a series of activities carried out by the group worker during the life of a group. It entails the deliberate use of intervention strategies and the group processes to achieve individual, group and community goals using the value base and ethical practice principles of the social work profession.

In support of the use of the group work method, an analysis of the benefits has been made and as such provided social support, (Kassin, Fein & Markus, 2011:597), for its use in ameliorating the psycho-social plight of widows. The very fact that people were born into a group setup (families), attend churches and clubs suggests widows' natural inclination towards group work. While groups can be useful, Lindsay and Orton (2014:36) warn that groups can have a negative effect on some group members and need to be used with special expertise and care.

3.5.2.1 Types of groups useful for the psycho-social plight of widows

Due to the psycho-social nature of the problems experienced by widows, this study has an inclination towards the use of groups that help widows directly cope with their problems from participating in group work. This study asserts that the use of treatment groups, namely therapy, educational and support groups provides better coping to the widows.

- **Therapy groups**

With therapy groups, the major focus is recovering from the difficult experiences the widow has undergone. Widows need to be taken through an emotional recovery journey of bereavement and abuses experienced from the time their husbands died and the injustices suffered. In support of this assertion, Toseland and Rivas (2011:20) hold that "therapy groups help members change their behaviour, cope with and ameliorate personal problems, or rehabilitate themselves after physical, psychological, or social trauma. The social worker in this group is encouraged to be very much present for the widows and carries the role of expert and leader for proper functioning of the group. The group size could be any number between five and nine members to enable effective functioning and interaction (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:104) in the group.

- **Educational groups**

The use of educational groups in assisting widows should mainly centre on information acquisition. Using this type of group, the aim is psycho-educational in nature (Pollak, 2015:3) in that there is use of group processes to provide widows with information they need and information to deal with their emotions. The learning processes among group members take the form of structured lessons where proper facilitation is provided and interactional processes are encouraged among the members of the group. The assumption is that these two forms of interaction cumulatively provide sufficient mechanisms for widows to cope with their problems.

As suggested by Mbandazayo (2012:66) the social worker plays the role of a leader in this group and provides information to the group and serves as an "expert". Much of the knowledge gaps are determined and content in the presentations brought to the group by the social worker who is an expert. The members of the group can be as many as five to fifteen people (Kirst-Ashman 2010:104).

- **Support groups**

A third type of group that has been found useful for intervention in widows' problems is the support group. As the name suggests, this type of group is anchored on the notion of "care for the other together" because of similarities in life experiences and coping needs. Befitting descritions of a support group are provided by Toseland and Rivas (2012:20) who perceive it as constituting members that rejuvenate and improve members' coping abilities in order to adapt to possible future stressful events. Adding to this descrition are Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:99) who see a support group as:

> …people sharing certain characteristics that get together to provide one another with emotional sustenance, encourage new coping mechanisms and allow a strengths-based sharing of issues, concerns and problems.

The basic entry into membership of a support group is the status of widowhood and a shared concern about abuse since the death of the husband. This type of group

has the ability to increase knowledge about their situation, boost self-esteem especially that the community shames and looks down upon them and to enable the feeling of being empowered even though as widows. Again in this group, a number of five to nine members is suggested as ideal by Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:104).

3.5.2.2 Social work skills necessary at mezzo level intervention

The skills applicable to group work with widows are not exclusive. In Kirst-Ashman and Hull's (2010:113) analysis, the micro level intervention skills still apply. According to these researchers, skills applicable include relationship building skills and attending skills. Whilst the micro level intervention skills are applicable to group work with widows, it is also important to use the skills specific to the treatment groups.Treatment groups are the preferred types of groups to be used in assisting widows to cope with their situations. These skills include conflict resolution, modeling and coaching, confrontation and coordination.

Using the conflict resolution skill, the group worker is expected to be expert enough to recognise conflict in the group, to assess the conflict making sure that the source is clearly understood and to choose a strategy on how the conflict could be resolved (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:114). In modeling and coaching, the social group worker helps widows to find alternative ways and develop an arsenal of skills towards solving their problems. Coaching enables the group worker to encourage coping skills (Wissing, Potgieter, Guse, Khumalo & Nel, 2014:252) from the widows by making them try out a number of skills and then encouraging them to master those skills.

Confrontation as a skill is used to "point out to the clients, directly or indirectly and without disapproval, discrepancies, inconsistencies or contradictions in their words, feelings and actions" (Compton, *et al.,* 2005:244; Cournoyer, 2011:412). Because of its power to cause discomfort to the individual group members, the group worker must engage in a non-blaming form of confrontation where a group is asked to take accountability for the solution to the problem.

It is also important to use the skill of coordination where service providers to the needs of the widows in a group put their effort together to meet the needs of the widows. The social worker has a duty to make sure that the service providers are brought together in common to put their resources together in assisting the widows

(Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:120). This is critical in Zimbabwe where many service providers are available but little concerted effort is put in helping the widows to meet their needs.

3.5.2.3 The roles of the social worker at mezzo level intervention

There are numerous roles played by a social worker at mezzo level intervention. These roles should be used in combination with the other skills discussed in the previous paragraphs. Applicable roles at mezzo level intervention include those of a broker, mediator, educator and facilitator.

In the role of a broker, the social group worker "links clients with community resources to accomplish the objectives specified in the services agreement" (Compton *et al,* 2005:231). The social worker is expected to have vast knowledge of available resources in the communities. Additionally, the social group worker should have relevant resource networks to link the widows.

The role of a mediator suggests that the social worker needs to resolve conflict between widows and other people in their social environment (Compton *et al.,* 2005:232; Zastrow, 2009:37). Most often widows have conflict with their in-laws linked to property claims after the death of their husbands. The social worker has the task to settle such disputes by making it a point that each party involved recognises the other's stand point and that they work to strike common settlements. The educator role is also important (Zastrow, 2009:37). Playing this role mandates the social group worker to provide group members with critical information on available resources and services (Kirst-Ashman, 2013:240). The social group worker models the members to grasp new skills.

Another important role that a social group worker plays is the facilitator role. In this role the social group worker guides widows to cope and makes it easy for them to deal with their problems. Swanepoel and De Beer (2011:73) assert that it allows for "rational decision-making, assising them to fully participate, taking initiative and discovering their resources." The social group worker helps widows to find inner strengths and resources within themselves to reach desired changes in their challenges (Compton *et al.,* 2005:231). This role by the group worker is very critical

and central to social work interventions as it creates lasting empowerment of the widows. This is the essence of social work intervention with oppressed clients.

3.5.3 Macro level social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of widows

Whilst it is important to intervene at micro and mezzo levels in the plight of widows, intervention at macro level is equally important. The practice of macro level social work involves helping clients using large scale approaches involving organisations and communities. Practice at macro level is commonly known as "community work" and has an advantage of empowering clients through their involvement in organised change and "plays a major role in the community more than any other professional discipline" (Mbandazayo, 2012:47). Focus on macro systems potentially opens up for unplanned change that can be beneficial to the clients. Practicing at macro level prompts the social worker to interrogate policies and procedures that impact on the lives of the clients. This is highly important in this study as policies and procedures in Zimbabwe are not responsive enough to the needs of widows. Social workers practising in Zimbabwe, in the researcher's view, need to devote much more effort towards influencing policies that ensure justice for the plight of widows.

At a more pragmatic level, social workers must help the widows to access their rights which are normally not accorded due to oppression covertly or overtly exerted on them by the community. Targeted change is on the "systems" which include the "political system, the legal system and the service delivery system" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:126). The use of advocacy in helping the widows to get the much needed resources and support for coping in their situations is emphasized.

3.5.3.1 Social work intervention through an organisation and the community for the psycho-social plight of the widows

The organisations providing services to the widows and community need to be explored deeper in order to provide services to widows in Zimbabwe. The organisation is understood as an agency of change such as an NGOs and relevant government departments and local districts councils that wield decisive and influential clout in women's issues.

Organisations provide special resources for helping the widows which include policy and procedures, staff and space needed for meeting the needs of the widows (Kirst-Ashman 2013:132). Organizational theory centres on how organisations function and what they do to accomplish their missions. With regard to the widows' problems this study holds that organizational theory should incorporate concepts of justice to oppressed groups such as widows in order to help alleviate the psycho-social problems that such widows suffer in their communities. At another level and primarily important is the ability of the organisations and government departments to have consistent policies and rules on the relevant rights of widows.

The community is critically important in that it provides space for orgainisational operations and resources for its own people as well (Segal, Gerdes & Steiner, 2016:172). Communities also "socialise" their members and instill a particular value system that becomes part of the everyday lives of its people. Participation of community members in matters that affect them could be utilised to reconsider matters of injustice and lobbying for helpful community responses for the benefit of widows.

The fundamental function of the community such as caring for one another is of prime importance as this needs to be explored and channeled for use in protection of its vulnerable members. Such care of the community should transcend basic caring for the widows in the communities.

3.5.3.2 Macro level approaches for social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of the widows

Intervention at macro level for the plight of the widows demands that the social worker embraces particular approaches that can bear fruit and have significant impact on lessening the impact of injustices experienced by the widows. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (20100:129) have suggested that "policy or planning, capacity development, and advocacy" can be of significance in intervening at community level.

Policy and planning can be central to helping the widows in that the needs of the widows can be part of the policy issues of the agencies. In planning for social

interventions, agencies can include widows' social needs so that services delivery programmes can also be inclusive of the widows' needs (Zastrow, 2010:51).

In capacity development, the central issue is increasing community competence to address the issues of the widows. Change is needed but the community may not have the capacity to deal with it or may lack of necessary information to execute change. The main aim with capacity development of the community is empowerment of the community members (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:38) and taping into useful community positive relationships and cascading these for community solidarity in fostering the well-being of the widows (Wissing, *et al.,* 2014:200).

Advocacy is one essential approach to working with the community. According to Segal *et al.,* (2016:172) advocacy means "pleading the cause of another". There is social advocacy, cause advocacy and case advocacy. In social advocacy, Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:130) inform that there is use of "pressure to bring about changes that will ultimately benefit individuals and groups experiencing social and economic injustice". The aim with social advocacy is to speak for the poor and powerless groups that have been deprived of their right to access resources such as the widows. Here the social worker devotes energy towards improving social conditions that contribute to the wellbeing of the widows.

Cause advocacy as the name suggests involves "representing and defending others" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:130). It is used for issues that are very important to a group of people. Widows are such a group of people to which this study maintains that such advocacy can be used. This kind of advocacy is appropriate since they are a group of an oppressed minority who can benefit from this. Case advocacy on the other hand seeks to speak on behalf of a "single case, family or small group" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:131). This type of advocacy is used for a small group of people that cannot access resources as entitlements. The overriding principle in advocating for the widows is to assist them to get the services they are entitled to or to prevent abuse of the widows which dehumanises and reduces them to objects.

3.5.3.3 Macro level skills for social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of the widows

There are numerous skills that social workers use to address problems at macro level. An analysis of these skills brought to the realization that they are not “one size fits all”, rather they are used according to the situation and the need determined by the professional social worker. Other skills from micro and mezzo level intervention skills are still applicable and can be interwoven to effect change. The skills this study sees as critically important for use to tackle the psycho-social plight of the widows are negotiating, mediating, influencing decision makers, needs assessment, planning and working with coalitions.

Negotiation as a skill involves “bringing together those who are in conflict over one or more issues and seeks to achive bargaining and compromise to arrive at mutually acceptable agreements” (Zastrow, 2010:592). This is sometimes called bargaining where there is need to separate the persons involved from the problem so that the social worker involved with negotiations cannot identify with the differences of the disagreeing parties. In negotiating for the needs of the widows, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:49) however take a different approach and assert that the negotiator in such a situation of oppression of the other party should take the side of the oppressed. This means that the social worker becomes an ally of the widows in the negotiation process.

Closely linked to the skill of negotiation is the skill of mediation where the social worker involved takes an impartial stance and becomes a peacemaker (Kirst-Ashman, 2010:139). For the social worker mediating in the situations of the widows, mediation needs to be approached with sensitivity too as the widow might feel less important if a satisfactory position has not been reached as successful mediation should. As the cases of the widows are sensitive in nature and involve violence, the ultimate goal of mediation should be building peace between the widow and any other party involved.

Influencing decision makers is a very critical skill for social workers who need to make a difference in the challenges faced by the widows. This is critically so because decision makers influence the distribution of resources and policy and laws

that have the potential to change the lives of the widows. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:140) see petitioning, working with the media, educating, persuading, confrontation, collaboration and letter writing as relevant skills in influencing decision makers.

In petitioning, the social worker obtains signatures of people who support ending the abuse of widows and such a petition can be presented to the decision makers. The media is also important to influence decision makers. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:140) indicate using television, radio and newspapers as way of working with the media and fruitful methods to influence decision makers.

In many instances decision makers in cultural matters that affect the lives of widows are not educated about the rights of the widows. In such cases where there is lack of knowledge, particularly in rural areas such as Binga District of Zimbabwe (Dube, 2011:1), education is very important to influence change in harmful and oppressive culture. Educating decision makers for example on the law and new policies on women may pay dividends.

Social workers can also use persuading as another skill to influence decision makers. This is when the social worker tries to make the decision maker to concur with the idea of tackling the abuse of widows. The most difficult part is when people involved in abusing the widows are also decision makers (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:143). This is the case where the chief abuses the widows yet he has influence to change the community mindset to respect the widows' rights. This scenario demands skillful social workers in order to influence decisions. Confrontation seems to be the opposite of persuading, the social work challenges the decision in understanding why critical decisions are not made about the plight of the widows. Legal action may be the option to force decisions to be made. Also the decision maker may be asked by the social worker directly face-to-face to make relevant decisions about the challenges widows are facing.

Sometimes it is necessary for the social worker to work together with the decision makers. This is what Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:145) called the "preferred route" to decision making in dispute resolution. Collaboration according to the authors should be attempted first before using rival methods. Another way of influencing

decision makers is letter writing which can be effort in some instances than others. Where postage works effectively it works well but in instances where there is poor postal, the researcher is of the opinion that it may delay decisions due to delays in postage movement. This can make letter writing less preferable. Some new technological advances have also taken over through emails that are commonly used and faster in the current era.

Needs assessment is an important skill that a social worker needs to master when intervening in any social condition. In Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:147)'s assertion, needs assessment encapsulates:

> …systematic gathering of data to identify the extent and nature of social problem or condition, the resources available to deal with the problem and potential obstacles and solutions to an intervention.

This challenges the social worker intervening in the challenges of the widows to embrace a scientific approach to their situation and engage in a systematic process that informs the intervention measures. The systematic gathering of information will contribute to evidence-based intervention which in the view of the researcher contribute to the scientific nature of the social work profession and increases the level of measurement of success, shortcomings and improvement plans.

Planning is another skill important for social workers. Work that is not planned is unlikely going to produce better results. It follows that after a systematic assessment of the intervention needed, a good plan of the intervention needs to be developed. Planning enables the identification of necessary steps, establish the time frame, and give assignments to specific individuals for the rolling out intervention. Further, it involes setting objectives and how the set objectives can be achived (Mbandazayo, 2012:75). In the view of the researcher, planning has a central function in that it assists in proper budgeting, allocation of resources and structuring of a good monitoring mechanism to assist in ameliorating deviations from the planned activities.

Social service organisations can also assist widows by working as coalitions. Working with coalitions requires that organisations put together their effort and

resources in order to reach a common goal (Segal *et al.,* 2016:176; Weyers, 2011:36). The results from coalitions of organisations is that the effort is concerted for common interests and the results are likely favourable. If coalitions for the challenges of the widows are formed by both public and private sectors, then the impact on alleviating the plight of the widows is increased.

3.5.3.4 The roles of the social worker at macro level intervention

During social work intervention for the challenges faced by the widows, identifying the social worker's role is very important as it clearly specifies how professional expertise is used. This study notes that there are many roles the social worker can play and some of these roles can be used at micro and mezzo level interventions for the plight of the widows. Some of the roles of the social worker that will be discussed in this study are that of an initiator, spokesperson, organiser, advocate and consultant. Some other roles that are important and deserve to be stated but will not be discussed in this section are that of a mediator and negotiator. These have been discussed in the previous sections and are also equally important to be used at macro level intervention as at micro and mezzo levels.

The social worker's role of the initiator in assisting the widows in their plight is very important especially in communities such as Binga District where there is reluctance from the community to tackle the problem. The initiator brings the problem to the attention of the community stakeholders so that it can be dealt with (Zastrow, 2009:37). In the researcher's analysis of this role came to the assertion that the most important part the initiator plays is to take the first step in tackling the problems of the widows and ignite the energies of other stakeholders to be interested in the issues affecting the widows' psycho-social wellbeing.

As a spokesperson, the social worker speaks representing the widows and taking into account that the information presented does not reflect his personal views, but those of the concerns of the widows having challenges in the community (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:150). The key and critical task of the social worker that the information and concerns presented should accurately and objectively represent those of the widows without gratifying the professional's own feelings and desires.

One other important role is that of an organiser which is the mostly used role in community work (Mbandazayo, 2012:65). An organiser is a social worker "who coordinates individuals or groups to pursue some designated functions" (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:150). This role involves the social worker's ability to develop leadership and influencing other people to join in in activities designed for ameliorating the challenges faced by the widows.

A critical role of the social worker to the oppressed group such as widows is the role of an advocate which has been borrowed from the profession of law (Zastrow, 2009:36). This role allows the social worker to act on behalf of the clients. Monds-Watson (2013:53) quotes Pierson and Thomas (2010:20) who define advocacy as "speaking up or being helped to speak up". The rights-based advocacy which this study embraces enables the social worker to align advocacy activities towards the rights of the oppressed widows instead of advocacy for the whole social group. In agreement to this view Monds-Watson (2013:54) declares that a social worker undertaking the advocate role should "possess both the inclination and the capacity to challenge the status quo in the defense of the individual's basic human rights, to protect and support the vulnerable, the marginalised and the excluded". The social worker has many professional contact persons and organisations that widows lack and is able to assist them in their problems which look like a maze of trouble to them (Swanepoel & De Beer, 2011:72). Playing an advocate role in assisting the widows to deal with their problems ensures that the social worker embraces advocacy-oriented practice which involves the widows in solving their issues with the intention of empowering them through supporting them and enhancing social functioning.

Another role of the social worker which is important which unfortunately tends to be less utilised in social work practice is that of a consultant. Playing a consultant means that the social worker advices, suggests and gives his or her professional ideas and expertise to the widows (Zastrow, 2010: 51). The assumption is playing this role is that the social worker is more knowledgeable about the rights of the widows, the law enforceable and the skills needed to assist them. The widows then have a choice to choose which advice to use in dealing with their situation after they have been furnished with professional social work advice and expertise in their problems.

3.6 THEORIES AND APPROACHES GUIDING INTERVENTIONS IN THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PLIGHT OF THE WIDOWS

Social work intervention for the psycho-social plight of the widows is essential. The profession of social work holds is guided by specific theory for guiding intervention. The discussion below provides and centres on the rights theory and the empowerment approach to be guiding the social work interventions in the psycho-social challenges faced by the widows.

3.6.1 The Rights theory

The question of Human Rights in the African context is very critical. The dominance of harmful culture in the region and rejection of Western philosophies to handling of African issues has always been of political interest in African states. Despite the importance of Human Rights for the welfare of the people in Africa, the fact that they originate in the West, normally viewed as colonisers in Africa, lends them to scrutiny with suspicion in various countries. The results are that each country has its own achievements and loopholes in terms of observing Human Rights as required by the United Nations. In an attempt to observe Human Rights, different treaties and conventions have been ratified by the various states and differently incorporated into their laws and policies which results in variations in Human Rights questions and issues in respective countries. That being the case, Zimbabwe has not accorded widows their inherent Human Rights to be enjoyed.

Scholars have not agreed on what is meant by the term “right” and such definitional imprecision has influenced the theory and understanding of Human Rights (Mbondenyi, 2011:14). Words such as “important, moral and universal” have been used to define right which lends itself to controversy because what is right in one community may necessarily not be right in another (Mbondenyi, 2011:14). Right can be defined in abstract or concrete senses. Mbondenyi (2011:17) shares that:

> …in abstract sense, right refers to justice, ethical, correctness, or consonance with the rule of law or principles of morals. In concrete sense it means power, privilege, faculty or demand inherent in one person and incidental upon another.

It is therefore based upon the discussed definitions of what right means which lends to the conclusion that rights are either morally or legally grounded. On that note, Mbondenyi (2011:17) concedes to the definition that human rights are:

> …the demands or claims individuals or groups make that are essential for individual wellbeing, dignity, and fulfillment the deprivation of which may lead to a great affront to justice.

No matter which definition of Human Rights any scholar may subscribe to, the conclusion is that Human Rights are "inherent, indivisible, interrelated, universal, and belong to every society regardless of geographical, historical, cultural, ideological, political and economic orientation" (Mbondenyi, 2011:18). This conclusion from the author dispels the justification of oppressing the widows by any society defending itself on the basis on any factor. This is why it is important that Human Rights be observed by any society or community for the wellbeing of its people particularly vulnerable people like the widows in Zimbabwe.

This study acknowledges the existence of many theories attempting to make accounts of what rights are and their origin. However, this study takes the Liberty and Equality: Choice theory approach to explain the Social Work approach in dealing with the psycho-social problems experienced by the widows in Zimbabwe.

Central to Choice theory is the concept of liberty and equality of human beings. This is fundamental, especially to the oppressed widows in Zimbabwe. In-as-much as equality and liberty are related terms, their components differ. Equality is dominantly understood to mean "non-discrimination" in such a way that people have equal "moral and legal standing" in the communities (Fagan, 2009:15). From this perspective, people's equality is not earned but they possess it inalienably and it is not determined by factors such as "race, gender, ethnicity, physical capabilities, religious or ideological commitments" (Fagan, 2009:15).

This position of the human rights approach is what the Zimbabwean community needs to embrace in according widows their rights and desist from oppressing them as the naturally have rights that need to be respected. The fact that women become widows, makes them automatically get abused by the communities which is militating

against the equality rule of Human Rights. The governments and political powers need therefore to recognise abuse of widows and eradicate discrimination on the grounds of widowhood.

Another aspect of the Choice theory is the concept of liberty which leans much on negative liberty and positive liberty. Negative liberty demands “non-interference in an individual’s private sphere” (Fagan, 2009:15). This means that people’s freedom needs to be extended to be free in their minds and thoughts from coercion and even from any external influence such as political influence. Positive liberty on the other hand centres on actualisation of this situation where an individual can set goals and pursue them without influence of the external forces (Fagan, 2009:16).

Since liberty is central to Human Rights, both negative and positive liberty have a very significant role on the rights of people. These two concepts reinforce and enforce the notion that if rights of people have to be fully accorded to them, then there is need to avoid interference in their lives and that people should be given the opportunity to actively formulate their own life goals and pursue them. Taping from that perspective, widows need to be liberated from abuse and oppression and they need to be allowed to make choices in their lives without interference and be able to purse personally structured goals for them to be able to live a fulfilling life.

The Choice theory also asserts that human rights are of highest significance and chief to all other moral contemplations because they entail the rights of every human being. From the Choice theory’s assertion, the qualification for having human rights is simple in that the theory holds that “being human entails the possession of human rights” (Fagan, 2009:16). This interpreted differently means that when human beings are deprived of their human rights, their humanness is jeopardised. All human beings are expected to hold and accept that all other human beings, such as the widows, have human rights simply because of their human nature. This is simply because human rights are inherent in human beings and as such, depriving them of human rights means reducing them to objects and “a failure of rationality” in the suppressor of human rights (Fagan, 2009:17).

From the Choice theory, freedom of human beings is defined by the ability of individuals to control “one’s behaviour by one’s unforced choice while having

knowledge of the relevant circumstances…" (Fagan, 2009:18). This put into the circumstances of the widows means that they should be allowed to make choices they need to lead their lives after the death of their husbands. The implication of this notion is the fact that they should not be forced into cultural rituals that give them no choices of how they should carry on with life.

3.6.2 Empowerment approach

The empowerment approach to the psycho-social problems of the widows is very critical in intervening in their problems. This approach is central to social work practice and has been widely utilised in the profession and considers clients' innate inner strengths rather than the deficit approach to their problems (Saleeby, 2009:13). This approach is normally called the strength-based perspective.

In order to be able to engage the strengths perspective in social work intervention with the widows, it is important to grasp the meaning of the word strength. Kondrat (2010:39) cites Greene and Lee (2002:182) who define strength as:

> …the capacity to cope with difficulties, to maintain functioning in the face of stress, to bounce back in the face of significant trauma, to use external challenges as a stimulus for growth, and to use social supports as a source of resilience.

The strengths which can be useful for the social worker to assist the widows can be from the environment or from within the individual widow. These can be tapped and used to assist the widows to deal with their challenges. In the individual widows, the strengths denotes the widow's ambitions, abilities and self-confidence while in the communities, it refers to available opportunities, people's linkages, assets and available amenities (Kondrat, 2010:39).

3.6.2.1 Understanding the language of strengths

Saleeby (2009:9) makes it clear that social workers need to understand the vocabulary and language of strengths for them to be in a better position and be competent in assisting their clients such as the widows. The writer notes plasticity, empowerment, membership, resilience, healing and wholeness, dialogue and

collaboration and suspension of disbelief as important vocabulary to understand. In plasticity, Saleeby (2009:10) informs that the brain of a human being is constantly changing and as such people can change the behaviour and the way they feel and think. If that is to be used to deal with the psycho-social problems faced by widows then it means social workers embrace the fact that what widows feel and think can be changed. They can be helped to feel better and to change what they think about their problems and embrace a positive understanding and attitude in the healing process.

A salient concept in strengths of people is the concept of empowerment. This is the basis for the interventions for the psycho-social problems of the widows. According to Saleeby (2009:11), empowerment refers to "the intent to, the processes of, assisting individuals, groups, families, and communities to discover and expend the resources and tools within and around them". Stated differently empowerment requires that the environment be responsive enough to provide opportunities to the clients to choose and that the person needs to be aware of such options. Therefore social workers need to understand that for the widows to be empowered there is need to provide them with necessary resources and options to deal with their challenges. These resources need to be explored within their environment and widows should be assisted to understand the possibility and availability of these resources and options.

At another level, the empowerment of the widows requires that the social workers deal with the endemic, deep seated strains and struggles in the communities that subdue and limit the widows to live a fulfilling life. This means that the community which normally is a source of stress and abuse to the widows needs to be targeted for interventions as discussed earlier in the macro level interventions.

The concept of membership is another central term to be comprehended. Membership gives people that social workers help a sense of belonging. Clients feel valued and a sense of belonging into the community. It is always the case that widows feel isolated in the communities because of loss of their husbands and people do not want to associate with them as they are regarded as dirty and unclean. This inculcates in them a sense of alienation. For empowering the widows, the understanding of membership should motivate the social work practitioner to

have inclination towards enforcing the “rights, responsibilities, assurances and securities” of the widows (Saleeby, 2009:11). The social worker needs to organise groups to which these widows can belong and be members, such as the support groups, in an attempt to foster the sense of belonging.

People exposed to abuse normally soldier on with life through resilience. Saleeby (2009:12) asserts that for human beings, resilience is “not an exception” but it is how human beings recover from trouble. In demanding situations such as the psycho-social problems experienced by the widows, it means that there is need for acknowledging their situations and traumatic life experiences and continue to bear with the ordeals they are facing. Social workers should assist the widows to continue to grow and taping on their capacities to grow out of adversity and fostering ability to meet the demands and challenges of their life experiences.

Saleeby (2009:13) alerts professionals of healing and wholeness that happens to the body and mind when faced with difficulties. The writer asserts that healing and wholeness is the body’s inherent capability when faced with adversity. Social workers have to understand that even though widows face abuse and trauma in their lives, their bodies have the natural tendency to heal. The social workers’ task is to facilitate the healing process through professional support.

Another important conceptual aspect of the strengths in people is dialogue and collaboration. In dialogue and collaboration, emphasis is on the fact that people grow and develop through their meaningful relationships with other people. The relationship with other people enables comparison and testing of one’s ability to that of other people (Saleeby, 2009:13). Dialogue would require that the community recognises widows as people with dignity and as such gives them equal respect with other people of the community which is a fertile ground for healing and empowerment. Collaborations requires that social workers work with the widows in tackling their challenges. Social workers become “agents and consultants” in the pursuit for healing by the widows in their challenging situations (Saleeby, 2009:14).

There also a need to suspend disbelief of the stories of the clients. The social worker has work with the mindset that what the widows say about their challenges is a true reflection of their challenges. Disbelieving what the widows say about their

experiences jeopardises the helping process and defeats the purpose of the engagement with them as clients in the helping process. “Suspension of disbelief” (Saleeby, 2009:14) helps the social worker to have an objective approach to the helping process and fosters to start where the clients is.

3.6.2.2 The principles and assumptions of the strengths perspective

When assisting clients, social workers are guided by professional principles which give the practitioner and operational philosophy. The strengths perspective has also operational principles which guide the practitioners’ actions in assisting their clients. Kondrat (2010:40) provides a summary of the guiding principles of the strengths perspective which are:

- Every individual, group, family and community has strengths.
- Trauma, abuse, illness and struggle may be injurious, but they may also be sources of challenge and opportunity.
- Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change and take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously.
- We best serve our clients by collaborating with them.
- Every environment is full of resources.
- Caring, caretaking, and context-care is essential to human well-being.

The most significant helping philosophy in social work practice using the strengths perspective is that social workers need to work collaboratively with their clients (Kondrat, 2010:40). This means that social workers helping the widows to deal with the psycho-social challenges experienced in their communities need to have a collaborative working relationship with them for the helping process and social work intervention to be effective.

Kondrat (2010:41) takes the operational guiding principles provided by Kisthardt (2009:51) as essential operational guidelines in social work interventions using the strengths perspective. The principles the author provides are discussed below.

1*. The initial focus of the helping process is on the strengths, interests, abilities, knowledge and capabilities of each person not their diagnosis, deficits, symptoms and weaknesses as defined by another* (Kondrat, 2010:41). Using this principle in assisting the widows means that while it is important for the social worker to understand empathetically the widows' challenges, the social worker needs to focus more on what the widows are capable of doing rather than devoting much attention on the abuses they are experiencing from the community. Devoting much effort and attention to what widows are able to do empowers them and increase hope in them and makes them see themselves as capable human beings in solving their problems. Kondrat (2010:41) suggests that social workers need to start this process by "showing respect, and admiration for clients and taking an interest in clients' hope, dreams and aspirations".

2. *The helping relationship becomes one of collaboration, mutuality and partnership. Power with another, not power over another* (Kondrat, 2010:41). The primary point of departure in helping the widows using the strengths perspective is that social workers should not assume a position of power over the widows. They need to embrace the fact that widows know better about their suffering and as such they are experts in their challenges. Social workers need to work collaboratively with the widows to foster a sense of hope in them and cultivate energy to see themselves as capable to overcome life ordeals.

3. *Each person is responsible for his or her own recovery. The participant is the director of the helping efforts. We save as caring community living consultants. The healing process takes place on many levels* (Kondrat, 2010:41). This principle gives power to the client to lead the helping process because they know better what needs to change in their lives. Clients also understand their aspirations and needs. Following this principle means that social workers need to give the widows leeway to lead the helping process because they know their problems better. Allowing the widows to take a lead in the interventions in their plight makes them more engaged, they feel important and they feel listened to which is important for empowering them and hence the chances of succeeding with interventions are very high.

4. *All human beings have the inherent capacity to learn, grow, and change* (Kondrat, 2010:42). Oppressive societies always give people labels which makes them feel as

if they are not capable individuals among them. These labels makes social work clients feel unimportant and incapable individuals amongst other people in the community (Kondrat, 2010:42). Likewise, widows are labeled as unclean and need to be cleaned and generally isolated from other members of the families and community on the basis that they are widows and have bad spells of the dead. Such labels undermine their selfhood and lower their self-esteem and subject them to abuse. Social workers need to help widows to understand that they have the capacity to change their situations and beliefs of the community about widowhood which cannot disable them from personal growth and living a fulfilling life.

5. *Helping activities in naturally occurring settings in the community are encouraged* (Kondrat, 2010:42). The major emphasis in this principle is that social workers need to help their clients within their communities. Resources and networks for sustaining the interventions are inherent in the communities in which the clients reside. From that perspective, social workers dealing with the psycho-social problems of the widows should also master the use of the community to de-stigmatise widowhood, gain community acceptance and respect for the widows, foster and sustain healthy relationships between the widows and the communities. This is critically important for sustainability of interventions and future prevention of possible abuse of the widows.

6. *The entire community is viewed as an oasis of potential resources to enlist on behalf of service participants. Naturally occurring resources are considered as a possibility first, before segregated or formally constituted 'mental health' or 'social services'* (Kondrat, 2010:42). This principle emphasies the belief that all environments, including the one which is a source of troubles for the clients, have necessary resources to assist the clients. Kondrat (201:42) argues that in the environments where clients' problems emanate:

> …there are individuals, associations, groups and institutions who have something to give, something that others need: knowledge, succour, an actual resource or talent, or simply time and place.

In view of the psycho-social challenges of the widows, this principle endorses the fact that there is need for the social worker to maintain a positive view of the communities that abuse widows. There is need to scan for helpful systems and

resources available within the communities and use the same facilities to help the widows. The very abusive community can be a succulent source of nurturing environment to the widows. The main task of the social worker is to help the widows tap those resources for personal adjustment, growth and further development.

3.7 SUMMARY

Social work intervention in the psycho-social problems of the widows is very critical for their psycho-social wellbeing. Other disciplines have attempted to assist the widows to deal with their problems, however, the psycho-social component of the problems of the widows needs social work intervention. This chapter has extensively described and analysed how social work interventions can be used to deal with the challenges faced by the widows in Zimbabwe. Most importantly the chapter has delved on the three critical levels of social work intervention to draw attention to the social work practitioner on how they can intervene at various levels. Additionally, the roles of the social worker in each of the levels of intervention was described. Moreover, the theoretical underpinnings for the intervention in the challenges widows face was discussed in an effort to provide a theoretical basis of the interventions.

This chapter has provided a convincing account of the importance of social work intervention in addressing problems of windows. The next chapter explains the the systematic methodological processes employed in carrying out the research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains and defends the research methodology that was used for the study. This methodology was briefly introduced in chapter one and is given full scope in this chapter. According to Brynard *et al.,* (2014:38) research methodology explains the ways of collecting data at the same time reflecting on the "planning, structuring, and execution of the research." It also refers to the various steps that were adopted by the researcher in interrogating the research problem along with the logic behind them" (Kumar, 2008:5). The succeeding paragraphs explain the methodology used in this study.

4.2 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The type of research undertaken here is basic research. Yegidis, Weinbach and Myers (2012:18) assert that basic research is sometimes called "pure research" and is "research that is designed to contribute to our general professional body of knowledge." This study contributes to and supplements the existing "knowledge" base in the field of social work on the phenomenon of widowhood (Brynard *et al.,* 2014:7). The information this study provides is useful for programme implementers and policy makers on women's affairs and specifically on widowhood and to social work practitioners who intervene in the lives of widows in oppressive African communities, specifically in Zimbabwe.

4.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The study adopted a qualitative research approach in order to get detailed insights into the abuse and challenges experienced by the widows. This qualitative approach depends strongly "on people who are articulate and introspective enough to provide rich descriptions of their experiences" (Padgett, 2008:53). Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2009:5) add that in qualitative studies, there is search for "qualities, the characteristics or the properties" of the phenomenon being investigated to enable enhanced comprehension and descriptions. As argued by Braun and Clarke (2013:10), qualitative research has the advantage of providing "rich, exciting and challenging" information and it "captures the complexity, mess and contradiction that

characterises the real world yet allowing the researcher to make sense of the patterns of meaning." To its advantage, qualitative research enabled the researcher to get significant and elaborate descriptions and interpretations of what the widowed participants shared. The qualitative research approach was deemed suitable for this study because it enabled data to be collected in the form of lived experiences of the widows. This method is reliable and conforms to radical feminist studies to which this study commits itself.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a phenomenological research design in which participants give accounts of their subjective experiences of a phenomenon under inquiry, widowhood in this case (Fouche & Schurink, 2011:316, Padgett, 2008:35). Phenomenological research design has been described as "concentrating its efforts on the kind of human experiences that are pure, basic and raw in the sense that they have not yet been subjected to processes of analysis and theorising" (Denscombe, 2010:94). The reason for using this design is that it enabled the researcher to gain first-hand information from the widows who experienced abuse and also information from the social service providers who assist the widows when they experience various challenges related to widowhood.

4.5 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

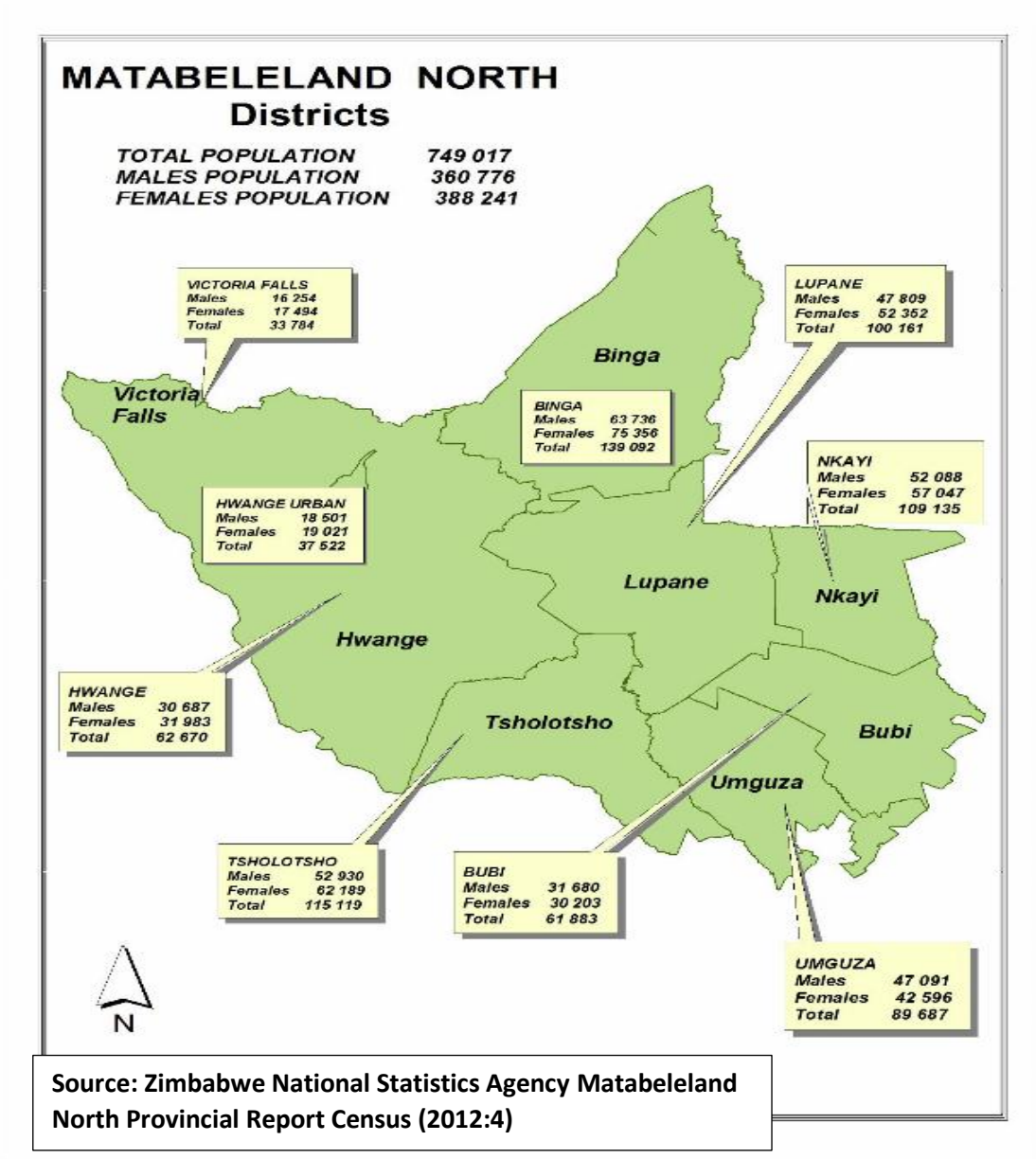
The study was conducted in the Binga District, in Matabeleland North Province which is one of the ten provinces in Zimbabwe. In the year 2015, the country had an estimated population of 15.6 million (Trading Economics , 2016:1). peopleThis district is poor, marginalised politically and developmentally and predominantly rural with 96.2% of the people residing in rural areas and only 3.8% residing in urban spaces (Zimstats, 2012:31). Due to a stark absence of urban development, the district lacks critical resources and necessary services to serve the needy populations such as the widows.

From this poor province, Binga District which has two regions, Binga North and Binga South, has been of particular interest to the researcher due to demographic and socio-cultural conditions that are peculiar to the district. The district has the highest population in Matabeleland North province with a higher mortality rate among the males than females (Zimstats, 2012:4). This is so because the district has 2 % of

the male population being widowers while 15% of the female population are widows, indicating a demonstrably higher rate of deaths among the male population as compared to their female counterparts (Zimstats, 2012:20). Access to formal education among the people is minimal, especially among women of all age groups, a factor which researchers agree have implications for women's socio-economic positioning and welfare (Dube, 2011:4, Gunga, 2009:11, Trivedi *et al.,* 2009:1). From my personal experience as a resident in the area, the people in the district have strong adherence to their traditional socio-cultural practices and these are passed on from generation to generation. The baTonga are a socially cohesive ethnic group in Zimbabwe and do not concede easily to unfamiliar external influence imposed and designed to change their cultural practices. The practices of polygamy and levirate marriages are still common and resilient traditional practices obtain among community members in spite of the HIV and AIDS scourge. In the same district, traditionally arranged marriages for young women are still widespread among the baTonga people. The reproductive roles of women in the families are more privileged than any other role, including their economically productive ones, and women are generally viewed as subordinate populations due to entrenched male dominance in family and other significant social structures. It is commonplace in Binga district for widows to face the social predicament of abuse from in-laws leaving them totally distressed. This became an impetus and a catalyst for this study, which examined the psycho-social challenges widows face in the district. In the final chapter, this study therefore provides a befitting intervention model for social work that could alleviate the pain and bitterness that widows experience consequent to their bereavement. Figure 2 on the following page shows a map of Matabeleland North, highlighting Binga, the demarcation of this study which has two regions, Binga North and Binga South. Binga North is peri-urban and Binga South is predominantly rural.

Figure 2: The map of Matabeleland North Province showing the demarcation of the study.

Matabeleland North Province



Source: Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency Matabeleland North Provincial Report Census (2012:4)

4

4.6 THE TARGET POPULATION

Target population refers to “only those cases that theoretically might be selected as research participants, those who are potentially accessible to the researcher…” (Yegidis *et al.,* 2012:195). The target population of the study included widows and social service providers in Binga District in Matabeleland North. The 2012 census results indicate a total female population of 75 356 (Zimstats, 2012:4). Of the 75 356 of the total female population in Binga District, 8.3% were widows, translating into an approximate total of 6 255 widow. This constitutes a significant figure that justifies a study such as this one.

From this population, not all widows participated in the study; a sample was drawn from the entire population of widowssuch that what was established in the sample could be extended to the overall experiences of widows in Binga District.

4.7 SAMPLING

Sampling is a research “technique employed to select a small group with a view to determining the characteristics of a [larger] population” (Brynard *et al.,* 2014:56). The characteristics of the sample included a amrital status of widowhood, all ages groupos of the widows, they resided in the rural areas while key informants were social service providers for the widows experiencing challenges after the death of their husbnads. Sampling was done to enable the researcher to study only a small selected number of participants from the population rather than engage all the widows in the study. In this study, a non-probability homogeneous purposive and snowball sampling strategies were employed. In non-probability sampling, people are selected into the sample on the basis of “experience or the fact that they might be unusual or different from the norm; their selection is not a matter of pure chance” (Denscombe, 2010:25). Purposive sampling involves choosing participants taking into account their “potential to provide ‘rich’ information” of specific topical issues (Padgett, 2008:53). Snowball sampling strategy involves “identifying several participants who fit the study’s criteria and then ask[ing] these people to suggest a colleague, a friend or a family member” (Tracy, 2013:136). Purposive sampling is consistent with phenomenological research in which participants “share common experiences so that detailed patterns of meaning and relationships can be identified” (Gray, 2014:208). Snowball sampling strategy enabled the researcher to identity

other widows in the communities by asking from the widows that had already participated in the interviews where the homes of the other widows were located. Subsequently then, interviews were conducted on agreed dates and times.

Phenomenological research is the design that shaped this study and hence the sampling strategies used and the design of the study complement one another. Samples were selected for individual in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group interviews from the widows who experienced abuse after the death of their husbands. Further, a sample was selected from the social service providers to participate in the key informant interviews. Hennink, *et al.,* (2011:109) define an interview as "a conversation with a purpose" and an in-depth interview as "a one-to-one method of data collection that involves an interviewer and an interviewee discussing specific topics in depth."

Homogeneous purposive sampling was the most suitable sampling type for selecting widows because it made certain that the widows who participated in the interviews were victims of abuse and could share real accounts and experiences.

Purposive sampling of key informants guaranteed the involvement of experts with known service provision to widows who were victims of abuse. Their role in intervening in the circumstances of the widows made them appropriate participants in the study.These interviewees fully comprehended the widows' needs and challenges. Purposive sampling therefore guaranteed the involvement of experts in the key informants interviews of which other sampling methods would not guarantee this.

4.7.1. Sample size

Padgett (2008:56) suggests that when determining sample size, the researcher needs to go "an inch wide and a mile deep," suggesting that a smaller number is desirable for collection of intense information in a qualitative study. Due to the need for "intensity" and "homogeneity", as mentioned earlier, Padgett (2008:56) suggests a sample size of "6 to 10 participants." In the current study, a total of thirty-three participants were selected to participate. Twenty-four widows were part in the study of which ten widows participated in individual in-depth interviews while fourteen participated in two separate focus group interviews. Each focus group had seven widows who were participants. The size of focus groups was big enough to gather

information that the researcher needed. This is consistent with the ideas of Padgett (2008:100) and Hennink *et al.,* (2011:152) who suggest a size of three to fifteen participants to be engaged in focus group interviews.

Nine key informants comprising of people who provide assistance to widows participated in key informants' interviews. All the participants were selected from Binga North and Binga South so that both constituencies of the district could have representation of participants in the study.

4.7.2 Eligibility criteria

Not all widows and social service practitioners participated in this study. There was consideration of eligibility criteria in engaging participants of the study, specifically the widows' hurtful experiences.

4.7.2.1 Eligibility criteria for widows

To be eligible for this study's individual and focus group interviews, the participants were selected on the basis of homogeneity in that they had to have been widows residing in the study area who had experienced challenges after the death of their husbands. Widows residing outside Binga District were not part of the study. The widows resided in either Binga North or Binga South and this ensured representation from the two poles of the district. Binga North is peri-urban and Binga South is predominantly rural. The former Community Mobiliser for Ntengwe for Community Development Trust was contacted to assist in locating the widows as she previously worked with them in the programmes the organisation had for widows in the district. The widows that participated in the study were those who lost their husbands between 1997 and 2015 when the laws protecting women in Zimbabwe became effectively implemented.

4.7.2.2 Eligibility criteria for social service providers

As for key informant interviews, firstly, the participants were social service providers to widows who experienced abuse. All the key informants provided social services to the widows whose husbands died between 1997 and 2015.

The second criterion was that they should either have been professionally trained or indigenous social service providers. The professionals that participated in the study

included the District Social Welfare Officer, two Police Community Relations Liaison Officers, one District Development Officer and one District Magistrate. These have professional expertise in social service provision to the widows and their professional contributions and insight shaped this study in important ways.

Another criterion for social service providers comprised those that provide indigenous and traditional social services to the widows in the communities. These included the Chiefs and the Village Heads (*Sibbuku*). These were adjudged crucial participants since they live with the widows and provide support services on a daily basis and provide first-hand dispute resolutions among community members.

The last criterion for social service providers was their geographical location. The District Social Welfare Officer, the District Magistrate and the District Development Officer are located at the district offices which are central and handle all cases of the district and therefore they had a wealth of information on problems affecting widows in the district. Their positions in the district made them have considerable information on widows which was very useful for this study. As for the Police Community Relations Liaison Officers, the Chiefs and the Village Heads, two from each of the districts were selected to allow equal representation of the poles of the district. This was adjudged crucial for the study because views from both Binga North and Binga South were essential to enable comprehensive coverage and for drawing of conclusions about the entire district.

4.8 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection (Denscombe, 2010:4) is described as the way in which the researcher collects data from the participants of the study. For the purpose of this study, three different methods for data collection were used. The individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the widows for corroboration purposes while the key informant interviews were conducted with social service propviders. These are discussed below in detail.

4.8.1 Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In this first phase of the study, semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews, (Denscombe, 2010:175, Hennink *et al*., 2011:109; Padgett, 2008:103, Whittaker, 2012:38), were utilised to gather data from widows who became victims of abuse

(See Annexure C). Semi-structured interviews were used to enable the researcher to follow a systematic guide in conducting the interviews so that important information could not be missed concerning the experiences of widows after the death of their husbands. According to Nieuwenhuis (2013: 87) the advantages of using a semi-structured interview guide are the following:

> ...it is used in research to corroborate data from other data sources; in most cases a semi-structured interview schedule calls the participant to answer a set of predetermined questions; it does allow for probing for the ultimate clarification of answers; semi-structured interview schedules also define the line of inquiry.

In-depth one-on-one interviews were used to enable the widows to describe their individual and personal experiences in detail in their own terms and without interference as these were conducted in their own homes where they were in control of their environment (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:109). An interview, according to Stinger (2014:105) enables the participant to engage in a "reflective process" and "explore his or her experience in detail and reveal the many features of that experience…"

Interviewing as a data collection technique is amenable to the "feminist research" strategy (Dube, 2011:12) that informs this study. During the interviews, the researcher acknowledged the participants as 'experts and knowers' in re-telling their stories of challenges and abuses experienced.

4.8.2 Focus group interviews

In the second phase of the study, the widows participated in the focus groups interviews (see Annexure D). Braun & Clarke, (2013:108), Hennink *et al.,* (2011:136), Padgett, (2008:100) and Tracy (2013:167) all describe a focus group interview as "a group interview with 3 to 12 participants and marked by a discussion, question and answer interactive dialogue…" The logistics of bringing the widows together for the focus group discussion involved travelling for recruitment, making appointments and conducting the focus groups as the distance in their areas of residence was huge. The help of the former Mobilization Officer for Ntengwe for Community Development Trust played as she extended her service contacting the widows and keeping contact with the researcher. The value of focus groups interviews is that they enable the researcher to find information that would otherwise

have been missed during the one-on-one interviews with the participants (Hardwick & Worsely, 2011:85). Focus groups in this study also allowed widows to share ideas that emanated from their solid responses. The focus group interviews facilitated discussions among the widows and allowed them to comment on, compare and contrast their own experiences with those of others who had similar experiences (Hardwick & Worsely, 2011:85). Further the widows reminded one another of the events they would have forgotten which allowed them to reboot memories of their experiences. The individual interviews could not facilitate such an important interaction among the participants.

Quality in responses was further enhanced in that participants interacted and communicated during the interviews and shared responses in order to get experiences and opinions that individual interviews did not provide. The "empowering nature" (Hardwick & Worsely, 2011:85) of focus group interviews has been important in gathering information from abused participants and was critical for this study and consistently so with the therapeutic nature of the profession of social work. Before the interviewees could leave the venue, the researcher invited the participants to state if there were questions or issues that they needed to be covered which the interview had not covered (see Question 14 of the focus group interview schedule). This enabled thorough coverage of issues of their experiences and individual questions to be handled adequately.

4.8.3 Key informant interviews

The third phase of the data collection process engaged expert key informant interviews (see Annexure E). Key informant interviews, according to Padgett (2008:105),

> ...target highly regarded practitioners or other public figures…These individuals add a top-down perspective to a study that would otherwise be missed without their participation.

Key informants provided their expert opinions to supplement data collected in phases one and two of the data collection process. This enriched the data in this study and enabled the researcher to gather exhaustive information critical for formulation of a model for social work intervention proposed in this study.

The researcher developed special interviewing skills during the interviewing process in order to elicit information from the participants:

- The researcher created **rapport** by facilitating a trusting relationship with the participants which was made possible by visiting the participants before conducting the intetrviews with the former Ntengwe for Community Development Trust Community Mobilisation Officer who had worked with them on various projects. While the meaning of rapport has various definitions, Dundon and Ryan (2010:4) define it as "creating acceptance by the participants to your research project." Trust is "a firm belief in the honesty, integrity and reliability of another" (Nelson-Jones, 2009:52). It was necessary for the researcher to create this rapport with the participants so that they would have trust in the researcher for them to share their lived experiences (Culley & Bond, 2011:65). The visits enabled making appointments and preparation for interviews. The community members and the widows were familiar with the former Community Mobilisation Officer and had worked together in widows' projects. This increased trust on the researcher.
- Before interviewing the study participants, the researcher maintained "**comfortable physical closeness, seating arrangements and respected personal zones**" with participants (Cummins, Sevel & Pedrick, 2006: 125; Nelson-Jones, 2009:15). In all the interviews conducted, the researcher followed recommendations made by Cummins *et al*., (2006:125) that there is need to respect the personal space of the participants and keep the distance that maintains comfort and allows participants to determine the seating arrangement themselves. This was most important especially considering respect for gender differences that existed between the researcher and the widows who made the majority of the participants for the study.
- After introductions were made to set the tone for interviewing, an important skill that the researcher used at the onset of the interviewing process was **information giving.** Information giving, according to Cummins *et al.,* (2006:114), is "used by the social worker when the client is in need of useful knowledge." The researcher used this skill to provide clear information on what was expected from the participants and their roles in the interviews. Through information giving, the goal of the study was explained with emphasis on the

voluntary nature of participation of the participants in the study and informing them that withdrawal from the study or choosing not to respond to the questions would go without penalty. Also information was given to the participants that the researcher would require their consent to record the interviews and ensure confidentiality of the information they would provide. This information given to the participants of the study was on the consent form they signed before commencement of the study (see Annexure B).

- **Probing skills** were used during the interviews to direct the participants towards specific issues in the semi-structured interview schedules. Culley and Bond (2011:45) agree that probing skills are useful because they direct the conversation so that important issues are covered and the interview gains direction. A specific probing skill used was the open-ended questions in the interviews (see Annexure C), such as Question 5: *"Share with me the psycho-social challenges you experienced after the death of your husband"* and Question 9: *"What kind of help did you receive for the problems you encountered?"* (see Annexure D). Cummins *et al.,* (2006:107) emphasise the use of open-ended questions as they prompt the participant to explore issues that concern them. Additionally, the researcher used verbal prompts (Rice, 2015:1) to make sure that all important aspects of the interview were attended to and encouraged participants to extend their responses to realise depth. Gestural prompts were also used when the researcher continually nodded his head to encourage the participants to continue and expand their responses (Rice, 2015:1). Cummins *et al.,* (2006:127) put it correctly that prompts are means for "furthering responses" from participants without being intrusive. These researchers further support the use of utterances that the researcher continually used during the interviews such as *"hmm"*, as very useful in encouraging responses from the participants.
- As each interview progressed, **comfortable eye contact was maintained** by the researcher to show the participants that the researcher was actively listening and attending to them. Where participants were uncomfortable, eye contact was broken to restore the comfort (Culley & Bond, 2011:28, Cummins *et al.,* 2006:125).
- It would have been ethically incorrect to conclude the interviews without **checking the feelings of the participants during the interviews**. The

researcher checked the feelings of the participants during the interviews so that if there was any participant whose emotions were provoked, the individual would be referred for counseling as per arrangement. To that effect, Question 6 *"How do you feel right now about the situation you went through"?* and Question 15 *"Can each one of you share with me on the feelings that you went through at this moment?"* were asked (see Annexure D).

The skill of empathy, (Braun & Clarke, 2013:95, Padgett, 2008:19), enabled the researcher to be sensitive to the challenges that the participants were articulating during the interviews and discussions. However, caution was taken that the skill only facilitated dealing with the participants' issues in depth instead of the researcher getting emotionally involved himself.

At the end of the interviews, the researcher checked from the participants whether there were any other issues that had not been covered during the interview sessions that could also be discussed. This idea is supported by Braun and Clarke (2013:97) who emphasise that "when the interview feels like it has come to a natural end, check again whether there is anything else the participant wants to add..." The participants were then thanked for making time to participate in the study. Thanking participants is good research practice and is highly recommended at the end (Braun & Clarke, 201397, Whittaker, 2012:48).

4.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Trustworthiness refers to the fact that "the results of the study are believable and worth paying attention to," (Fenton & Mazulewicz, 2008:1). In order to enhance trustworthiness, data were collected using the "data triangulation method" (Denscombe, 2010:347). Firstly, three different data collection instruments (interview schedules, annexures C, D and E) were formulated on significant predetermined themes and used to collect data in three different ways from the participants: the individual semi-structured interviews with the widows, secondly, the focus group interviews with the widows and thirdly, expert interviews with service providers. This type of data triangulation is what Denscombe (2010:347) described as "informant triangulation.' Three different sources of information on the same challenges faced by the widows were used to get comprehensive data that supplemented each other on the widows' experiences.

In order to further enhance trustworthiness of the data collected, the researcher also used “space triangulation” in which the participants were from different social statuses and geographical backgrounds (Denscombe, 2010:347). Space triangulation enables different social backgrounds and locations of the participants to enhance representations and trustworthiness of data. In this study, participants were firstly widows who experienced challenges after the death of their husbands and come from socially lower and rural segments of the community.

As explained earlier, the expert key informant interviews comprised of officers and traditional leaders from different social and professional backgrounds. These participants came from different geographical settings: Binga North and Binga South. Such thorough data triangulation enhanced trustworthiness of the study.

During the interviews, important information was not missed out because follow up questions and prompts were used and these allowed the participants to give information in depth. The interviews were recorded to accurately capture all the information. Using three different data collection instruments in three phases of the study on varied participants ensured quality, objectivity, dependability and credibility of the results (D’Cruz & Johns, 2014:74; Zamboni, 2015:1). The data was mechanically and personally interpreted by the researcher according to predetermined themes and emergent themes. This enabled the researcher to pay particular and special attention to the collected data which was procedurally reduced to create meaning and interpretation of the experiences of widows in Binga District.

To further enhance trustworthiness of the data collected, an audit trail was created. Denscombe (2010:300) asserts that an audit trail should allow other readers to:

> ...follow the key path and key decisions taken by the researcher from conception of the research through to the findings and conclusions derived from the research.

In the audit trail created, the researcher first developed the proposal to conduct the study which was presented to the Social Work programme at the North-West University for other researchers and academic staff for their input and recommendations towards enhancing the quality of the research processes. On the academic staff’s satisfaction of the research procedures, the proposal was approved. The Higher Degrees Committee in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences also

made recommendations for improvement of the study which were incorporated. The proposal was then sent for ethical clearance (see Annexure A), after whcich the researcher proceeded to conduct the study. Before the researcher could conduct interviews with the participants in the study approval was sought and received from all selected organisations and gatekeepers. Thereafter, each participant signed a letter of consent (see Annexure B) to indicate that they understood their part in the study and all information and procedures such that they participated voluntarily.

All the conducted interviews were recorded (except for the magistrate and the police due to sensitive working environment) as raw data. The data were them transcribed verbatim (word-for-word) for thematic analysis (see Annexure F).

Before data the were analysed, member checking, (presenting the transcribed information back to the participants), was done to enable participants to have a view of the transcribed data so they could confirm these as a true reflection of the information they had provided, (see an email conversation between the researcher and one of the key informants in Figure 3). The names and personal email contacts have been omitted for confidentiality reasons.

Figure 3: Sample of an E-mail conversation used for member checking

To: The participant.

Firstly, I would like to thank you for participation in the study. The time we spent on the interview was very precious to me.

I write this email to you to forward the key informant interview conversation we had in December 2015. This is part of the research process which checks from the participants interviews held that no alterations were made or if there are any mistakes I have done, to suggest corrections. This helps check trustworthiness of the research process. The conversation has been transcribed verbatim from the interview recording I conducted.

May you please check through and indicate to me whether this is a true reflection of the conversation we had. I have attached the interview conversation to this email.

Thank you very much.

Email response

To: The researcher

Thanks for your email.... I have gone through the conversation and it is indeed a true account of the interview we had....all the best in the study.

Member checking involves "verification of preliminary findings by the study participants to guard against researcher bias" (Padgett, 2008:190). Analysis of data was done according to the predetermined themes and the sub-themes that emerged during the study to create consistency and this enabled drawing of sound and relevant conclusions and recommendations.

Table 1 below indicates how the researcher enhanced trustworthiness of the research.

Table 1: Strategies for enhancing trustworthiness

Strategy for enhancing trustworthiness	Description of procedures
Credibility	The researcher triangulated different data sources which included the individual widows in one-on-one interviews, the focus group interviews and key informant interviews.
Transferability	The researcher triangulated participants from different socio-economic classes which included widows from rural communities, key informants both at professional level (such as District Social Welfare Officer, District Magistrate and Community Relations Liaison Officer from the police) and those from traditional indigenous groups such as Chiefs and Village Heads. Also space triangulation was done. The participants were drawn from both Binga North and Binga South so that all cardinal poles of the district are represented in the study.
Dependability	The researcher created an audit trail which can be followed. Member checking was used to enable the participants to confirm the data that was captured and remove possible researcher bias. This was from the time the research proposal was developed to how data was analysed, findings

	presented, conclusions drawn and recommendations made. This is described in detail in confirmability of the study.
Confirmability	The researcher created an audit trail of the research process. The following events are traceable and can be audited: 1. Presentation of the research proposal at Department for other researchers' inputs and contribution towards the study. 2. Presentation of the study to the Higher Degrees Committees for input, recommendations and approval of the study. 3. Ethical clearance of the study by the ethical committee (see Ethical clearance attached as Annexure A). 4. Letter of consent signed by all participants before conducting the study and recording interviews (see Annexure B). 5. Individual one-on-one in-depth semi-structured interviews schedule for the widows constructed on relevant themes to capture all needed information with prompts for probing (see Annexure C). 6. Focus group interview schedule for interviews with the widows constructed on relevant themes and prompts used for eliciting information (see Annexure D). 7. Another interview schedule for the

	key informant interviews also constructed on relevant themes with prompts that elicited information from the key informants (see Annexure E). 8. All the responses of the participants were recorded after seeking their consent so that no data could be missed. The recorded interviews were then transcribed verbatim per theme and per question and the raw transcripts are attached (see Annexure F). 9. Member checking done (see email response from one participant in Box 1). 10. Data interpretation, presentation, conclusions and recommendations based on the information the researcher obtained from the participants.

4.10 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

A research instruments is defined as “a tool such as a questionnaire, interview schedule, survey or observation schedule used to gather data as part of a research project”, (Gray, 2008:400).

4.10.1 Interview schedules

Three interview schedules were utilised in this study. One interview schedule guided individual interviews with the widows (see Annexure C), the other one was used to guide focus group interviews in the second phase of the data collection process (see Annexure D). The third interview schedule guided interviews with the key informants (see Annexure E).The interview questions for the three interview schedules were organised around particular predetermined themes to enable participants to share in-depth sentiments of what they had experienced.

For the interview schedule that guided the one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the widows (see Annexure C), the following predetermined themes guided the questions that were asked in the interviews:

- Personal information of the participants,
- Psycho-social challenges and abuse experiences of the widow,
- Intervention measures for the challenges experienced by the widow,
- Factors influencing the choice of intervention sought by the widow, and
- Gaps that exist in intervention used.

4.10.2 Focus group discussions

As for the focus group discussion, the predetermined themes that comprised the interview schedule, (see Annexure D), are similar to those of the individual interviews with the widows since both the individual and focus group interviews required widows as participants who were victims of abuse and experienced various psycho-social challenges. There was also a need to capture data that individual interviews could not capture through focus group interviews; hence similar predetermined themes were used. However, the questions on the focus group interview schedule differed from the individual interviews to cater for the focus group setup.

4.10.3 Expert interviews

The interview schedule, Annexure E, for expert interviews had predetermined themes relevant to the social service providers in order to capture their expert knowledge about the challenges experienced by widows and how they intervene in their problems. These comprised the following predetermined themes:

- Personal work experience in helping widows,
- Factors contributing to abuse of widows,
- Legal policies and laws protecting widows and,
- Help offered to widows who fall victims of abuse.

Prompts were used by the researcher to nudge participants into sharing their experiences on the questions asked, thereby giving the researcher insight into the widows' challenges. Garthwait (2012:33) clarifies that prompts are "short words or sentences rather than questions used to encourage clients to continue to

communicate". These prompts were used for all the interviews conducted. An illustration of how the prompts were used in the interviews is shown in an extract of the interview schedule with the individual widows in Table 2.

Table 2: Illustration of the use of prompts

Predetermined themes *(indicated as "**themes"** on the interview schedule).*	**Questions asked during the interview (**indicated as **"questions"** on the interview schedule).	**Prompt used to elicit more and deeper information** (indicated as **"prompts"** on the interview schedule.
Psycho-social challenges and abuse experiences of the widow.	5. Share with me the psychosocial challenges you experienced after the death of your husband.	-Lost esteem -lost friends -blamed for husband's death -stressed -traumatised - failed caring for children -property taken away

During the one-on-one and focus group interviews with the widows, chiTonga language, the language spoken by community members of Binga District, was used. This enabled widows to communicate with the researcher freely and tell their stories without the language barriers. Key informant interviews, the Chiefs and the Village Heads, were interviewed using chiTonga language as well, as these are older people and could communicate confidently through the local language. The rest of the professional practitioners such as the District Social Welfare Officer, District Development Officer, District Magistrate and the Community Relations Liaison Officers were interviewed in English since they are conversant with the language. These were labelled "English" and the individual and focus group interviews conducted in chiTonga were labelled "chiTonga". All the audio recorded interviews were later transcribed verbatim for analysis. As the the researcher did not pre-test

the research instruments (interview guides) since the topic had the potential to evoke painful emotional feelings.

4.11 DATA ANALYSIS

Data are "materials collected or generated that are analysed" (Braun & Clarke, 2013:329). In the view of Hennink *et al.,* (2012:205) qualitative data analysis is described as:

> A process of immersion in data, through which you can identify and interpret the experiences of your study participants. It involves a process of discovery that enables you to remain close to the data and form an evidence-based understanding of the research issues.

Hardwick and Worsely (2011:114) add a different dimension to understanding data analysis in that they describe it as "creating order from chaos" meaning that analysis organises the data to facilitate interpretation and synthesis.

In this study, the researcher used the thematic data analysis method. Whittaker (2012:96) defines thematic data analysis as "identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in data". Braun and Clarke (2013:175) add also that thematic analysis is "a method for identifying themes and patterns of meaning across a dataset in relation to the research question." A theme "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some patterned response or meaning within the dataset" (Whittaker, 2012:99). A dataset is defined as "the total data used in analysis" (Whittaker, 2012:96). Braun and Clarke (2013:329) add that a dataset refers to "all the data items collected for a particular study or analysis." Other important concepts to understand are data item and data extract. Whittaker, (2012:96) defines a data item as "a particular interview or focus group" while a data extract is defined as "a passage that has been taken from a data item."

The collected data were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. This was accomplished by directly listening to each of the audio recorded interviews (data items) of the participants to make meaning of their stories. Transcribing data refers to "making a record of an interview or group discussion called a transcript for data analysis" (Hennink, *et al.,* 2011:211). The researcher read the questions again and again as he transcribed the data while at the same time listening to the responses

the participants gave to each question that was asked. This led to data reduction by reading the transcribed answers to the questions again and filtering the information; removing information that was not relevant to the study questions (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234). The data transcription key in Table 3 explains the symbols that were used during the transcription process to describe and indicate the behaviour of the participants during the interviews.

Table 3: Transcription key

Description of activity or behaviour	**Symbols used and examples**
Interruptions	Indicated by hyphen (-) where an interruption occurred
Emphasis	Caps were used to denote strong emphasis on a particular point, for example, "NOTHING…NOTHING!"
Held sounds	Held sounds are repeated and separated by hyphens, for example, "Aa-a-a-a-a-a" and "Ha-a-a-a-a" (sigh), "Hh-m-m-m".
Pauses	Shown by a series of dots (...) (a visitor came and interrupted. The interview was paused)
Exclamations	Shown by an exclamation mark (!)
Transcriber comments about text or behaviour.	(Participant hands it to the researcher to see the age Researcher tells the participant that she was born on 12 November 1959. The participant was 56 years old)).
Laughter	Ha-ha-ha-ha!

(Adapted: Braun and Clarke, 2013:165)

The data obtained from each of the questions were then put together as data extracts and compared to observe patterns in the issues participants shared with the researcher (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234). The data extracts were grouped according to

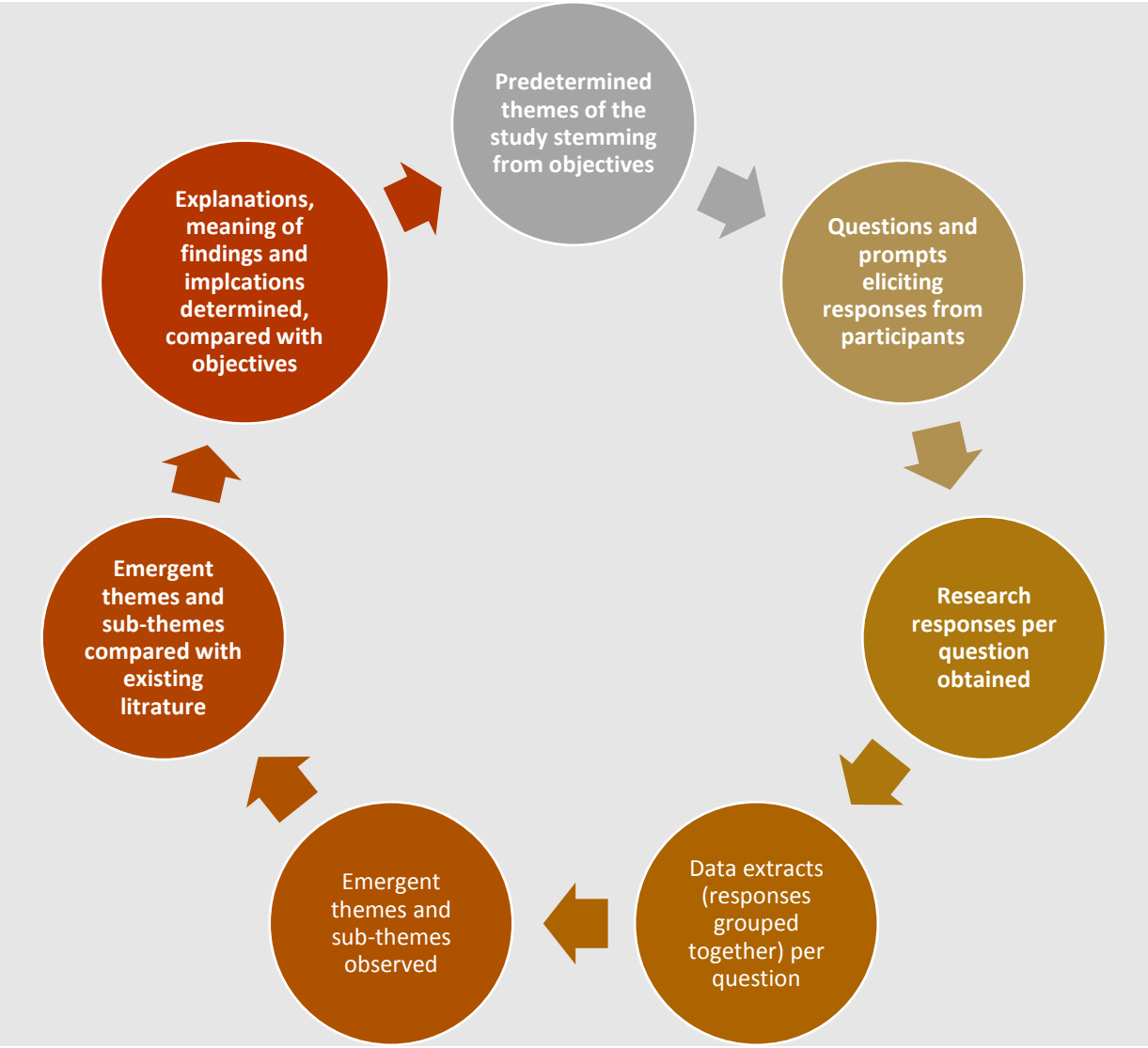
the predetermined thematic areas that the questions were organised on for all the three data items: individual, focus group and key informant interviews. The emergent themes from the data extracts were then observed and described textually as obtained from the participants and compared with existing literature to create meaning. Both the major themes on which the responses were organised and the emergent themes were used in logical data display (Hennink *et al.,* 2011:234). Table 4 below indicates how the emergent themes were determined.

Table 4: How the emergent themes were determined from data extracts

Question asked	**Data extracts (grouped responses) from data items (interviews).**	**Emergent themes from data extracts**
What kind of marriage were you in?	**Anna (BN):** I was in unregistered customary marriage. I was in a good marriage. My husband paid all the bride price as required. I was in a monogamous marriage. My husband had married before and the wife died and that's when he married me. **Maria (BN):** I was in unregistered customary Marriage. I was in polygamous marriage. My husband had three wives. One of the wives died and the two of us remained live. **Esnathi (BS):** My marriage had papers from the court and it was a customary marriage. Firstly, I was the only wife and as time went on he married another wife and we become 2 married to him.	-Unregistered monogamous customary marriage -Unregistered polygamous customary marriage -Registered polygamous customary marriage

During data analysis emergent themes were compared with the existing literature to find out similarities and differences and implications of the findings. This aided in drawing conclusions on the objectives of the study and ultimately on the psycho-social problems of the widows that the study investigated. The entire data analysis process that the researcher adhered to and followed in this study is shown in a summary diagram in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Summary diagram of the data analysis process

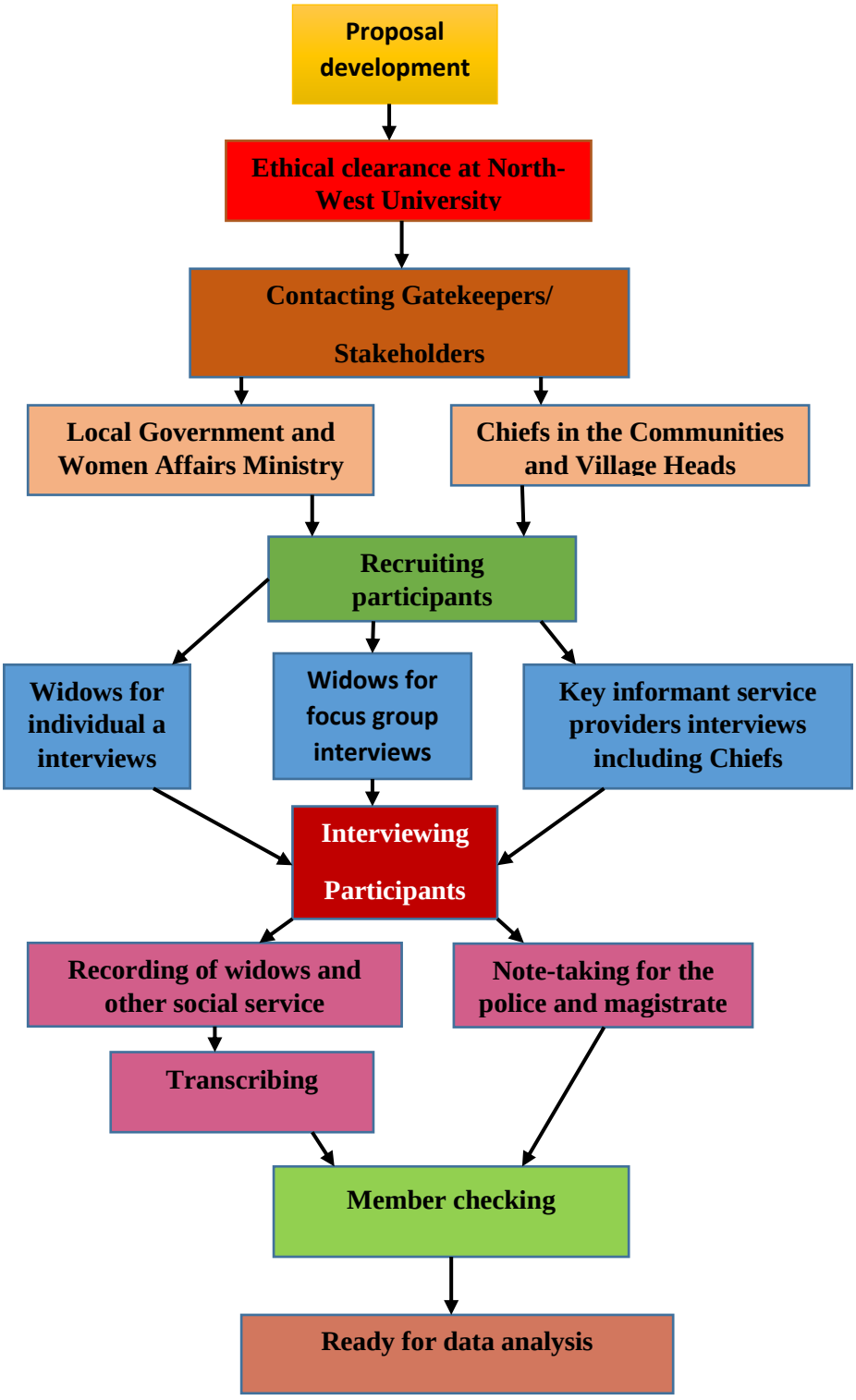


(Source: Dube, 2016)

4.12 RESEARCH PROCEDURE

Research procedure denotes the sequence of the research activities (D'Cruz & Jones 2014:98; see Figure 5). Figure 5 is a schematic representation of the sequence of the research activities followed.

Figure 5: Sequence of research activities



(Source: Dube, 2016)

As indicated in Figure 5 in this study, the researcher first developed a research proposal and then sought ethical clearance from the North-West University Ethics

Committee before conducting the study. After obtaining ethical clearance from the University Ethics committee, the researcher then contacted the Binga Local Government and Women Affairs Ministry District Office before getting to the participants of the study. In the communities, the Chiefs and the Village Heads were contacted for community protocol purposes. Contacting these stakeholders and or gatekeepers before conducting the study legitimised the researcher's engagement with the participants in the community and enhanced ethical responsibility. The former Community Mobilisation Officer for Ntengwe for Community Development Trust was also contacted to help with locating the participants of the study in the communities and she helped with **recruiting** the participants of the study after contacting the relevant stakeholders and gatekeepers.

Purposive sampling was used to select both the widows and the social service providers as explained in 4.7 in the preceding paragraphs. The **recruitment process**, (Braun & Clarke, 2013:62), began where the **widows** were contacted in person by the researcher and the former Community Mobilisation officer for Ntengwe for Community Development Trust for appointments for participation in the study.

The sequence of conducting the interviews were that individual interviews were conducted first followed by focus group interviews, conducted in both Binga North and Binga South. The key informants' interviews were conducted at the end so that a link in information from the individual and focus group interviews to key informant interviews could be created.

Most of the interviews were **recorded** so that all the information shared by the participants is captured, **except for the police officer and magistrate**. They asked that they should not be recorded due to sensitivity of their work environment. However, the researcher wrote notes during the interviews. Verification of the information recorded was done with informants soon after each interview to check whether the researcher had captured the right information during the interviews.

Permission for recording of the interviews was sought from the participants beforehand (as explained in the informed consent in 4.13.2 and in the consent form in Annexure B). This is why some participants working for the state in sensitive environments asked not to be recorded. Individual and focus group interviews were conducted in chiTonga language so that there would be easy communication

between the researcher and the participants. The key informant interviews were conducted in both chiTonga and English language. The Chiefs and the Village Heads were interviewed in chiTonga. This is mainly because these traditional leaders were not conversant with the English language and communication barriers would arise. The trained professional service providers like the District Social Welfare Officer, the District Development Officer, the District Magistrate and the Community Relations Liaison Officers were interviewed in English language because they are conversant with the language.

In all the three phases of the interview processes, the researcher administered the interviews himself to enable control of the environment and to read non-verbal responses from the participants as well as to develop empathic understanding for their feelings. The researcher was able to seek clarity and communicated further in idiomatic language since the researcher is conversant with the language spoken in Binga District. **Transcribing** and analysis of the data was done after data collection personally by the researcher to allow for accurate analysis and presentation of the information gleaned from the participants. **Member checking** was done to check whether the researcher had captured the right information before analysis began. The **data analysis** procedures and processes that the researcher adhered to are explained in 4.11 in the preceding paragraphs.

4.13 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher observed ethics during the study. To explain the concept of ethics, Brynard *et al.,* (2014:94) avers that it relates to what conduct is “right or wrong” on the part of the researcher. Braun and Clarke (2013:330) add that ethics relates to “practices concerned with ensuring we do research in moral and non-harmful manner.”

In this regard, the researcher obtained ethical clearance from North-West University Ethics Committee after meeting the requirements of ethical research of the institution.

4.13.1 Gaining access

Negotiating access to the participants is a very critical initial step in field work and authorities agree that it increases credibility of the study (D’Cruz & Jones, 2014:104,

Silverman, 2010:203). To reach respondents of the study, the researcher first contacted the Local Government Offices, and the Women Affairs Ministry office in Binga District. These form authoritative government structures of the district. The chiefs, even though they also participated in the study, were contacted for observing community protocol.

4.13.2 Informed consent

The researcher explained to the participants the aims of the study and the objectives to be achieved and also the possible time that would be needed for their participation. Further the participants were made aware of their freedom of choice to participate in the study (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011:34), and that withdrawal from the interviews at any time carried no punishment. Nevertheless, study participants were made aware of the fact that the study could be emotionally trying and they might not respond to some of the questions. The use of the recorder during the interviews was explained to the participants. Finally, all the study participants signed the informed consent form (see Annexure C).

4.13.3 The right to privacy

The privacy of the participants was ensured through observing confidentiality and anonymisation. Confidentiality ensured that the "information collected from the participants of the study is not revealed in the form that it can be linked or traced back to the individuals" (Hardwick & Worsley, 2011:35). To ensure anonymity, the names, personal contacts and physical addresses were not sought. Instead, pseudonyms for individual interviews were used. For the focus group interviews, the participants used letters of the alphabet and they were named Participant A to Participant G from Binga North while in Binga South participants used numbers as names and they were numbered Participant 1 to Participant 7. In the key informant interviews, titles of the study participants were used instead of personal details. In all the three phases of the interview process, the participants were made aware that the information they provided would be used for academic purposes only.

4.13.4 Deception of participants

In order to avoid deceiving the study participants, as many facts as possible were given to them. Information about the goal of the study, the participants' role, and that

the study was conducted for academic purposes, was explained before conducting the study.

4.13.5 Distress and emotional harm

Padgett (2008:69) warns that researchers need to avoid harm to the participants especially where sensitive and emotional topics are involved. In this study, the researcher avoided emotionally evocative questions. During the individual and focus group interviews, the participants were asked how they felt so that the researcher could refer them for counselling in the event of unforeseen emotional stressors. Questions 6 and 15 of the individual interviews and of the focus group interviews with the widows checked their emotional involvement in the study(see Annexures D and E). Before parting ways with each widow who participated in the study, participant was informed of where they could get support from a counsellor. Even though qualitative studies do not emphasise **debriefing**, providing information on available sources of support helped to serve the purpose of debriefing (Braun & Clarke, 2013:43).

4.14 LIMITATIONS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE STUDY

Limitations refer to circumstances that the researcher was not in control over and were in hindsight the best under specific situations (Glesne, 2016:214). The researcher encountered some practical limitations during the study but managed to deal with these problems so that the study could be successful.

Translating chiTonga language into English was challenging as some of the words and names used in chiTonga language are not translatable into English, for example *Busika* (a sour fruit used for making porridge in Binga District) has no English name since it is a local fruit.

There were other obstacles in conducting the study in the homes of the interviewees such as crying and attention seeking babies, visitors coming into the homes, and ringing cell phones despite the ground rules that had been made. The participants had to attend to babies, visitors and cell phones so the interview had to pause and then continue later but the recorder remained on so that the researcher could capture all aspects of the interview conversations and circumstances for transcribing purposes. The researcher at times had to remind the participants where the

discussion was and then continue. The distracted participants' feelings about their stories at times were altered by such disruptions: the gestures as well as the tone fluctuated often under such conditions. Prompting was used to get the participants back on track. Trevithick (2005:172) offers that prompting provides "a link between one statement and another in order to encourage further dialogue or by helping the individual to return to their unfinished sentences."

The physical location of the participants also became a problem in the research process. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to locate some participants of the study though others had relocated and hence the snowball sampling strategy was integrated so that other widows could locate the homes of their fellow widows. In snowball sampling the researcher asked the widows "if they knew anyone else" who is a widow and where stayed in their community to participate in the study (Braun &Clarke, 2013:57). This situation enabled the researcher to realise that purposive sampling was of significance in defining who would be involved in the study but snowballing determined the actual and physical location of other participants to the study. The two sampling procedures made selecting and locating the participants possible. Arranging dates and time with the participants, especially the key informant interviewees, forced the researcher to travel more than once due to other commitments the participants had.

Certain of the key informant interview participants such the Community Relations Liaison Officers in the police and the District Magistrate could not be recorded during the interviews. This is due to their sensitive work environments. The researcher however, wrote notes during the interviews and verified with the participants after the interviews whether all their views were captured in the notes. Non-verbal communications could have been missed during notetaking.

One participant was married outside Binga District and experienced some challenges as well. She was married to someone in Tsholotsho into a Ndebele tribe far away from Binga and when the husband died, she came back to her natal home in Binga. What the widow experienced may not be an accurate reflection of the practices of the baTonga people in Binga. Nevertheless, the researcher interviewed the widow and the data enriched the research.

4.15 SUMMARY

In this chapter, coverage of how the study was conducted has been comprehensively done. Not only did the researcher explain how the study was conducted, the challenges the researcher encountered are also detailed and how they were managed for the study to proceed successfully. The researcher gained more insight into qualitative research and essential skills for such enquiries. In the next chapter, analyses and presentation are the focal points.

CHAPTER FIVE

PRESENTATION, INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, data is presented, interpreted and analysed, with findings discussed based on information obtained from the thirty-three participants who took part in this study. As noted the study was conducted in three phases. Phase one of the study entailed individual interviews with the widows, phase two involved focus group interviews with the widows and the last phase, phase three, involved interviews with key informants.

The predetermined themes that the individual and focus group interviews with the widows included the following:

- Personal information of the participants;
- Psycho-social challenges and abuse experiences of the widow;
- Intervention measures for the challenges experienced by the widow;
- Factors influencing the choice of intervention sought by widows and the
- Gaps that exist in intervention.

The key informant interviews had different predetermined themes because the participants were not victims of abuse but rather they were social service providers to the challenges faced by widows and they provided information based on their work experience. The predetermined themes that were central to the key informant interviews included:

- personal work experience in helping the widows;
- Factors contributing to abuse of widows;
- Legal policies and laws protecting widows and
- Help offered to widows who fall victims of abuse.

This chapter presents findings from the study and the the emergent themes from the information provided. The data from the individual interviews, which form phase one of the study, data from the focus group interviews which make phase two of the study, and data from key informant interviews which formed phase three of thye study analysed. It is important to note that the names used in the individual interviews of this study are pseudonyms for confidentiality and anonymity purposes. For participants in the focus group interviews alphabet letters and numbers were

used. Those that come from Binga North had (**BN)** used for pseudonyms and letters of the alphabet used as a name, whilst those from Binga South took on **(BS)** as their pseudonyms.

5.2 PHASES ONE AND TWO OF THE STUDY: INDIVIDUAL AND FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Phases one and two of the study comprised the individual and focus group interviews respectively. The participants in these two phases of the study were widows who had experienced various challenges after the death of their husbands. The emergent themes and sub-themes during the study are also discussed.

5.2.1 Personal information of the participants

Personal information of the participants was sought during the study. Ten participants were part of the individual interviews and fourteen participants were involved in focus group interviews. The information in Table 5, from individual interviews, and Table 6, from focus group interviews, represents information that the participants provided about themselves during the interviews.

Table 5: Personal details of participants from individual interviews

Name of participant	Age in years	Area of residence	No. of children	Genders of children	Number of people in household	Level of education	Mode of sustenance
Anna (BN)	43	Sikalenge	5	3 girls 2 boys	9	Grade 7	subsistence farming piece jobs small business
Maria (BN)	48	Kelamenda	1	1 girl	4	Grade 2	selling Busika subsistence farming
Kumbayile (BN)	54	Kelamenda	1	1 boy	3	Grade 1	Nothing specified used to grow crops but now had a broken hand
Julia (BN)	37	Sikalenge	3	2 girls 1 boy	5	Form 2	subsistence farming Keeping chickens for sale ECD teacher
Choolwe (BN)	56	Sikalenge	7	5 girls 2 boys	4	Never went to school	subsistence farming selling Busika
Siphiwe (BS)	52	Simbala	1	1 boy	5	Grade 5	piece jobs like brick laying, fetching building stones, and fetching thatch grass
Esnathi (BS)	Unknown (lost identity document)	Simbala	2	1 boy 1 girl	4	Never went to school	subsistence farming piece jobs
Chipo (BS)	68	Simbala	5	4 girls 1 boy	5	Never went to school	piece jobs subsistence farming
Bina Chi (BS)	58	Simbala	1	1 girl	2	Never went to school	subsistence farming gardening selling vegetables
Esy (BS)	27	Simbala	3	1 girl	5	Form 2	subsistence farming

Table 6: Personal details of participants from focus group interviews

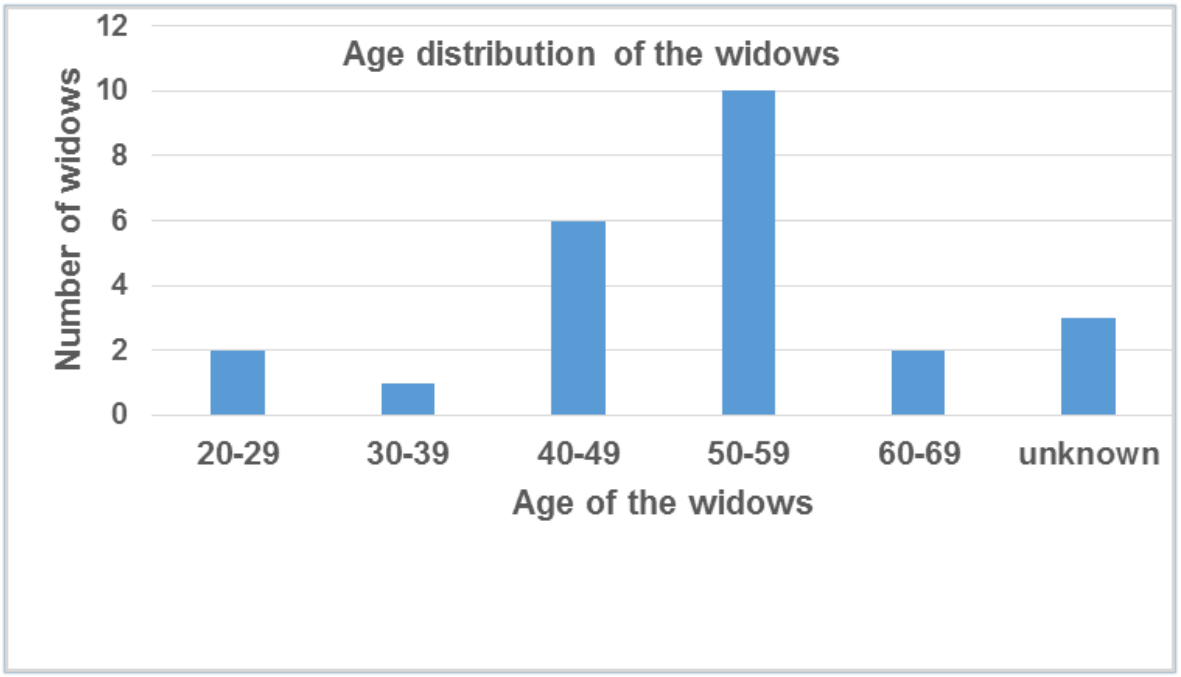
Name of participant	Age in years	Area of residence	No. of children	Genders of children	Size of household	Level of education	Mode of sustenance
Participant A (BN)	54	Kelamenda	2	1 boy 1 girl	3	Grade 1	-fending for myself in any way possible
Participant B (BN)	56	Sikalenge	4	all boys	4	Grade 1	-gardening -selling Busika
Participant C (BN)	48	Kelamenda	1	boy	4	Grade 2	-subsistence farming
Participant D (BN)	40	Sikalenge	3	1 boy 2 girls	5	Form 2	-small business -works at ECD but has not been paid
Participant E (BN)	42	Sikalenge	5	2 boys 3 girls	9	Grade 7	-small business -gardening -selling any commodity like fish
Participant F (BN)	43	Sikalenge	3	2 boys 1 girl	6	Grade 7	-gardening -selling vegetables
Participant G (BN)	Unknown	Sikalenge	3	1 boy 2 girls	5	Grade 1	-gardening
Participant 1 (BS)	55	Simbala Centre	5	4 boys 1 girl	7	Grade 7	-subsistence farming
Participant 2 (BS)	53	Simbala	1	girl	5	Grade 4	-piece jobs
Participant 3 (BS)	28	Simbala Chisawu	3	all girls	6	Form 2	-subsistence farming
Participant 4 (BS)	68	Simbala	5	1 boy 4 girls	6	Never attended school	-subsistence farming
Participant 5 (BS)	58	Simbala	1	girl	2	Never went to school	-subsistence farming
Participant 6 (BS)	Unknown	Simbala	2	1 boy 1 girl	4	Never went to school	-subsistence farming
Participant 7 (BS)	56	Simbala	5	2 girls 3 boys	5	Never went to school	-subsistence farming

The twenty-four widows, ten being participants in individual interviews and fourteen being participants in two separate focus groups comprising of seven members each, provided their personal details. This provided the researcher with a full “biographical image” of the participants. The personal details included names, ages, areas of residence, number of children they have and their gender, the size of household, level of education and mode of sustenance.

5.2.1.1. Ages of the widows

The ages of the widows gives an indication of the psychosocial developmental stage of the widow at the time she was widowed. Young widows experience challenges being young developmentally, inevitable psycho-social challenges which are heavy and stressful. The age ranges of the twenty-four participants who were widowed and experienced challenges after the death of their husbands was from twenty-seven to sixty-eight years. Concentration was on the age at which they were when the study was conducted, and not on when they they became widowed. Figure 6 depicts the age distribution of the widows who participated in the study.

Figure 6: Age distribution of the widows (n=24)



As portrayed in Figure 6 the majority of the participants, (sixteen of twenty-four), were between the ages of forty to fifty-nine years. Three participants were aged between twenty-five and thirty-nine years whilst only two participants were aged sixty eight years. Three participants did not know their ages and could not provide identity documents for the researcher to determine their ages (Esnathi, BS), Participant G (BN) and Participant 6 (BS). This finding is markedly different from what the DHS found in Zimbabwe that 9.06% widows are aged between 15 and 49 years (Peterman, 2010:5). The findings of this study suggest that many women lose their

husbands from the ages of thirty to forty-nine. At this age, women reflect on what they have achieved in life and what else is possible to do in their lives (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:455). Upon reflection on the meaning of life, they see the emptiness of losing their husbands and hopelessness and loneliness. This implies that women in this age range in Binga are at high risk of psychological strain as this is a critical life stage. The importance of age in this study is that it apparently predicts the degree of the widow's attractiveness otr otherwise to men who want to inherit the widow and the possibility of being forced into levirate marriage. The younger the widow, the higher the chances of being forced into levirate marriage.

5.2.1.2 Areas of residence for the widows

The participants to the study resided in various areas in Binga District. The majority, (ten of twenty-four), participants came from an area called Simbala area. These were Siphiwe (BS), Esnathi (BS), Chipo (BS), Bina Chi (BS), Esy (BS), Participant1 (BS), Participant 4 (BS), Participant 5 (BS), Participant 6 (BS) and Participant 7 (BS). The Sikalenge area of Binga had eight widows participating in the study (Anna (BN), Julia (BN), Choolwe (BN), Participant B (BN), Participant D (BN), Participant E (BN), Participant F (BN) and Participant G (BN)), while the Kelamenda area had four participants (Maria (BN), Kumbayile (BN), Participant A (BN) and Participant C (BN) in the study. Simbala Centre and Simbala Chisawu area had one participant each (Participant 1 (BS) and Participant 3 (BS) respectively. The areas of residence of the participants of the study were predominantly rural and poverty-stricken. Widows residing in the rural areas fall mostly into the low economic status and are predominantly dependent on husbands for their daily needs. Social feminists have long advocated for the rights of lower class women who are abused in the home where their role has been socially constructed (Graff, 2012:3). In agreement with the social feminists, Chenube and Omumu (2011:3614) clarify that women who are dependent on men daily needs are prone to abuse by in-laws when their husbands die. The locations of the study participants indicate that the information obtained in the study came from various rural parts of the district, with a radius of about 100 kilometres, hence providing rich information for analyzing the experiences of widows in the district since Binga is predominantly rural.

5.2.1.3 The number of children the widows had and their genders

All the twenty-four participants of this study had children of various genders. The participant with the largest number of children was Choolwe with seven children whilst the smallest number of children in the study was one (Maria (BN), Kumbayile (BN), Siphiwe (BS), Bina Chi (BS), Participant C (BN), Participant 2 (BS) and Participant 5 (BS). From this finding, it can be seen that all widows had dependants who needed their support and these were their solitary burden as their husbands have died. From this finding, conventional wisdom tells that being a lonely provider to dependants with scanty resources has unbearable consequences for the widows since their already depleted coping mechanisms to the widowhood phenomenon aggravated their impoverished circumstances.

In terms of the gender of the participants' children, there were more girls than boys. There were a total of forty-two girls and thirty boys for all the study participants. It emerged from the study that eleven widows had more girl children than boys as compared to four widows with more boys than girls. Further, four widows had girls only and two widows had boys only. Three widows had balanced genders among their children.

The genders of children have an impact in terms of the way widows are treated under customary law. The higher the number of girl children in the widows' families, the increased are the oppressive tendencies from in-laws on matters regarding succession of property. The discriminatory nature of the traditions on the girl child in Binga District is a significant predictor of property inheritance problems (Dube, 2011:86) resulting in psycho-social problems such as stress, loss of self-esteem and loss of valuable income sources and assets needed for supporting the widow herself and the children left under her sole care. Discrimination that is based on gender amounts to sexism and highly condemned by radical feminist theorists who view it as a way of perpetuating patriarchy attitudes and tendencies (Lord, *et al.*, 2012:18). This explains why a widow with female children finds it hard to inherit any property in the context of customary practices in Binga District.

5.2.1.4 The size of the widows' households

The participants also provided information on the size of their households. This determined the burden of supporting and fending for family members that the widow

took care of. This had a negative impact on economic resources and meeting the needs of family members under the widow's care. The study revealed that most of the widows (sixteen of twenty-four) had large family sizes. On average a widow has six people under her care. This suggests that they took care of other extended family members. The study also found that only one widow took care of fewer extended family members compared to her own children. This suggest that other children had grown up and were able to take care of themselves and most probably had moved to live in other places. This was the case with Choolwe (BN) who had seven children, with five girls and two boys but her household had four people under her care. The girls she bore got married elsewhere and stayed with their husbands and families.

Four widows in the study had families that tally with the number of children that they had. This might suggest that they lived with their children only. On the other hand, three widows lived with younger children when the elder children left their home. This has been the case with Chipo (BS), Participant B (BN) and Participant 7 (BS).

5.2.1.5 Educational levels of the widows

Another important biographical aspect that the study gathered was the education level of the participants. Education has significant influence on how widows cope with grief and loss. Chenube and Omumu (2011:3620) argue that widows that received formal education faired better with grief and loss than those with less formal education. It is important to distinguish between formal and informal education where formal education is classroom-based under the guidance of a trained person such as a teacher whilst informal education is gained through interaction with others and socialisation with significant others (Eaton, 2010:2). Seemingly, lack of formal education has a significant impact on successful coping mechanisms. It emerged from the study that not all the twenty-four participants were functionally literate. From the twenty-four participants, 12 had never gone to school. Twelve participants had only managed to get primary education which means that they were disadvantaged in terms of literacy. They could not read and understand the contents of legal instruments and the consent form for participating in this study until the researcher explained in their own language. Four participants in the study had managed to attain lower secondary education. These managed to read and sign the consent forms by themselves. The findings of the study are similar to those of Van De Walle

(2011:5) where the area of Mali, 88% of women were not formally educated. Steady (2006:80) blames lower educational levels for of lack of development in Sub-Saharan countries. In Bulawayo, Izumi (2006:42) observes that poorly educated women could not articulate their rights and easily gave up the fight for their rights in cases of property inheritance. This means that a lack of formal education disempowers widows in such a way that they are unable to fight for themselves where oppression is experienced. The widows who participated in the stidy were prone to abuse without any hope for self-initiated recourse to just and constitutional ends.

5.2.1.6 Modes of sustenance for widows.

The study findings show that widows had more than one way of fending for their families. They engage in agricultural activities such as tilling the land and gardening. Also piece jobs and small business (like selling *Busika* and vegetables from the gardens) were part of their survival strategies. The main form of agriculture is subsistence farming. In this study the majority of the participants (fifteen of twenty-four) survived by subsistence farming. They grew maize, sorghum and millet as their main crops. Subsistence farmers have been defined as “those who grow what they eat” (Waters, 2007:15) One can deduce that if widows survive by tilling the land and gardening, it means they own certain portions of land to engage in agricultural activities in Binga District. However, the definition of subsistence farming implies that widows in the district grow crops for food. In short, the widows engage in “hand-to-mouth farming” meaning they have nothing to keep for commercial purposes. With weather conditions having worsened steadily over the years, their conditions have worsened. This shows that widows are affected by low socio-economic conditions. Lowly economic class widows have been found to be affected negatively by the cumulative consequences of losing their husbands (Chenube & Omumu, 2011:3619). The findings of the study also confirm those of International Regional Information Networks (IRIN) (2015:1) that land, mainly for agriculture, is a source of livelihoods, sustenance and a major economic base for the women population in Zimbabwe with an estimated 86% of women in this country surviving on subsistence farming.

5.2.2 Psycho-social challenges and abuse experiences of the widows

This segment of the study explored the psycho-social challenges experienced by the widows after the death of their husbands in both the individual and focus group interviews. This addressed the **objective that sought to analyse the psycho-social problems faced by widows in their communities.** The sub-themes under which their responses were analysed included the type of marriage entered, husband's death, experiences after the death of the husband, psycho-social challenges experienced after the death of the husband and feeelings of the widows about their experiences.

5.2.2.1 Type of marriage entered

The widows were asked about the type of marriage that they had entered into before the death of their spouses. The majority of the participants, (twenty-two of twenty-four), were in customary marriages. A sub-theme that emerged is unregistered customary marriages as a part of customary marriages. These marriages are not recognised legally and not registered under the Customary Marriages Act of 2001, Section 3 of Zimbabwe (Chirawu, 2012:2). The section nullifies the legality of any marriage that is not registered in terms of the Marriages Act of 2001. Customary marriages differ from civil marriages in that civil marriages are registered under general law. Among the participants that were in customary marriages, eighteen revealed that their customary marriages were not registered. This finding of the study confirms that of Share (2013:1) that in Zimbabwe, "84 percent of the customary marriages" were unregistered and these presented widows with many challenges despite the fact that women had routinely entered into them. Hosegood, McGrath and Moultre, 2009:292) found that in KwaZulu Natal Province of South Africa, whether registered or unregistered, customary marriages are common with the majority being among the population loyal to the Shembe religion. Another important sub-theme that emerged was that registered customary marriages which are recognised by the law. In this study, four of the widows indicated that their customary marriages were registered. This being the case with the study participants, one learns that the widows in this study are vulnerable to many untold psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands because customary marriages, whether

registered or unregistered, do not guarantee them protection by abuse from their in-laws.

Among the customary marriages that the study participants were engaged in, an important sub-theme to emerge was polygamous customary marriages. In polygamous customary marriage “a man is married to more than one wife” (Chirawu, 2012:3). The marriages may be registered or unregistered under customary law. This was the most common feature to emerge from the study with the majority of the participants, (sixteen of the twenty-four) being in polygamous marriages. Only a minority (three of the twenty-four), widows in customary marriages were in a monogamous marriage. Despite the fact that polygamous marriages are widely condemned for not protecting women, they are the common marriage practice in Zimbabwe and can be registered under the Marriages Act (Chapter 5:07) as Dube (2013:7) and Share (2013:1) confirm.

Civil marriages were among the least of the marriage types that participants had entered into. The current study found that only three out of the twenty-four participants were in civil marriages. This is despite the advantages and the protection women have under civil marriages (Dube, 2013:6). Civil marriages protect women against discrimination and property grabbing from the in-laws yet in this study such marriages are in the minority. From this finding, it seems that it is commonplace to be in a customary marriage in Zimbabwe which does not guarantee safety of the widow upon the death of the spouse than civil marriage. One can deduce that people in Binga District are likely to enter customary marriage yet cannot foresee the challenges this union brings to the widows upon the death of their spouse.

5.2.2.2 Husband’s death

The participants were asked to provide information on the death of their husbands. To this end, the idea was to capture when and how the participants’ husbands died. The participants gave varied responses as to when and how their husbands died. However, the study established that all the participants’ husbands died in or after 1997 when the Intestate Succession Act law for protecting widows from harassment from in-laws on grounds of inheriting property was legislated (Pfumorodze, 2010:44). The law protects the surviving spouse from difficulties of inheriting property or any

other assets that are left behind in the event that the spouse dies without leaving a written will. From this finding, one would expect the widows to have been protected fully by the legal system from discrimination on the basis of being a widow.

It emerged from the study that in Binga illness takes a toll on men leaving behind their wives and children. In the study, twenty-three widows indicated that their husbands succumbed to illness mainly HIV and AIDS. Only one participant's husband collapsed and died with no specific illness identified as a cause of death. Probably this could have been a heart attack or stroke. This is what the participant had to say:

> *"I went to church and when I came back people told me that your husband had collapsed in the toilet. I took him to hospital where he was admitted for 4 days and was discharged and when we were at home, he just died. There was no specific illness that he had"* (Participant G (BN)).

For the participants that indicated that their husbands died from illnesses, many of them specified that their husbands had died from HIV related illnesses as they described the symptoms commonly linked to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The study however could not establish why the widows were still alive when their husbands had died some years ago. Only speculations could be made that widows were also infected by HIV and probably on medication. From this emergent theme and finding of the study, polygamous marriages are a potential causative agent for HIV and AIDS infections leading to death. This is what some participants had to say:

> *"My husband died in the year 2000 and he died from this new disease" (Participant A (BN)).*

> *"He got ill and his feet were swelling. He had HIV".* (Participant C (BN)).

> *"My husband died in 2012 and at hospital they said he had HIV and AIDS."* (Participant 1 (BS)).

To confirm the findings of this study, Ndlovu (2013:3) exposes that in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe is one of the countries that has been hardest hit by the HIV and

AIDS pandemic leading to many socio-economic difficulties. Ndlovu alleges that even churches are struggling to handle the consequences of the pandemic.

Traditional belief systems play a central role in the life of some people in the district. This was the case with one widow who mentioned that her husband died from alleged witchcraft, a belief that is long held in the district to be one causes of death. This is what Choolwe (BN) had to say with regards the death of her husband:

> *"People put muti ((witchcraft)) in his way and when he crossed over he got sick and died."*

The researcher argues that the complexity nature of belief in witchcraft causes divisions among family and community members leading to further victimisation of those implicated in practising it. Mgbako and Glenn (2011:390) share that in Ghana people accused of witchcraft are often beaten and punished by mob justice or have their property destroyed. This threatens societal cohesion among the community members.

5.2.2.3 Experiences after the death of the husband

The participants in the study were also asked to describe their experiences after the death of their husbands. A myriad responses that reflected widows' experiences during and after the funeral of their husbands were given by the participants.

The emergent theme from the participants' responses that the majority of the participants (eighteen of twenty-four) experienced was challenging misunderstandings with their in-laws on a variety of issues after the death of the husbands both in Binga North and Binga South. Only a minority of the participants (six of twenty-four) did not experience any challenge. From the ecological perspective, Teater (2010:26) describes such experiences of widows as an unfavourable "person-environment fit." On a more interactional level to understanding this phenomenon, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:29) describe such experiences of the widows as negative transactions. This is an indicator that upon the death of their husbands, widows become vulnerable to a host of psycho-social challenges in their lives.

The theme that emerged is that widows lack the comfort and support they need upon the death of their husbands. It emerged that during the funeral of their husbands,

public humiliation is one of the experiences widows encountered. The study revealed that part of the humiliation meted on the widows by in-laws openly accused the widows of being responsible for the death of their husbands. Additionally, the study also identified that in-laws even had the audacity to tell the corpse in the coffin words that reflected badly on the widow. Some participants revealed the following during the study:

> *"During the funeral they insulted me, each spoke as they wanted to. A-a-a-a! They spoke all they wanted to say! (Exclaiming). When we were at the graveyard, they spoke to the corpse and said "We told you to divorce this Nambia woman and you ran away from us and went to live with her in Simbala! See now what has happened to you! You never even said goodbye to us. Is this how you say good bye to us? They asked me why I ran away with him to Simbala. This is why he has died now",* (Siphiwe (BS)).

> *"Later, news started spreading that I bewitched my husband. Then they also said if it's not you then it is the other wife because he got sick there. ……The in-laws accused me and the other wife of killing him"* (Bina Chi (BS)).

> *"A-a-a-a-a-a! (Participant pauses). The way the relatives of my husband treated me changed. They first said that I gave him a love potion when he was coughing. So they still hold to that"* (Participant 1 (BS)).

> *"They spent about 1 hour shouting at the corpse at the graveyard. Even during body viewing. All the people who attended the funeral were surprised and quiet. My cousin even said that they are not shouting at the corpse, they are shouting at you because the corpse cannot hear. They poured all sorts of insults"* (Participant 2 (BS)).

The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013:4) asserts that depriving the widow of the much needed support during the time she needs it the most constitutes emotional abuse on the widow. According to Idialu (2011:6) emotional abuse causes intense psychological pain that affects the widow for the rest of her life. This is what social workers fight around the clock to prevent from happening and where it has

happened, they intervent to rehabilitate the victims. Further, behaviour such as criticising the widow and condemning her for the death of her husband an emotionally abusive behavior (The Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013:4). Belief in witchcraft and accusing the widow of bewitching the husband can significantly contribute to the emotional abuse of the widow (Dube, 2011:110), as was the case with Bina (BS), which is then used to justify abuse of the widow by in-laws.

From the findings of this study, widows' emotional wellbeing was continually destabilised as they faced double sources of mental stress: the death of the husband which comes with insurmountable stress and the in-laws who never spare the widow from accusations over the death of the husband. It means that the widows experience widowhood at individual level and at the immediate environmental level.

One other stressful experience after the funeral that emerged as a theme in the study was that widows were subjected to widow sexual cleansing by their in-laws. Customarily, this is done by the brother of the deceased and the widow. This is one traditional practice that is enforced and maintained by in-laws in Binga District. They believe that sexual cleansing ensures that the widow is freed from the evil spirit of the dead. However, it appears that this enduring practice is receiving unwelcome responses from some women who fear contracting HIV and AIDS. In this study, the participants revealed the following:

> *"The problem came during the cleansing ceremony. The discussion amongst elderly women was that it should be done sexually with a relative, but the major issue was that he was married. The wife refused and was saying the husband will contract HIV",* (Participant B (BN)).

> *"…The cleansing ceremony was stopped because all of us [two widows who were in polygamy] refused to be sexually cleansed"* (Participant D (BN)).

Lomba (2014:34) found that the widow cleansing practice cuts across cultures and nations and is acceptable in Malawi as opposed to disliking it as the widows in the current study have shared. The practice is perceived to be protective to the widow's future sexual life. Gunga (2009:170) adds that sex is seen as crucial to cleansing in

certain cultures and is performed by an experienced person in a cleansing ritual. Whilst sexual cleansing is viewed as important culturally, it is however, critical to point out that this practice is usually done without the consent of the widow whose sexual life allegedly needs cleansing. It means that the sexual and reproductive rights of the widow are violated under the pretext of cultural norms.

Levirate marriage is one of the themes that emerged in this study. Widows are expected to enter into levirate marriages with one of the brother in-laws as a manifest way of practising traditional customs. The refusal of the widow to be remarried goes with punishment such as the in-laws' refusal to cleanse the widow and neglecting to offer support to the widow's children. This is one of the challenges that widows indicated as a driving force for notorious misunderstandings with their in-laws in Binga District, especially in the wake of HIV and AIDS. It can be deduced from the statements of the widows that men in Binga District still brave to inherit wives despite the HIV and AIDS pandemic that is killing many people in Zimbabwe and beyond. Punishment is subsequently meted upon the widow and her children. The participant's words below indicate this problematic and enduring practice:

> *"The problem came from the traditional marriage of the widow as we do it in Tonga tradition after the funeral. I refused and also the other wife refused to get married to the brother to our late husband. They then punished us by not cleansing us"* (Julia: (BN)).

> *"They had already given me a husband before cleansing. The brother in-law had already said he will marry me before I knew it. All the relatives fought me that I should get married and why am I refusing. I stood my ground and refused to enter into this [levirate] marriage… From that time they never had interest in even supporting the child who is now going to Grade 3. They don't even know him and they only know him when you are together. When he is alone they can't recognise him"* (Participant D (BN)).

Just so, Mughal (2010:101) found that in Pakistan, Badria, a widow, was beaten by her in-laws until she lost four of her teeth after refusing to be forced into a levirate marriage.

With regards to the findings of the study, it seems that the need for continuation of the practice of levirate marriages weighs more than the fear of HIV and AIDS in many societies. Further, the observance of the right of the widow to choose their own "successor partner" upon the death of her husband is minimal as in-laws make provisions in advance for marriage within the family.

Sometimes the in-laws show contradictory emotions towards widows. Sometimes they accuse the widow of killing her husband, suggesting that they cannot tolerate living with her as she killed their son. In contradiction, they also would still want to retain her through levirate marriage. Over and above cultural observance, levirate marriage is a typical example of commoditizing women, again a form of contravening their human rights. Radical feminists critise such a cultural practice and see it as a partrichal tool to control women in society.

Another important theme that emerged in the study was property inheritance disputes. Amongst other challenges that widows experienced after the death of their husbands, property appropriation and sharing of assets was evident. This is what some participants experienced in Binga North (BN) and Binga South (BS):

> *"After the funeral there were many other problems like there were problems with sharing of domestic animals"* (Anna: (BN)).

> *"The sister said to me that your marriage certificate is only a paper you did and doesn't work here so you want all this property to be yours? Then she told me that "I am telling you Nambia woman, you can't stay here! Leave this place and go and build your home somewhere!"* (Participant 2: (BS)).

> *"My husband was put to rest well, the problem came [at the point of] sharing of property. During that time, everything was put outside and they said show us what is yours because we are taking everything"* (Participant E: (BN)).

These findings of the study confirm those of Rusere (2010:1) who recorded a public media story of the Zimbabwean Regional Integration Minister, Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga, who could not inherit her husband's estate after his death because the in-laws grabbed them. A similar incident was recorded in Bulawayo, the

second capital city of Zimbabwe, where a woman lost all her houses and property to grabbing the in-laws (Maphosa, 2013:1). One can deduce that property inheritance is one factor that is at the helm of widows' abuse in the communities. This is probably because poverty forces people to fight over the property and assets of the deceased person despite the fact that the deceased's children suffer in the aftermath. From another angle, disregarding the suffering children of the deceased through property grabbing becomes a sign of cruelty and greed on the part of the in-laws. This implies that it is not the widows only who become victims and sufferers; children of the widow are hardest hit and their future is adversely affected.

Another emergent challenge from the study that widows experienced was the risk of physical assault upon non-compliance with the demands of their in-laws. This was a risk and a threat to their health and personal integrity. Beating up of widows for non-compliance to the demands of the in-laws means that the widows are forced to do what the in-laws want and there is no room for negotiating amicably on the issues in dispute. One can deduce that the widows are under continuous oppression and they have no power to voice their concerns on matters that affect them and their children. The widows had the following to say:

> *"The problem started when they were fighting us over the land after the funeral. The relatives wanted to take the land and we were promised to be beaten over that land. I left and re-joined my [natal] family"* (Participant B: (BN)).

> *"My husband's brother said that I should go and show him the size of that land and if I don't do that properly he will beat me"* (Maria: BN)).

Other communities in Zimbabwe cannot compromise on their late relative's property as well, just like in Binga. In Buhera community, widows are not safe from physical assault too. As noted earlier in this thesis, five widows were physically assaulted when they resisted eviction from their marital homes left behind after the death of their husbands (Izumi, 2006:27). The writer notes that the widows did not report such abuse because they were afraid of the police's unfriendly interrogations.

Yet another theme that emerged in the study is personal isolation of the widow. It is evident from the study that due to confrontation with the in-laws, the widow may have no option but to isolate herself and keep her distance from the in-laws. Some

daughters in-law tended to dislike the widow since they feared and suspected that she might get married to their husbands. The widow finds herself either re-joining her natal family or building her own separate home on another piece of land far away from the in-laws. In analysing the movement of widows, it can be deduced that she leaves the in-laws in pursuit of peace and makes an effort to avoid misunderstandings. This is what some of the widows in this study said:

> *"It became hard for me to stay there. They gave me unfriendly looks. The daughters in-law also married in this home thought I was staying to get married to their husbands. So I had to leave their home and built my own home elsewhere"* (Participant A, (BN)).

> *"They sent me away from my home and I built my home there. That is why my huts look like they are falling"* (Participant 2 (BS).

> *"The problem started when we were fighting over the land after the funeral. The relatives wanted to take the land and we were promised to be beaten over that land. As for me, it gave me heartaches…I left and re-joined my original family" (Participant C (BN)).*

Returning to the natal family is a common phenomenon amongst the widows in Zimbabwean communities who experience abuse or threats to their wellbeing from in-laws when their husbands die. The findings of this study concur with that of Izumi (2006:41) who found that out of 143 widows who participated in a study in Zimbabwe, 43 returned to their natal homes after evictions from their land and houses by their in-laws. The responsibility then rests upon the natal Village Heads to allocate them land to re-settle. It is clear from the study that the natal family of the widow is a welcoming and a safe place for the widow and her children. It can also be said from the findings of the study that the relationships between the in-laws and their daughters in-law tend to be weak and cannot be sustained after the death of the widows' husbands who usually have stronger bonds and relationships to their wives.

Widows protected from abuse of their in-laws by Civil Marriages Act encounter stressful long court processes. The study revealed that in cases where widows seemed to be protected by the Civil Marriage Act against abuse by in-laws and property appropriation, unfamiliar and stressful court processes ensure. The signing of the legally binding papers of transferring ownership of property and money

normally is a lengthy process which in many instances involves the in-laws as witnesses. Siphiwe (BS) had this to say:

> *"A-a-a-a, I suffered…(*pauses)*, paper work in High Court! ((Exclaims). The money that my husband left in the bank and that all papers to be in my name, a-a-a-a-a, I suffered!"* (Exclaims*).*

The in-laws are normally not cooperative and become disinterested where they know that they would not gain anything eventually. The study found that the court processes are not only unfamiliar, but they are demanding and lengthy. The widows also cannot find easy access to the court officials to sign their papers due to judicial officers' congested workloads. This was the experience of one widow at the High Court in Bulawayo:

> *"When I submitted the papers to the magistrate, I was told that the Judge is busy to sign. That was a Friday... I sat down in the High Court until I fell asleep. I woke up and even cried inside the High Court until I fell asleep again"* (Siphiwe (BS)).

Whilst this study revealed that legal intervention was sought by some participants, Dube (2011:110) found that widows normally lack the energy to take legal action when their in-laws grab property left behind when their husbands died. Dube (op cit) also argues that widows experience intense psychological stress which lessens their appetite to follow up on the demanding court process with limited resources.

One can deduce that widows' ability to seek professional legal recourse decreases due to stressful procedures and processes. This means that widows find it hard, energy-sapping, stressful, and financially demanding to follow legal recourse on their matters.

5.2.2.4 Psycho-social challenges experienced after the death of the husband

In this study, participants were asked to share the psycho-social challenges they experienced after the death of their husband. Sharing of such challenges gives an indication of their psycho-social wellbeing.

From the study, four main themes emerged as psycho-social challenges widows experience: stress, loneliness, loss of dignity and struggling to cater for needs of their children.

Stress is one prominent psycho-social challenge that the widows face after the death of their husbands. Of the twenty-four participants in the study, sixteen indicated that they experienced stress during and after the death of their husbands or intermittently. The stress emanates from losing their loved ones which brings deep and intrusive thoughts. This is especially the case where the widows confront problems which the deceased partner would have helped solve easily. This is what some of the widows indicated:

> *"When my husband died I developed a lot of worries and I got ill for about 1 month"* (Anna (BN)).
>
> *"It pained me in my thoughts until at the hospital I was diagnosed with High Blood Pressure* (Kumbayile (BN)).
>
> *"I used to have painful thoughts after his death. I used to think about who would help me fend for my children or renovate these huts"* (Esnathi (BS)).
>
> *"I had painful thoughts, even now they still attack me. These thoughts are very painful. People will think that at night I do sleep when I don't"* (Participant 2 (BS)).
>
> *"Yes, thinking too much is a problem as others have mentioned. I always think that if my husband was here, he would have done A, B, C and D, especially fixing these huts that we have"* (Participant 5 (BS).

Stress is one of the psychological challenges that widows go through at the individual level. Stress has been defined differently by different scholars. Tummers (2011:5) explains that "stress can indicate a force, strain or a generalised mental state requiring change." Van Heerden-Pieterse (2015:297) defines stress as "the body's reactions to any demands made upon it" and results in undesirable strain. The effect of stress on people differs from person to person. However, "depression shows anxiety, disturbed eating patterns, sleep disturbances, intrusive and persistent

thoughts" (Tummers, 20118). Martin-Matthews (2011:345) explains that when widows lose their husbands, they experience bereavement, loss and grief which contribute significantly to disturbed functioning in their lives. Among the disturbances in functioning, writers agree that stress is a common experience (Holden, *et al.,* 2010:10, Keister & Destro, 2008 438).

The proper functioning of widows is negatively affected, especially considering that widows normally lack the means to seek professional help to deal with their problems. Deep-seated stress can lead to depression as widows continuously experience different stressors in their lives.

Another of the thematic psycho-social challenge that emerged from the study results is that widows also experience loneliness. The death of their husbands with whom the widows used to share intimacy, the burden of caring for children, various life challenges and solving problems alone, leave the widows with an intense feeling of loneliness. The enduring existence of loneliness in the lives of the widows is amplified by lack of much needed support from the people around them. This is what the widows had to say about their experiences of loneliness:

> *"What was troubling me was that I felt so lonely and now who will help support my children? ... When he died, they said you know what killed him. When I tried to explain, they never got to understand it"* (Anna (BN)).

> *"I was thinking hard about the death of my husband and that I was left alone here and I do not come from this place. I come from Mucheso, about 90km away"* (Participant A (BN)).

> *"You know, even if you were not in a proper marriage and he didn't care well for you, when your husband dies you feel left alone"* (Maria (BN)).

Consistent with the findings of the study, Holden, *et al.,* 2010:4) and Trivedi *et al.,* (2009:38) also found that in social functioning widowhood brings loneliness to women who fall victims. Loneliness refers "to a feeling of uneasiness, yearning, despair, or nervousness that people sometimes experience when they are, or when they believe they are, lacking the company of others. It is a state of mind where

people have a constant need to be among other people" (Cherry, 2015:1) As a solution to their loneliness experience, Trivedi *et al.,* (2009:38), posits that widows need social support to cope with their social circumstances which can help them deal with the experience of loss.

From the study findings, it can be deduced that being around the partner has got pleasant feelings for women despite the fact the partner may not even be contributing meaningfully in their lives. The absence of this partner in a woman's life brings intrusive thoughts that destabilise their psychological wellbeing. This suggests that widows were dependent on their partners for many things, which contradicts the principle of the strengths-based perspective that "all human beings have an inherent capacity to learn, grow, and change" (Kondrat, 2010:42).

In this study, struggling to care for the children emerged as one main challenges widows experience. Many of the women depended on their husbands for resources needed to financially support their children. The death of the husband reduces the material support base needed to meet their children's needs. The study found that thirteen of the twenty-four participants were struggling to raise their children due to lack of necessary resources. With regards challenges of caring for their children, this is what participants said:

> *"Now supporting my children is a major problem. I think about that day-in day-out. I don't stop"* (Participant 6 (BS)).
>
> *"I actually started borrowing some money from other people to buy food for my children because they could die from hunger"* (Julia (BN)).
>
> *"I have difficulties in supporting my young child since my late husband did not get along with his relatives. They could not support the children. Sometimes I even try to take the children to the relatives of my husband, they refuse to support them"*(Choolwe (BN)).

Similar to the findings of this study, Trivedi *et al,* (2009:37) found that many widows suffer from little economic resources to meet their needs and those of their children. Chenube and Omumu (2011:3613) also note that widowhood results in decreased income thereby compounding further the difficulties associated with the status. The implication is that lack of resources impacts negatively on planning for the future of

their children and leads to further poverty transference to the next generation which can result into a vicious cycle of poverty. Children could even be forced to drop out of school and engage in delinquent behaviour.

Loss of dignity and respect is a psycho-social problem among the widows that emerged during the study. The widows revealed that after the death of their husbands, dignity and respect for them from the people around them was lost. Of the twenty-four participants to the study, five indicated they felt they had lost dignity and respect after the death of their husband:

> *"I feel not respected, and I feel easily my value has gone down among community members and other women"* (Maria (BN).
>
> *"My value and respect went down because now I am no longer a wife to someone. It's now different from being Mrs."* (Julia (BN).
>
> *"I feel less dignified [as] a human being. It's common that when your partner dies, respect from people goes down and belief in myself is reduced"* (Chipo (BS)).

While this study found loss of dignity and respect as one of the psycho-social challenges widows face, Keister and Destro (2008:438) have found that widows lose morale and friends in the community. The differences in the findings may be attributed to the fact that communities respond differently in their interaction with widows which varies across populations and cultures. The implications for losing dignity and respect on some of the widows may be ultimately settling for less in order to fit in such as engaging in transactional sex.

5.2.2.5 Feelings of widows about their experiences

The study also sought to understand the feelings of widows regarding how they had coped with the interview process and how they felt about the psycho-social challenges they experienced. The feelings of the participants were checked in order to determine the widows' emotional state. This is an ethical requirement (Padgett, 2008:69) that helps in minimizing harm to the participants.

It emerged that most participants felt cathartic relief about their experiences. The majority (seventeen of the twenty-four participants) indicated that they felt ventilating

and sharing their experiences with the researcher had helped lift a part of the burden but the other five participants to this study apparently bottled their emotions and experiences. The participants said the following about sharing what they experienced with other widows and the researcher during the study:

> *I feel having let go [of] something heavy in me when I talk about something that bothers me in my heart* (Kumbayile (BN)).
>
> *I feel having let go [of] something heavy in my heart and supported. I am surprised that in Zimbabwe there are people like you who are interested in knowing our problems. I didn't expect this. I am so comforted"* (Siphiwe (BS)).
>
> *As we talk about the problems I came across I feel relieved. I feel like the problems are gone* (Esnathi (BS)).

These findings are similar to those of Chenube and Omumu (2011:3616) who found that widows tended to bottle up their emotions but manage to cope with their situations once given a chance to vent such internal pain. In another study, Sue, Jackson, Rasheed and Rasheed (2016:194) submitted that emotional release brings about relief to the people who experienced hardships. In social work, letting off steam or venting through verbalization and sharing problems with other [trusted] persons has a healing effect on victims. This implies that widows are rarely accorded a chance to recount their experiences in order to have an emotional offload of their experiences which facilitates coping with widowhood experiences.

It emerged from the study that widows felt informed and enlightened about their widowhood experiences after meeting and sharing with others. The participants in the focus groups realised that there were other people who had experienced similar problems and had dealt with the effects of widowhood in certain ways. Six of the twenty-four participants highlighted the power of sharing experiences with other widows as a learning and comforting experience. The discussion among themselves and listening to each other's stories allowed the participants to learn from one another about various ways of coping with the challenges of widowhood. The widows revealed the following:

If we share as a group, it feels like we are supporting and comforting one another. You tend to [understand and] wonder that my friend is also suffering like me. You sometimes feel that this one's problem is [smaller] or worse and this one is similar to that one (Participant B (BN)).

If we share our pains together, we understand more about our problems. You begin to understand how each and every one lives (Participant C (BN)).

Since I am the youngest here ((participant guessing)) and when I listen I find these problems with everyone here, they are common problems with widows. I begin to think that this is how life is. I feel having removed heavy feelings because I am not the only one affected by these problems that stress us as widows…I have learnt a lot and I wish many other widows can get the lesson learned here, the communities would be better" (Participant D (BN)).

You begin to see that my neighbour laso has the problem that I met. Even though the problems are different [but] you learn from your friends and that builds your strength as a widow"(Participant E, BN)).

If I am alone there at home, I always think I am the only one with this problem. I never think that there is someone like me also widowed and facing these problems. Now I know and I am relieved (Participant 7 (BS)).

Consistent with the findings of this study, Hardwick and Worsely (2011:85) observed that focus group discussions allow participants to share information among themselves and empowers them through interaction. This implies that focus groups, as a means for collecting data, have more than just the purpose of collecting data; focus groups have an educational and therapeutic element which is very important especially for abused participants.

Some participants revealed that they had managed to deal with the feelings of widowhood on their own. They indicated they had adapted and accepted the situation that they are facing. Three of the twenty-four participants indicated having

adjusted and moved on with life despite their challenging experiences of widowhood. The participants said:

> *"I am fine. I accepted that death is a way of life. That's how we live on earth: people die"* (Chipo (BS)).
>
> *"It is now past and I have buried it"* (Bina Chi (BS)).
>
> *"I am used to it now. I am fine with it and have accepted"* (Esy (BS)).

The empowerment approach to social work practice emphasises that people who have faced adversity have the power to bounce back from those situations of adversity and the capacity to handle and heal from difficult circumstances (Saleeby, 2009:15, Teater, 201042). One can therefore deduce that widows have an innate capacity to deal with their challenges. It is important to give them support to cope and adjust to their new life and reduce further victimisation and exposure to stressful circumstances.

5.2.3 Intervention measures for the challenges experienced by widows

This thematic area addressed the objective which sought to **appraise the intervention measures available and in use for addressing the challenges faced by widows**. This was possible by finding out the types of interventions widows received to alleviate the challenges they encountered after the death of their husbands. The responses that widows provided fell under the following themes that were analysed: support needed by widows after the death of their husbands, people who helped the widows resolve their problems and finally, the nature of help received by widows.

5.2.3.1 Support needed by widows after the death of their husbands

The participants from both individual and focus group interviews were asked about their support needs after the death of their husbands. The responses varied among the participants, with some participants receiving more than one form of support .

It emerged that widows needed support with child care. Children become a burden for the widows after the death of their husbands as they become single parent breadwinners. Ten of the twenty-four participants indicated the need for help with child support. Many of these children are left behind at a young age and have

tremendous need for support for their normal development. The support specifications of the children varied from basic needs such as food, to issues such as support with planning for educational needs of their children. The participants had this to say about their need for help with child care support after the death of their husbands:

> *"I needed support for taking care of the health of my children, and food for feeding my children. Also for school needs of my children"* (Participant B, BN)).

> *"There are many things that we need, school fees for the children, food for the children, all these are heavy for us up until children grow. It's like the whole Zimbabwe is on top of your head"* (Participant: (D, BN)).

> *"I only wanted to be helped with the education of my children. They should not stay at home like me."* (Esy: (BS)).

Chenube and Omumu (2011:3613) have also found that widows struggled with supporting their children, especially in meeting their educational demands. Education serves as a foundation which enables orphaned children to realise their future goals and when they are failed, this has a negative effect on their dreams.

From the findings of the study, it can be deduced that meeting the needs of children is one important aspect that bothers widows. Children are at the heart of every woman which explains many widows needed support for their children.

In the study another emergent support need for the widows is financial support. Nine of the twenty-four widows revealed that financial support was a scarce resource and a crucial need for meeting the pressing demands of their lives and those of their children. Financial resources of the woman are drastically reduced when their husbands die. A sample of responses points to this dire need:

> *"I wanted and today still need financial support. Even if a child gets sick I can have means to take the child to the hospital"* (Choolwe (BN)).

> *"I was expecting financial support and social grants but I did not qualify because of my age. Save The Children didn't even give me food parcels. They said that I am still young and I do not qualify"* (Participant 2 (BS)). ((the participant was 53 years old)).

Holden *et al.,* (2010:6) similarly found that lack of financial resources impacts negatively on the lives of widows and adds to depression symptoms. Chenube and Omumu (2011:3613) concede that financial problems among widows remarkably increased their "psychological and emotional stress." Widows thus need a stable source of income to mitigate the impact of financially-induced stress.

The study revealed that widows also expect spiritual support from fellow Christians when their husbands died. Five of the twenty-four participants disclosed the need for spiritual support for the challenges they faced. The death of their husbands is an emotionally scouring moment and and therefore spiritual upliftment becomes an eminent need. The responses of some of the participants are articulated below:

> *…From my church I needed spiritual support…"*(Esnathi (BS)).

> *"I also expected church members to put prayers for me. My current church members didn't do that except Seventh Day Adventists where I was a member some time ago* (Participant 2 (BS)).

Church members and leaders also offer support to widows when they are bereaved. In support of this observation, Maririmba (2015:1) narrated an example of how Victor and Anna (widower and widow) were spiritually supported to deal with the effects of widowhood by Christ Alive Gospel Ministries, chaired by Bishop Tichaona Maume in Zimbabwe. Cohen (2007:274) has also indicated that widows had resorted to spiritual solace as a way of coping with the distressful experiences of widowhood and widows have a strong belief that God punishes spiritual and emotional oppressors.

From this study, it can be understood that spiritual support is an essential component of the wellbeing of the widows. It is an existential need that helps widows to cope and fair better with the daily psycho-social challenges when their husbands die.

Income generating projects emerged as another form of financial support that widows needed. Income generating projects are a potentially reliable source of

sustainable income for the widows if managed well. Interestingly only a few, (two of the twenty-four), participants highlighted the need for self-help income generating projects to meet their needs and those of their children. The two participants in the study that indicated the need for income generating projects said this:

> *"I just needed money for supporting myself, especially through income generating self-help projects"* (Maria (BN)).

> *"The help that we always need is training on projects that can give us income for our survival because our problems will never end. This could be in the form of business and or income generating projects. Donations and free food do not sustain us. We need sustainable income generating projects"* (Participant E (BN)).

The main source and initiatives for income generating projects are largely funded by the NGO sector in Zimbabwe. In Binga District, widows sought help from Ntengwe for Community Development Trust on income generating projects and livelihood initiatives such as the gardening projects to provide better nutrition for the widows, especially those that are HIV positive (Dube 2011:12). This observation was less prominent in this current study as only two respondents highlighted such a need.

Undoubtedly, income generating projects are critical as sustainable sources of income and as a self-help initiative for widows. However, only a few widows indicated the need for income generating projects as opposed to state financial support. This shows that while income generating projects are perceived may be important to the widows in literature, the idea not popular among widows as only a handful understood them.

Despite the widespread reliance upon subsistence [agricultural] farming by participants, it emerged from the responses that only a few widows (two of the twenty-four participants) mentioned needing agricultural inputs for farming purposes. Agriculture is generally perceived as a reliable source of food in Binga District and widows engage in agriculture to fend for their families. The following is what the participants said on subsistence farming:

> *"I wanted cattle that I will use for ploughing the land to grow food"* (Kumbayile (BN)).

*“I need help with field implements and tools like ploughs in the fields. At least also a bigger field would be fine” (*Julia (BN)).

According to IRIN (2015:1) an estimated 86% of women in Zimbabwe survive on subsistence farming. Subsistence farming is a reliable economic base in the country, especially for rural populations. However, only a few participants to the study indicated the need for agricultural inputs to aid with food production. This is attributed to the fact that this mode of farming is input-intensive wherein widows would face more challenges.

Whilst many participants expressed the forms of support they needed or expected after the death of their husbands, the study revealed that some participants did not expect any form of support from anybody. The few participants (four of the twenty-four) highlighted that they did not know where to seek help or that widows may be helped to cope with their situation in any form and hence they never expected any form of support. Bina Chi (BS), Participant 5, (BS), Participant 6 (BS) and Participant 7 (BS) sumitted the following:

Even if I was struggling to get many things I needed as I still do, I never thought of getting support to ease my problems. There was no support I imagined I could need (Bina Chi (BS)).

I didn’t know that I could get support so I was not expecting anything and I didn’t get any help (Participant 5 (BS)).

As for me I just hear that there is help given to people in the community. I do not even know whether they can help us. I was not even expecting any help (Participant 6 (BS)).

I didn’t expect any help and I didn’t get any, even from the church members (Participant 7 (BS)).

Dube (2011:104) found that widows could not seek help for their challenges citing reasons of being far from their natal family. They expressed the fact that thet felt their in-laws were not their blood relatives. Such feelings and desperation undoubtedly contributes significantly to a sense of loneliness and powerlessness.

5.2.3.2 People who helped widows for their problems

Widows were asked to indicate where they had received help in the challenges they faced after the death of their husbands. One finding that was no one helped in the problems they encountered. Many participants (thirteen of the twenty-four) did not get help from anybody in dealing with the challenges they encountered when they became widowed:

> *"There is no one who helped me at all [with] my son. I don't know what people think of me"* (Participant A (BN)).

> *"There is no one who helped me. One has to fend for oneself in one's problems. We even have stiff bodies [from] hard work [in] fending for our children. We are just waiting for God to take us. If people with help drag their feet, then we will all perish, but if help comes quickly, I am sure we will be found alive"* (Participant B (BN)).

> *"I didn't get any help in the problems that I faced. No one helped"* (Participant 1 (BS).

The findings of the study are similar to those of Nwabueze (2010:142) and Rusere (2010:1) who found that some widows fail to get help to mitigate the challenges they encounter on a daily basis. How successfully the widows cope with the challenges of widowhood and the demands of life on a daily basis may be attributed to their resilience since many never get help. From the empowerment approach of social work, Saleeby (2009:12) posits that it is a "rule not an exception that people rebound from serious and troubling adversity." Widows have an innate capacity to recover from challenges they face upon the death of their husbands and this implies that when assisting widows, there is need to tap into their innate abilities and strengths and nurture them to deal with their own challenges.

However, failure to seek help on the part of widows should not be construed to mean help is not necessary in the lives of the widows. It emerged that often widows are unaware of potential sources of help and therefore they did not seek help.

Family members featured in the responses of the participants in respect of people who offered help to the widowed woman. Three of the participants, (Maria (BN), Choolwe (BN), and Participant 3 (BS)), revealed that some relatives assisted them in

a variety of ways depending on what they could offer to them. The responses of the participants highlight some of the relatives that provided various forms of assistance:

> *No one helped me except for my father who gave me a place to stay. He accepted me and said come my daughter there is nothing we can do. You will stay with us in this home* (Maria (BN)).

> *My brother sometimes helps me when I cry for help from him. He sometimes helps me with mealie-meal* (Choolwe (BN)).

> *My mother helped and she is still helping me. She supported me all the way and received me back home. My late husband's aunt also helped by taking care of my children and educating them* (Participant 3 (BS)).

The help offered by the natal family cannot be underestimated in alleviating the problems widow face. Izumi (2006:41) found that widows return to their natal families to seek comfort after being evicted by in-laws from their homes. The findings of this study indicate that some families still provide comfort to the widows and help widows to adjust to the problems associated with widowhood.

Not all in-laws lack understanding and compassion for the situation of the widows. Some of them offer a helpful hand towards the widows in order to cope with the death of their husbands and this is a rare scenario as experienced by Esy (BS). The participant had this to say:

> *The aunt of my children who stays with the children helped. When there was misunderstanding, she gave me money to come back home. [That] aunt cares for my children as well* (Esy (BS)).

This revelation by the participant contradicts those of many researchers (Brewer, 2011:6, Chenube & Omumu, 2011:3613, Izumi, 2006:41, Johnson & Shyamala, 2012:196) who found that widows often face abuse at the hands of their in-laws. From this finding, where good relationships between in-laws and widows exist, it appears that some in-laws could be relied upon to assist widows to cope with everyday challenges, albeit quite limited as established by the single participant who indicated such amity.

The Chief is one of the traditional leaders that emerged as offering some help to the widows when their husbands die. The Chiefs are traditional social service providers in the rural communities and some widows found them accessible when seeking help during their times of need. Below are some of the experiences shared by the widows:

> *"The person who helped me in the problems I had is the Chief. I told the Chief about my problem and he listened and understood. He is the one who told me that all the property that I owned with my husband belonged to me even though when I took the property the sister in-laws were not happy about it"* (Julia (BN)).

> *"I was unlucky in my case. All things fell on me. I had to go to the Chief who gave me money worth $40 (American dollars) to go and buy food for my children. The Chief encouraged me to stop crying and be strong for my children"* (Participant E (BN)).

Whilst this study found that Chiefs could be instrumental in assisting the widows and maintaining order in the communities, News 24, (2015:1) reported that they could also be a source of pain for the widows with their strict adherence to tradition and culture. As indicated earlier, the case of Beauty Moyo, a widow in Mberengwa district of Zimbabwe, demonstrates how she was fined one cow and nine goats for failing to adhere to customary procedures and unveiling the tombstone of her late husband without alerting all the family members and relatives (News 24, 2015:1). There was an attempt by the Chief to sell the property attached to the widow until there was court intervention.

The magistrates also emerged in the study as very important professionals in providing help to the widows. In circumstances that involve legal matters, the magistrates' help has been significant. Signing legal documents and mediation in matters of dispute have been some of the roles played by magistrates in meeting some of the needs of the widows. To that effect some widows had this to say with regards the help offered by magistrates:

> *On the cattle that the in-laws were selling, we also got help from the police and from the magistrate to stop the sale* (Participant D (BN)).

The magistrate…helped me to get my funds as I mentioned earlier on (Siphiwe (BS)).

"The magistrate is the one who helped me with signing papers for me to be protected from in-laws who wanted to take my property and so that I can get the pension funds (Participant 2 (BS)).

Ndlovu-Bhebhe (2012:2) confirms the findings of this study and points out that in Zimbabwe, many cases of abuse of widows have been successfully resolved at magistrates' courts. Magistrates are custodians of the law and are mandated to implement the Intestate Succession Act and Administration of Estates Amendment Act where disputes arise in property succession and administration. To demonstrate how magistrates have been professionally helpful to widows in Zimbabwe, News 24(2015:1) documented how one magistrate helped Beauty Moyo of Mberengwa district in Zimbabwe, as indictaed earlier, by blocking the Chief who wanted to sell the property attached to the widow citing contempt of customary procedures in the unveiling of her husband's tombstone. Whilst magistrates play an important role in mediation and legal procedures for widows, their congested work schedules, coupled with long physical distances to their office locations from the widows' place of residence, make their services difficult to access.

Non-governmental organisations also intervened in the situation of some widows. These organisations have a long history of offering various forms of assistance to people in Binga District, including services to various population groups besides the widows. The organisations that offered help to the widows include the Wankie Colliery Company and Save the Children Fund. Some participants revealed this during the interviews:

No one helped except for last year when we got money worth $28 (American dollars) *from Save the Children* (NGO) *through the phones* (Ecocash) (Kumbayile (BN)).

The Colliery Company helped [me] to carry my property home from town. They always do that when their workers die (Siphiwe (BS)).

In Zimbabwe, many organisations such as UNFPA, Zimbabwe Lawyers Association, Padare and Musasa Project have played a part in assisting women with

conscientisation on their human rights working to assist the Ministry of Women Affairs Gender and Community Development (INFPA Zimbabwe, 2011:1). While the role played by the NGO sector is very critical in the lives of the widows interms of to mitigating the effects of widowhood, it is noteworthy that the sector is fund-driven and their services may not be sustainable as they may be terminated given that the organisations have limited funding.

While the services of social workers are very critical in the resolution of some challenges faced by widows, only one participant out of the twenty-four participants of the study managed to receive help from social workers. Participant 4 (BS) in the study revealed the following during the interviews:

> *There is no one else except the financial help I am getting from Welfare in Binga* (Participant 4 (BS)).

This is a single incident confirmed by one research participant but generally, social workers provide critical services like advocacy to marginalised populations such as the widows (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:517), psycho-social support (Lindsay, 2013:3) and work to empower widows (Monds-Watson, 2013:57). Widows normally lack hope and strength because of the many challenges they face, empowerment therefore can facilitate their ability to gain confidence to handle their problems. It is noteworthy that these important and critical services are very inaccessible to the widows in Binga District and this perhaps explains why widows could not access significant help from the social workers.

5.2.3.3 The nature of help received by widows

This study sought to find out what help participants received from any of the service providers to mitigate the challenges they experienced after the death of their husbands.

It merged that many of the participants (eleven of the twenty-four) did not receive any services from the service providers. These were some of the participants' responses:

> *I did not receive any help with my problems* (Anna (BN))

I did not get help from anyone for the problems I encountered (Maria (BN)).

No help was given to me (Kumbayile (BN)).

I did not get any help (Participant 5 (BS)).

There was no help that I got from anybody (Participant 6(BS)).

While many of the widows sought help and received helpful service for their adjustment to widowhood, Chenube and Omumu (2011:3615) opine that widows need the social services in order to adjust to the challenges they face in their lives. Scott, Bergeman, Verney, Longenbaker, Markey, and Bisconti (2007:245) also concede that social support is critical for widows to adjust to the experiences of widowhood. Cohen (2007:274) cogently argues that inability to seek help stems from despair which is a psychological state of hopelessness wherein the widow thinks that her situation is untenable. While many explanations could be attributed to why widows did not seek help and get the services they needed, it could also be argued that lack of knowledge about where to seek help affects the widows in accessing services.

The study also revealed that the Chiefs provided some advice to widows. Participant D (BN) and Participant E (BN) revealed that they received advice from their Chiefs on inheritance rights and also one Chief provided some once-off financial assistance to Participant E (BN). This study identified sparsehelpful services that the Chiefs provided to widows, contrary to other studies that have found that some Chiefs were involved in property grabbing from the widows leaving them more hopeless and powerless. To give credence to this latter argument, Izumi (2006:36) established that widows did not want to engage in mediation talks with traditional leaders in Seke village, Zimabwe, when they confronted problems because Chiefs were allegedly the worst abusers of the widows, including their oft-reported tendency to accuse widows of witchcraft.

The implication of these findings is that Chiefs are traditional service providers which the community members could sometimes rely upon, they are custodians of traditions and customs from whom widows may not be spared some of the

unfavourable demands of customs and traditions that often leave them even more disempowered.

A couple of participants in the study indicated having received financial support. Despite the fact that many widows are in need of financial support, it emerged in the study that only two of the twenty-four participants were able to get financial help as revealed during the interviews:

> *The Chief helped with advice to go and work for my children. The Chief helped me with bus fare to go and fend for my children as they are now grown up* (Participant E (BN)).

> *I just received financial support. I didn't get another form of help* (Participant 4 (BS)).

Whilst a few (two of the twenty-four) participants managed to get help financially to meet some of their needs, Holden *et al.,* (2010:12) found that financial struggles for widows affect adversely their psychological wellbeing. Widows with financial problems have been found not to adjust well with the challenges of widowhood. Be that as it may, the researchers found that many widows still do not engage in paid work. The implications is that many widows suffer from untold psycho-social problems as many of them live without financial means and support to meet the demands of their lives.

The other form of help that the participants reportedly have received is mediation services. Mediation helped to resolve disputes that arose between in-laws and widows over inheritance matters. Participant D (BN) was one such participant who got mediation. In this participant's case, the Chief and the District Magistrate mediated in the dispute that she had with in-laws. To indicate the pivotal role played by the Chief and the District Magistrate, this is what the participant revealed during the interview:

> *The Chief helped me to get back the property that was taken. Even though the property was damaged on the way to my home in a donkey cart accident but he help me . The police didn't do much to help on the dispute we had on the cattle. They simply referred it to the*

magistrate. The magistrate then said I should be given back the money I was robbed from cattle sales (Participant D (BN)).

The case of Participant D (BN) is one typical case which liberal feminists would advocate for in the fight that women engage in in order to be freed from oppressive societal tendencies. Widows ought to be treated the same as their male counterparts (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111). Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:86) opined that the mediator role, played by the Chief and the District Magistrate, is very important in social work as it helps in settling disputes through compromise. It can be said that the mediation role offered to Participant D (BN) should have been offered to many other widows who lost valuable property and assets to in-laws because they did not seek mediation. Should mediation services have been given to all widows who were victims of property grabbing at the hands of their in-laws, the psycho-social problems associated with property grabbing would have been lessened.

It emerged also from the study that widows were helped with prayers. The church as an institution has been very instrumental in helping women cope with the challenges of widowhood. Losing a partner is an emotional experience where prayers always play a pivotal role in dealing with the emotional drain that widows undergo. Two of the participants in the study that were helped through prayers had this to say:

I received food donations and prayers from my church members (Esnathi (BS)).

There was a time when I collapsed and had to go to the prophets to seek help with prayers that's when I was told that I collapsed from bad spirits (Chipo (BS)).

Ndlovu (2013:113) notes similar findings that in the widows' state of powerlessness, the church uses the power of God to help the widows regain power and the church also accepts widows because of the belief these are people with dignity and worth. Believing in the worth and dignity of the widows is a principal value of social work and central to helping widows deal with challenges they experience.

Child care emerged as a theme during the study when widows were asked to state the kind of help they expected to receive. Children are at the heart of every woman and as such there is anticipation and expectation that their children would find the

necessary support when they unfortunately became widowed. The child care services they received included assistance with education and rehabilitation of children:

> *I received financial support and care for my children. The aunt is also taking care of my children's education* (Esy (BS)).

> *I went to Binga with my disabled child for help* (Participant 1 (BS)).

Childcare has always been a source of angst for widows as their financial resources dwindle upon the death of their husbands (Chenube & Omumu, 2011:3613, Idialu, 2011:9). This means that when widows get childcare support, their burdens are reduced and so are the emotional swirls associated with supporting children.

Food donations and aid appear to be some of the help the participants had received for the nutritional needs of their families. Most widows upon the death of their husbands found it hard to find food for their children. Two participants highlighted this in the interviews:

> *Except for the little help with food I got from my brother when I cried with hunger, I didn't receive real help* (Choolwe (BN)).

> *I received food donations and prayers from my church members* (Esnathi (BS)).

Whilst food aid is one critical need of the widows, NGOs have devised stringent criteria for widows qualifying for food aid programmes which saw many widows being unable to get food aid. One frustrated widow vented her frustrations out during the interviews and pointed out the following:

> *As for the other forms of help like food aid from Save the Children, I didn't get any help. I don't even know now whether I should date someone's husband now at my age. This is why older people can go into prostitution even if it is embarrassing. You will end up in a fight and losing your teeth because of poverty. The Save the Children always says that we are young and can fend for ourselves. So they don't consider us for food aid. THEY WANT OLDER WOMEN WITH WALKING STICKS!* (emphasis) (Participant 2 (BS)).

In Mali, Van De Walle (2011:26) found that the safety nets of the government and the NGO sector are unlikely to reach the widows and their children. The findings of the study indicate that if relatives and church members cannot assist a widow, chances are very slim that a widow would get food aid from the NGO sector because the criteria used privileges very old women. Ncube (2016:1) reported that in the drought of 2016 the government of Zimbabwe imported grain to aid "the elderly, disabled, chronically ill and child headed households" in Matabeleland North, where Binga District is located. Sadly, it is the Department Social Welfare who managed to enumerate the eligible beneficiaries, and this excluded the widows. Since most widows in Binga District are young chronologically as detailed in the biographical details of this study at the beginning of this chapter, it is clear that these young widows do not meet the criteria used for food aid adistribution and are excluded.

5.2.4 Factors influencing the choice of intervention sought by widows

Under this theme, the study sought to find out various factors that led widows to choose particular interventions for their problems. It also sought to establish factors that could have led to failure to seek help for those participants that did not. The sub-themes under this thematic area included what factors widows considered when choosing the kind of help they sought and what factors contributed to widows' failure to get help. The information was analysed thematically in the succeeding paragraphs.

5.2.4.1 What widows considered when choosing the kind of help they sought

In the study, participants were asked to provide the researcher with information on what they considered in choosing the various interventions in the problems they experienced. From those that managed to seek help, (13 of 24 partcipants), a myriad of responses point to the unique nature of their experiences.

One theme that emerged from the participants' responses is proximity and capacity. It appears that the widows sought help on the basis of proximity which means that the social service providers were nearer and the widows found it easy to seek help from them. Julia (BN) and Participant D (BN) found that the Chief was closer to them and hence they sought help from this office. More than just being nearer to them, the widows considered the Chief's capacity to deal with their problems and

make referrals, specifically the respect and reverence that the community has for the Chief. The participants answered as follows during the interviews:

> *"I went to the Chief because he is nearer to me. Also if the problem could not be solved by him, he would have sent me to get help from others. Also I went to him because the Chief is respectable in the community and the in-laws can listen to him"* (Julia (BN)).

> *"I just thought to myself who was the nearest person who could help me solve the problem very quickly. Then the Chief came to my mind. I went there to get help and when the in-laws were called to come, they refused because they knew that the Chief would not make it easy for them. The Chief is closer and quick to solve problems"* (Participant D (BN)).

Muwaniri (2014:1) notes that widows' choice of getting help from the Chiefs in rural areas is expected since the Chiefs' positions are respectable in the communities. The researcher adds that Chiefs are on top of the community leadership pyramid and enforce customary law, culture, traditions and norms of the community and hence people are bound to respect them. With regards the powers and trust communities have in their Chiefs, it is important for these Chiefs to receive necessary judicial training to equip them with the necessary skills and information to empower them to intervene effectively in the problems of the widows.

The other factor that emerged from the responses of the participants property inheritance is the type of marriage entered into. Upon the death of their husbands, transfer of property, assets and finances into the widow's name requires legal procedures. This has seen widows being forced to seek legal help because they entered into civil marriages in community of property. Civil marriages are legally protected and ownership of property is endorsed through legal processes. This is why some widows sought the services of the magistrate in solving their problems. Siphiwe (BS) and Participant 2 (BS) found themselves seeking the services of the magistrate and this is what they said:

> *"It is the marriage that I had entered into that forced me to go out and look for help from the magistrate and those people that helped me"* (Siphiwe (BS)).

"It is the marriage that I had. All had to be changed into my name" (Participant 2 (BS)).

Ndlovu-Bhebhe (2012:2) enlightens that magistrates are well known custodians of the law in Zimbabwe and have resolved countless legal problems on behalf of the widows. The researcher concretises the point by mentioning that magistrates implement Succession and Intestate Succession Acts and the Administration of Estates Amendment Act to resolve disputes where succession of property is concerned. The implications of these findings are that it is important that widows enter into civil marriages so that their assets, property and finances are legally protected from property-grabbing in-laws.

It also emerged from the study that affiliation to churches enabled widows get help from churches. Because they are affiliated to certain religious denominations, widows got help from members of the church as this is common practice in many religious denominations. This theme of the study is highlighted in the following responses of the participants:

"Help came from church because we go to the same church. So we visit one another in our church when a member is bereaved" (Esnathi (BS)).

"As for my reasons for looking for help from the Christians, it is because we go to the same church..." (Siphiwe (BS)).

These findings are similar to those of Dube (2011:109) where the church (comprising of congregants and Pastors) has been instrumental in helping widows cope with the challenges they experience. Pastors have stood firm in assisting widows whose property was grabbed. Ndlovu (2013:39) affirms the findings of this study by stating that religious leaders have a responsibility to care for people in their communities through essential pastoral care. This means that pastoral care services provided by churches in helping widows need to be considered used to intervene in conflict resolution at the domestic level. This capacity might need to be sanctioned and ratified by the laws of the country so that what the pastors do in resolving problems becomes can be recognised by law.

From the responses of the participants, it has also emerged that blood relations constitutes another factor that is considered when widows seek help. Some participants in the study revealed that they sought help from specific individuals because they were related to those who helped them. Choolwe (BN) sought help because the person who could help in her situation was a brother. Similarly, Esy (BS) managed to seek help from her mother to cope with her situation.

The importance of the family in providing help and comfort to its members cannot be overemphasised. Izumi (2006:41) found that it is commonplace for widows to turn to their natal families for help and assistance in order to find ways of coping with their circumstances. For the fact that widows have always thought of their natal families, this option suggests the inherent power in the family systems to stabilise and facilitate recovery of close members facing challenges such as the widows.

Personal choice and judgment also contributed as a factor in deciding where to get help for one of the widows. The participant chose to seek help using her personal judgment of the person who would help in her situation. The participant had this to say:

> *"When I had that problem, I chose to go to see the Chief because I thought of him as the right person to help me"* (Participant E (BN)).

Exercising choice by the widows and making own volitional judgments are concomitant with the rights theorists' epistemological point of view, (Fagan, 2009:16) which holds that external influence must be limited when people make their own choices. Fagan (2009:16) explains non-interference in the choices that people make as "positive liberty." It is worth noting that positive liberty is consistent with democratic dispensations which the world adulates as the most preferable choice that is also at the helm of human rights and empowerment endeavors.

5.2.4.2 What factors contributed to widows' failure to get help

For those participants (11 of 24) that did not seek help, the study sought to find what factors had contributed to their failure to seek help from social service providers. The participants provided a variety of responses, the most prominent theme being that participants lacked specific knowledge on where to seek help in order to resolve their challenges. From the nineteen participants that indicated that they did not get any

form of assistance, fourteen indicated that they lacked knowledge of where to get help.

In the interviews, some of the widows revealed factors that hindered them from getting help from the social service providers:

> *"I never thought of getting any help and I was not aware that there is help that I can get"* (Maria (BN)).
>
> This is reiterated in almost similar words by another participant:
>
> *"I did not know where to find help in this ward where I am"* (Kumbayile (BN)).
>
> Another widow who did not get help took recourse to her personal resourcefulness:
>
> *"I didn't know where to get help this is why I started a garden to help myself"* (Participant G (BN)).
>
> This subsequent submission adds to the view that widows who have not had an education succumb to a sense of disempowerment:
>
> *"I did know where to get help. I did know that we have such services in Binga. If you are widowed, you just live like that. There is nothing you can do"* (Participant 4 (BS)).
>
> This resignation to fate and the wretchedness of being a widow in Zimbabwe is echoed one of the responses:
>
> *"I didn't know where to get help and whom to ask it from. I don't even know that there can be help given to us. As a widow, what I know is that I should just stay home and think of the best way to live"* (Participant 5 (BS)).

This finding is similar to that of Dube (2011:110) where many widows indicated they were unable to seek interventions when their property was grabbed by in-laws because they were not aware that they could find recourse for their problems. Professional service providers were reportedly not visible enough in communities where people live, making it difficult for widows to know the services they could get

from them when they face challenges. The other deduction is that there are weak communication lines between the traditional leadership in the community and the professional service providers because community members would have been aware of available services had there been a more robust methods of dissemination of information about possible services available to widows in distress.

One other prominent emergent theme was lack of power on the part of the widows to seek help. Apparently there were many reasons why the widows felt powerless in seeking help for their challenges. Bina Chi (BS) just lacked power to seek help; Participant 1 (BS) tried but she was let down by unfulfilled promises of service providers to assist in her case; Participant 2 (BS) was denied food aid because she failed to meet the age-criterion for the service; Choolwe (BN) could not seek help because the Village Head who was responsible for registering people for aid was the victimiser in her situation and they were not in good books. To offer credence to these findings, the responses for the participants are poignant:

> *"I felt powerless to go and find help. I never had that energy"* (Bina Chi (BS)).
>
> In Choolwe's case:
>
> *"my late husband's brother is the Village Head who writes the names for those who should be given help of any kind to our people in the community. At the same time he is the man with whom we are not in good books. For any kind of help it's likely that I will be left out and only those that he likes will have their names written down for help"* (Choolwe, BN)).
>
> *"I tried but I failed and then I had to give up and my heart was painful. I never went back because of their empty promises"* (Participant 1 (BS)).
>
> *"We are not given food aid because they say we are still young and we can help for ourselves"* (Participant 2 (BS)).

Some widows did not seek help because of the pain they experienced during their endeavors and as such they avoided re-experiencing the pain, (for example, the cases of Choolwe (BN) and Participant 1 (BS)), and they became exemplars of what

Cohen (2007:269) called “pain-avoiding-mechanisms.” This pain experienced by widows strains them into remaining subordinate to the social system in order to avoid further pain associated with widowhood. The pain is experienced at individual psychic level and undermines the widow’s personhood, transforming her into what Cohen (2007:269) terms a “pain-avoiding mechanism.” DuBois and Miley (2014:150) have argued from a social justice perspective that being powerless is a result of the covert, at times overt, oppression and discrimination pervasive in African societies. Widows are continuously experiencing oppression and discrimination thus they are unable to seek help because of feeling powerless (the case of Bina Chi (BS)). It can be deduced that powerlessness on the part of the widows is involuntary but induced by painful experiences the widows have suffered after the death of their husbands.

Another important theme that emerged for what influenced help seeking behaviour is the distance widows must travel to access professional intervention. It appears the participants in the study needed to travel very long distances for them to access professional help for the challenges they experienced. This is what Choolwe revealed during the interview:

> *“Sometimes you have to travel to Binga Centre to get help and you don’t have the money to do that. The distance involved needs money and when you don’t have money, you miss out”* (Choolwe (BN)).

Martin-Matthews (2011:346) establishes a contrasting finding that widows do not utilise the services provided to them even if they are accessible to mitigate the challenges of widowhood. However, in light of the findings of the study, the distance involved in travelling to administrative centres could be a negative factor in that it is long, consequently inducing negative financial implications to the already poverty-stricken non-working widows.

5.2.5 Gaps that exist in interventions

Amongst the widows who faced challenges after the death of their husbands, some received help whilst others were unable to get help for the challenges they faced. For both groups of widows whose problems were received attention and those whose problems never received interventions, the study sought to establish the gaps that exist in the interventions. This addressed the objective that sought to **assess the gaps that exist in intervention measures used** in addressing the psyco-social

plight of widows The predetermined sub-themes under which such gaps in interventions were established are adequancy of interventions received by widows, improvements suggested for interventiions, additional opinions of the widows and feelings of the widows at the end of the interventions. The paragraphs that follow indicate the analysis done under these sub-themes.

5.2.5.1 Adequacy of interventions received by widows

The widows were asked to provide information on whether the interventions they had received for the all their problems they experienced after the death of their husbands adequately met their needs.

From the responses of the participants on the adequacy of interventions received, the emergent theme was that these interventions were not enough. There were various reasons the participants cited for the interventions not being adequate: being dissatisfied, (Julia, (BN)) and unsustainable (Participant E (BN)) were cited. Participant 2 (BS) explained that she got help for signing paper work yet she remained poor and stressed. The interventions received managed to deal only with one aspect of her problem, leaving her under stress and poorer. This is what participants revealed with regards the interventions offered:

> *"For the disappearance of the cattle that we owned with my husband and the lack of explanation of where the cattle are, I am not satisfied with the help offered to me. My child could not get anything. This didn't satisfy me",*(Julia (BN)).

> *"It is not enough. I am already suffering after the [little] help I got"* (Participant E (BN)).

> *"The help I received was not enough. I just got help to sign the papers for property to be in my name and to get the pension funds. As for the hardships I am facing and stress, I didn't receive any help"* (Participant 2 (BS)).

The findings here contrast those of Scott *et al.,* (2007:250) who found that widows were generally satisfied with the social support they received for the challenges they experienced after the death of their husbands. The differences could be attributed to the type of help the widows needed upon the death of their husbands. Most

significantly, the findings of this study provide grounds for the deduction that the interventions the widows received for all their problems were piecemeal and not comprehensive enough to deal with the entire complexity of the problems of the widows. The help offered left widows even more vulnerable and exposed to further agonizing psycho-social states as their problems were only partially dealt with.

5.2.5.2 Improvements suggested for interventions for the widows' problems

Since most participants revealed that interventions offered for the challenges they experienced were not adequate, the participants were asked to suggest improvements to such interventions. A constellation of suggested improvements was provided especially financial support to meet the ever swelling demand for financial resources. Esnathi (BN), Participant A (BN), Participant B (BN), Participant F (BN) Participant1 (BS), Participant 2 (BS), Participant 3 (BS),Participant 4 (BS), Participant 5 (BS), Participant 6(BS) and Participant 7 (BS)), mentioned needs such as school fees, buying food to meet their nutritional needs and renovating their houses (Maria (BN), Kumbayile, (BN), Chipo (BS) and Participant F (BN)). Interventions through financial support are evidenced by these responses from some of the participants:

> *"I was just wondering [that] how [about] if they can support us financially for our children to be able to attend school? This can give our children a better future"* (Participant F (BN)).

> *"In my thinking, financial support needs to be [re]considered. We can even renovate [our] huts with it"* (Participant 2 (BS)).

> *"I suggest that they should improve [by] assisting us with finance and food"* (Participant 3 (BS)).

> *"They should improve financial support for us to be able to educate our children"* (Participant 4 (BS)).

Consistent with these findings, Holden *et al.,* (2010:13) assert that widows were not satisfied with their financial situation. Similarly, Chenube and Omumu (2011:3615) found that widows do not have a satisfactory economic standing and that this contributes significantly to abuse by in-laws and the widows' inability to adjust. The

implications are that many of the widows struggle to adjust to the challenges of widowhood due to lack of financial resources to mitigate the impact of widowhood.

Whilst the participants indicated improvements on financial support, they seemed aware that such financial support needs to be sustainable. Two of the participants then suggested that interventions needed improvement on income generating projects. In their suggestions for income generating projects, the participants indicated that such projects could contribute significantly to sustainable sources of income. Having sustainable income generating projects could see the widows meeting many of their long standing financial needs such as educating their children, (Participant F (BN)), and renovating their huts (Participant 2 (BS)). Suggestions were made of examples of some income generating projects such as rearing animals for sale, (Participant 1 (BS)), and small businesses (Participant 3 (BS)):

> *"There is need to consider...rearing animals that can multiply with time. We can sell these animals to sustain ourselves and for other needs"* (Participant A (BN)).

> *"It is better if they can assist with sustainable sources of income. Donations and food parcels do not last for us,* (Participant E (BN)).

> *"Income generating projects are also needed but we do not know how they can be started. We need to be taught about them. Income generating projects will help us to use our own hands to get money to sustain ourselves. Even the bible says that laziness doesn't pay"* (Participant 2 (BS)).

Roberts (2014:110) agrees that improvement suggestions such as income generating initiatives empower women and are significantly beneficial to them and the future of their children and the communities they reside in. Roberts further cites the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women in the UK which builds and empowers women to become economically independent. The findings of the study underscore the importance of sustainable sources of income if the problems the widows face are to be significantly ameliorated.

Some participants to the study suggested that food aid needs to be improved as an intervention strategy for the challenges faced by widows in Binga District. The

participants called for food aid to be quantitatively increased so the food reserves for the widows are improved. Apparently food aid in the district is an intervention measure aimed for older people and people with disabilities whilst those that still have the energy to work are deemed inegigible to food aid programmes run by NGOs. Some of those that suggested improvement in interventions of food aid disclosed this during the interviews:

> *"Widows need food. There is need to help them with food especially that many of us are HIV positive and need food to boost effective treatment, especially with the many many pills we take"* (Maria (BN)).

> *"They need to help us more on food and educating our children"* (Chipo (BS)).

Zvobgo (2009:360) demonstrates that food aid in Binga District is a common phenomenon particularly spearheaded by Save the Children aid programmes. The growing need for improving food aid as found by this study seems to indicate that many widows are entirely dependant on food aid interventions.

Surprisingly, one widow (Kumbayile (BN)) took a turn from physically tangible improvements to focusing on psychological approach. The participant indicated the need to consider counseling as an addition to interventions offered to the widows. This is what Kumbayile (BN) revealed in her response to the interview question:

> *"There should be counseling provided to widows. Like myself I have developed "pressure" because there was no one to talk to. There must be someone who provides counseling to the widows to reduce too much thinking"* (Kumbayile (BN)).

In consonance with this finding, Idialu (2011:8) also found that the psychological pain that the widows experience need special attention especially within African communities where they are subjected to unbearable torture that resides in culture, norms and traditions. Although many widows did not indicate the need for counseling services, they however indicated that they were relieved after sharing their problems with the researcher and other widows in the focus group interviews. This implies that widows need counseling services but they may not be aware of counseling as a necessity.

Visibility of professional social service providers is one other theme that emerged during the interviews. The participants suggested that professional social service providers need to improve their visibility in the communities where people live. The visibility of the professional social service providers would increase the widows' understanding of their interventive roles when widows are faced with challenges. One of the widows had this to say:

> *"H-h-m-m-m,* ((participant thinks deeply))*, maybe when the husband dies and property is being shared, those in power such as the Chief and the District Administrator need to be present to explain the law themselves as people who keep the law, maybe people will begin to take such matters seriously. In other words this problem, despite people's knowledge about inheritance laws and the need to set the widow free, it will not change...This is why I say maybe if those people who keep the law can be present to oversee property sharing or TAKE OVER SHARING OF PROPERTY THEMSELVES,* ((emphasis added))*, maybe things will be better",* (Julia (BN)).

> *"As for Social Welfare people, I do not understand what they do and they have never come to us for us to know how they work"* (Esnathi, (BS)).

Lack of visibility by professional social services providers in the communities reduces the widows' knowledge of the services they provide. The Social Institutions and Gender Index, (2015:4) found that in the communal lands of Zimbabwe women were not aware of their land rights because they lived in remote areas where little knowledge is disseminated on land rights of women. It can then be deduced that the non-visibility of the social service providers has a negative impact on service uptake by the widows.

5.2.5.3 Additional opinions of the widows

After the widows had given their suggestions on the improvements that they felt needed to be considered in the interventions, the study sought to gather any additional information not covered that the widows thought was important. Sadly, not many widows had additional opinions in this regard and they seemed to be content with what had been discussed. Some of the opinions of the participants seemed to

be recommendations while other opinions reiterated the improvements on interventions discussed earlier.

One participant opined that men should also go for testing to prevent the spread of HIV (Maria (BN)). Another participant commended the interview conversations and suggested that such 'therapeutic talks' need to turn into a community project (Kumbayile (BN)). Other opinions affirmed the need for helping the widows by training them so that they can participate in community projects and that NGOs should provide adequate funding for widows to attend training even overseas (Julia (BN)).

Another opinion that came forth was that NGOs should not victimise widows who are given animals to care for with the idea that they will breed and multiply and then those that were taken from the NGO be returned. One widow complained that NGOs force the widows to return the original number of animals which may have died. This has been seen as one possible cause of emotional suffering for the widow. One respondent, (Participant B (BN)), added that now focus needs to be on orphans as well and not on widows alone.

Whittaker (2012:47) supports the idea of getting the opinions of the participants on other issues that may not have been covered as closure. From the responses, one can deduce that the participants in the study felt that the interview conversations had covered all the important aspects and there was nothing more to add.

5.2.5.4 Feelings of the widows at the end of the interviews

At the end of the interviews, the researcher sought to find out participants' feelings after sharing information about the psycho-social challenges they experienced after the death of their husbands. The researcher found it appropriate ethically to check the feelings of the participants to determine whether some participants would have been emotionally involved with the study to the extent that they might need to be referred for counseling.

Interestingly all the twenty-four participants indicated that they had positive feelings after sharing their problems with each other or with the researcher. The participants indicated that they felt relieved and they had hope that the study might bring change. Some widows alluded to the fact that discussing with them on their psycho-social

challenges with them was a rare occurrence because people are not interested in understanding their problems. As such the research had given them a rare opportunity to recount their experiences. Some participants revealed their feelings at the end of the interviews:

> *"I feel happy that I had some time to talk to you about my problems. I feel also happy that somebody's son whom I don't know where he comes from has come to give me a chance to talk about my problem…this will make me sleep well tonight. I will definitely sleep peacefully today. God bless you and travel back safely"* (Choolwe (BN)).
>
> *"I feel relieved and this talk we had is really good to me"* (Esnathi (BS)).
>
> *"I am happy and hopeful for change in our lives. I don't know when this will happen. Please write everything and send it wherever it must go"* (Participant G (BN)).

Sometimes when widows are reminded of their experiences, emotions are evoked as they remember their loved ones. Ndlovu (2013:7) found that widows experienced pain and their life experiences were emotional after the interviews with them. Contrary to that finding, the participants in this study had positive feelings as they felt relieved: the study has given them a rare opportunity to vent their painful experiences. The interviews provided the widows with a healing platform and an opportunity to learn coping mechanisms from one another.

5.3 PHASE THREE OF THE STUDY: KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Phase three of the study comprised the key informant interviews, conducted with professional social service providers and local traditional social service providers. The interviews centred on these predetermined themes:

- Personal work experience in helping widows
- Factors contributing to abuse of widows
- Legal policies and laws protecting widows and
- Help offered to widows who fall victims of abuse

The emergent themes and sub-themes during the interviews are discussed based on the predetermined themes.

5.3.1 Personal work experience of service providers in helping widows

The study sought to understand the personal work experience of the social service providers in assisting the widows and the size of the geographical areas they service in assisting widows who experience the various challenges after the death of their husbands. This is presented in Tables 11 and 12.

Table 7: Personal work information of participants in key informant interviews

Position of social service provider	Length of service	Areas serviced
District Development Officer	9 years experience	25 Wards in Binga District
District Social Welfare Officer	14 years experience	Whole Binga District
District Magistrate	15 years as a Magistrate and 6 months in Binga District	Whole Binga District
Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN)	4 months experience	Binga Centre, Manjolo to Siabuwa
Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS)	2 years experience	Kamativi, Simbala, Tinde, Pashu and Katete
Chief Sikalenge (BN)	24 years experience	Binga Centre to Kariangwe (radius of about 90 km)
Chief Saba (BS)	3 years experience	Sibbungwe to Gwayi (radius of about 70 km)
Village Head (BN)	9 years experience	Sikalenge and Manjolo areas
Village Head (BS)	10 years experience	18 wards covered from Simbala, Mudila, Mpati to Kabwe

In the study, each of the nine social service providers to the widows furnished their personal work information, including positions held, experience of the social service providers in helping the widows, the area serviced and its size. This information

helped with understanding the capacities of people providing social services to the widows and extent of social service provision in the district, including their mandate.

In the study, two main groups of social service providers were prominent namely the professionally trained social service providers such as the District Development Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, District Magistrate, the Community Relations Liaison Officers and the traditional local social services providers such as the Chiefs and Village Heads. The professional social service providers are mainly office bearers and the traditional local social service providers are located in the communities where the widows live.

In terms of length of experience of the social service providers assisting the widows, it appeared that Chief Sikalenge was the most experienced social service providers to the widows with a practical experience of twenty-four years to his credit. The District Magistrate had fifteen years as a magistrate, even though she had been in Binga District for a mere six months. The District Welfare Officer had fourteen years of experience in assisting widows in the district while the Village Head of Binga South had ten years of experience, in this regard. The District Development Officer and the Village Head of Binga North both had nine years. Chief Saba of Binga South had three years of experience while the Community Relations Liaison Officer of Binga South had two years of experience in assisting widows. The Community Relations Liaison Officer of Binga North had been in the position for just four months. Thus those with vast experience had been servicing the communities for a long time and which implied that they had a deep-rooted understanding of the psycho-social plight of the widows and the dynamics of the communities in Binga District.

The area serviced is also significant in understanding the coverage of social service providers and this has a bearing on service uptake by the community members and also making judgments on the availability of assistance in the district. It emerged that the District Welfare Officer's services, the District Magistrate covered the whole district as their offices were at the district centre while the District Development Officer serviced 25 wards out of 52 wards in the district. The Community Relations Liaison Officer for Binga North serviced various areas in Binga North, while the Community Relations Liaison Officer for Binga South covered areas within Binga South.

The traditional leaders also have demarcated areas of service in the district. Chief Sikalenge serviced areas in Binga North, together with the Village Head of Binga North who participated in the study. Chief Saba covered various areas in Binga South, alongside the Village Head of Binga South. It is clear that there is an extensive area to cover in providing the services to the widows who face challenges and seek help.

The District Social Welfare Officer, the District Magistrate, the District Development Officer, the Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN), Chief Sikalenge and the Village Head (BN), service some of urban areas and rural areas in the District. The social service providers from Binga South that include Chief Saba, the Village Head (BS) and the Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS) all service areas that are predominantly rural. In the urban areas, people are closer to most service providers and their uptake of professional services is likely to be higher than those in the rural areas. The widows in the deep rural areas mainly depend on the services of the traditional local leaders more due to distances involved in travelling to seek professional services in urban areas and the attendant costs. Most widows residing in rural areas are likely to not be functionally literate, and unreachable by professional social service providers: this affects their knowledge of social services available to them. In analysing how rural people utilise social services in other rural areas in Zimbabwe, Muchacha and Mthetwa (2015:62) found that rural women underutilised the services that prevented high child mortality rate for children. At personal health level, Devi and Rotti (2012:80) found that widows in rural areas were more prone to physical challenges like heart problems and disabilities than their urban counterparts.

The study also sought to find out from service providers the forms of abuse that the widows they helped suffered from and the common forms of abuse in their service areas. The themes that guided the interviews with the social service providers are forms of abuse experienced by widows in their demarcated service areas and people common in abusing widows. The discussion before presents the findings.

5.3.1.1 Forms of abuse experienced by widows in their demarcated service areas

Out of the nine social service providers, seven had provided help to the abused widows while two had not. It emerged that the Community Relations Liaison Officers (police) are mainly contacted where criminal cases are concerned. Teodori (2013:5) writes that "many victims are afraid to report their cases for fear of being judged and interrogated by the police."

It emerged that property grabbing is one form of abuse the widows face. All the seven participants revealed that property grabbing from the widows by their in-laws is common occurence. Sometimes fights between the widow and the in-laws ensue if the widow attempts to resist:

> *"We are mainly concerned with the widows because here in Binga there are issues to do with inheritance...When the spouse passes away there is a tendency to have disputes as to who is supposed to inherit the property that has been accumulated with the relatives of the deceased coming to say that this wealth was accumulated by our son"* (District Social Welfare Officer).
>
> *"The main form of abuse is property grabbing...",* (District Magistrate).
>
> *"They normally face property grabbing from the in-laws",* (Village Head (BN)).

Scholars have echoed the same findings of property grabbing against widows in African societies with widows losing property to in-laws (Brewer, 2011:5, Idialu, 2012:8, Rusere, 2010:1, Van de Walle, 2011:3). In-laws feel that the property of their deceased relative belongs to them because the widow is generally perceived as an outsider who cannot take the property with her. The implication is that the widows' economic bases are drastically reduced as property and valuable assets that supplement their economic resources are lost.

It further emerged that widows frequently suffer custody battles in regard to their own children. Seven of the nine participants in the study revealed that the widows do not have the liberty to retain custody of their own children as in-laws fight with the widows over care of children once their father dies. Sadly, the custody of children is

not anchored in the best interests of the children, but rather the in-laws use this to take control of property left behind by the deceased. The participants in the study had the following to say:

> *"…the widespread problem is custody of children battles",* (Chief Saba (BS)).

> *"Custody of children battles are directly linked to the wealth that has been accumulated in the household. The belief is that the one who retains the custody of the children will have a claim over the wealth. You will find that custody battles are not premised on the best interest of the child which is what we could expect as social welfare officers…the best interest of the child. But now you find that it is the material interest that is pushing the custody agenda. As a result, you will find that we have a lot of custody cases that are being referred to us through the courts. You will find that the parties contesting are after the wealth or estate of the late and not the best interest of the child"* (District Social Welfare Officer).

Similar findings have been documented by Van de Walle (2011:4) who noted that once bride price has been paid for a woman, upon the death of her husband she does not have the liberty to take children with her because the children are said to belong to the man's "lineage." This implies that a woman may essentially lose a lot and be lonely: without a husband, without property and without children if the law fails to protect them from "grabbing of children" by in-laws. Women are only recognised for their reproductive capacity in Binga and cannot make decisions regarding their own biological children.

A very painful form of abuse of widows that emerged in this study is accusing the widow of having killed her husband. Widows have often been accused of bewitching their husbands or infecting them with HIV. These accusations have caused a lot of tension and misunderstandings between strong-clawed in-laws and powerless, vulnerable widows. Two participants put it this way during the interviews:

> *"There are many abuses faced by widows. Some are accused of killing their husbands and in-laws band together to accuse the widow*" (Chief Saba (BS)).

> *"The most common form of abuse that I have come across is that widows are accused of killing their husbands"* (Village Head (BS)).

Idialu (2011:7) concurs and reveals that in the Edo State of Nigeria, women are victimised on allegations of having killed their husbands. Mgbako and Glenn (2011:395) also found that in Malawian and South African communities women are accused of practising witchcraft. Allegations of women bewitching the now dead husband have been witnessed where a community member's death is explained by suggesting witchcraft from the remaining spouse. The accusations of witchcraft levelled against widows constitute victimisation. These accusations result in the widow losing the psychological power and physical energy to fight for custody of her children.

The study also revealed that some widows are abused psychologically through humiliation and verbal attacks and harassment in the communities. Village Head (BS) indicated that some widows are attacked and harassed verbally and have lost respect even among young children. The Village Head (BS) had this to say:

> *"People utter derogatory words to her because she now lack[s] respect in the community. Even young children just speak offensive words and even threaten to beat [up] the widow."*

Gunga (2009:169) notes that it is a characteristic of widowhood to lose respect from the community and earn harassment that affects widows psychologically to the extent that they lose self-esteem. It can be deduced from these findings that many widows are psychologically affected since they lose community respect.

Widows are not spared from sexual abuse: their vulnerability as widows exposes them to sexual violence. An interview with the District Development Officer revealed that sexual abuse of the widows was rampant in the district despite the HIV and AIDS pandemic.

> *"…They are physically and sexually abused...The most common one is being sexually abused which cuts across marital status, girls at school and widows [included]"* (District Development Officer).

Rape is not only a human rights violation; it is a complete disregard of the widow's personhood and objectifying her. Brewer (2011:14) found that rape was a common

phenomenon meted upon young Indian widows. Lomba (2014:34) also that sexual violations of widows are done as a cultural way of cleansing the widow in Malawi. The findings of the study seem to suggest that widows need extra protection as they are vulnerable and defenseless against sexual abuse.

5.3.1.2 People commonly abusing widows

In the study, the participants were asked about the identities of people that commonly abuse widows in the communities. It emerged that in-laws (father in-law, mother in-law, sister in-law, brother in-law), are the main perpetrators responsible for abusing the widows. Many reasons were advanced to explain why in-laws are at the forefront and the reasons included property inheritance, (District Development Officer), accusing the widow of killing the husband, (District Social Welfare Officer), and that the widow did not marry again because her bride price had been paid by the family of the deceased, (Village Head (BS)).

These findings have been widely supported by literature: Lomba, (2014:35), Mughal, (2010:100), Nwabueze, (2010:145) and Rusere (2010:1) agree that in-laws in African communities are responsible for abusing widows over property disputes and promoting suspicions that the widow is responsible for killing her husband. Social feminists condemn the home for oppressing women and they vehemently argue that these private spheres need to be understood as a source of the entrenched subordination of women and hence tsuch practices need to be condemned (Graff, 2012:3). The findings of the study demonstrate a mentality in the in-laws that contributes to perpetration of violence on widows who are already vulnerable.

5.3.2 Factors contributing to abuse of widows

The study sought to find out from the key informants factors that contributed to the abuse of the widows. It was clear that these are many and varied.

One source of disputes that emerged was property inheritance disputes. The participants highlighted that many widows are abused due to disputes over inheriting the property the widows owned jointly with their husbands. The in-laws render relentless abuse on the widows in a bid to grab the property for their own benefit in total disregard of the welfare of the widows who are the rightful heirs. The following comment is indicative:

> *"The first one is property….. Any man with 30 or more cattle when he dies, the wife undergoes abuse whether the inheritance issue is solved or not conflict will arise definitely…* (District Development officer).

> *"On property inheritance, THERE IS A BIG WAR….YES THE WAR IS VERY, VERY BIG!"* ((adding emphasis)), (Village Head (BS)).

Using a Demographic Health Survey to analyse the problems of widowhood in Sub-Saharan Africa, Peterman (2010:3) found that property grabbing is one major problem among the widows in the region. In Zimbabwe, widows experiencing property grabbing felt "unsafe and unprotected" (Rusere, 2010:1), consequently disabling widows from taking care of their children and themselves as their economic resources are taken away.

The other factor that emerged is the complex nature of the baTonga people's culture in the district which has rendered them stubborn to change (District Magistrate) and has entrenched a widespread belief that women are subordinate (District Welfare Officer). The early marriages among young girls in the district, coupled with heightened mythological beliefs in witchcraft, have compounded the abuse of young widows and have disempowered them from seeking recourse. Young widows remain ill-informed and sometimes afraid to voice and stand by their inheritance and sexual reproductive rights. In highlighting cultural bias as a factor that contributes to the abuse of the widows in Binga District, participants revealed during the interviews:

> *"Mainly the contributing factor is the culture here in Binga. Binga is different from the other districts I have worked in before because people adhere to strange cultural practices and are stubborn to change"* (District Magistrate).

> *"Culture has also a bearing on women abuse. Women have been taught to be submissive and have been socialised that they cannot make decisions…* ((Cellphone rings)). *That's where most of the abuses are emanating from"* (District Development Officer).

The oppressive cultural practices contradict the provisions of objective number 7 of the Gender Policy of Zimbabwe (2013:13) which sets to "identify harmful laws,

cultures and traditional practices that infringe on women's and girls' rights and that impede the gender equality objectives and lobby for their elimination." Peterman's (2010:7) findings of the challenges widows face in Sub-Saharan Africa point to abusive culture and lower educational levels. The deduction from the findings points to the fact that laws and policies that protect women do not guarantee such protection of widows, often being selectively applied.

In some instances, jealousy is a factor that contributes to the abuse of the widow by her in-laws. In-laws may not want the widows to re-marry from a different family citing that bride price was paid to the widow's family and the unstated 'fact' therefore that she belongs eternally to the family of the deceased. Essentially, the family of the deceased may prefer the widow to consider re-marrying within the family. This is what two of the participants indicated in the study:

> *"Mostly the in-laws do not want the widow to get married to someone outside the family of the deceased. They want her to marry within the family. The reason for that is that bride price was already paid and she is having their children* (sic)*. So it's better for her not to go anywhere"* (Chief Sikalenge (BN)).

> *"Some of the factors I think it's because they still love the widows and [are]jealous about her moving on in her life and they don't want to see her in a new relationship"* (Village Head (BS)).

Gunga (2009:170) found similar widowhood circumstances in Kenya among the Luo people and stresses that it is one of the abuses widows need to be liberated from. Ogolla (2014:288) controversially sees marrying of the widow within the family of the deceased as "widow custody, care for the widow, or management of a deceased brother's home" as opposed to (what the respondents of the study referred to as) "jealousy" and outright objectification of the widow. It can be understood from these opposing positions that different societies ascribe different meanings to a widow's lack of choice towards her reproductive life: some societies regard it as abuse while others see the practice as the responsibility of the in-laws to oversee her sexual reproductive life.

It emerged also that misunderstandings between the widow and heir in-laws may have existed long before her husband's death, (Chief Saba), which then translates

into suspicions of being responsible for the killing of her husband (Chief Sikalenge, Village Head (BS)). The widow may be chased away from the premises and the community that they resided in with her deceased husband due to such misunderstandings and suspicions hovering on her. The death of her husband paves the way for making the widow vulnerable to punishment by in-laws. This is what the participants had to say:

> *"The biggest problem is that whilst the husband is still alive, people* (referring to mother in-law, father in-law and daughter in-laws) *do not go along. There are pre-existing misunderstandings. Now when the husband dies, it becomes worse. In-laws take advantage of the situation to punish the widow. Some widows are even sent away because their husband has died so they no longer have space in this community and may be suspected of killing the husband"* (Chief Saba (BS)).

> *"Sometimes the in-laws demand answers to the death of their relative from the widow. They suspect that she killed her husband or infected him with HIV and AIDS and demand answers on his death which traumatises the widow* (Village Head (BN)).

> *"Due to misunderstandings, also there may be suspicion that the widow killed the husband and then she must suffer or die as well. They don't even have evidence that she killed her husband, they are just jealous that why is she still alive. She must also die"* (Village Head (BS)).

Similarly, Idialu (2012:6) found that widows in Nigeria are not spared from accusations of killing their husbands through witchcraft which contributes to immerse torment from the in-laws. It is evident that there is deep seated oppression of women in African societies which does not spare the widows even during the time they need everyone's support to cope with loss of their husbands.

5.3.3 Legal Policies and Laws protecting widows

The study sought to find out information in regard to policies and laws that protect women and widows in Zimbabwe and specifically in Binga District. Two important

predetermined sub-themes on policies and laws protecting women were important, and they are:

- Views of service providers on polices and laws protecting women and widows and
- Suggested improvements on policies and laws protecting women.

The analysis obtained under these sub-themes were then analysed accordingly in the succedding paragraphs.

5.3.3.1 Views of service providers on policies and laws protecting women and widows

The participants in the study were asked to give their views on the policies and laws protecting women and widows in Zimbabwe in general and in Binga in particular. The responses of the participants were varied due to their diverse professional, social and geographical backgrounds and differences in the communities that they provide their services to within the district.

The theme that emerged from the responses of the participants was that implementation of the Policies and Laws was lacking. Participants revealed that the policies and laws protecting women and widows are many and very clear, however, there were not enough resources to implement the laws which made it difficult for service providers to enforce the laws in Binga District. Funding was highlighted as being intermittent and therefore affecting service delivery. Human resources were revealed to be critically lacking with for example, nine staff members working in twenty five wards in the District, (District Development Officer), and the existence of only one Magistrate for the entire District to adjudicate all the cases. Awareness campaigns and commemorations have also been affected by lack of resources and workforce which inevitably translates in lack of awareness of policies and laws by the people in the District especially with regards to women issues. The participants in the study had thus to say during the interviews:

> *"…We also have the Marriage Act, yes also to some extent it is protecting also but we have a problem of implementation due to service providers' capacity. The women and the widows do not know their rights. They may have heard about the law. The constitution itself is very clear. But we are saying how many widows have the*

privilege to see the constitution to read or to see the provisions of the constitution and which gender issues are in the constitution? We have the Gender Policy which is very clear and talks about gender equality and other things. But still as service providers we do not have the capacity to go around the 25 wards and service them and serve these women as need be", (District Development Officer).

"The policies are there, for example the Wills and Inheritance Act is there, but that is a piece of legislation. Are the people aware of the Act? is another thing. On implementations, I feel that there is still a gap that needs to be holistically addressed in order to protect the women…. Whilst pieces of legislation are there that is Wills and Inheritance Act, Guardianship of Minors Act, it's clear on what it says, and the Maintenance Act …but implementation!" , (District Welfare Officer).

"Protection of the widows from the law is adequate, but there is lack of personnel to enforce the law. For example I am the only magistrate in the entire district. Also resources are not adequate enough to implement the laws", (District Magistrate).

Some of the evidence for the findings of the study are echoed by Chirawu (2012:6) who found that there were numerous laws to protect women but there was a problem with capacity of the social service providers in Zimbabwe to deal with issues and suggested that their capacity be built to implement the laws of the country especially with the customary laws which are prone to misinterpretations. Mashiri (2013:97) agrees about presence of policies and laws protecting women in Zimbabwe but condemns the fear of reporting violations and abuse by the victims as the main problem with implementation of the laws. It can be deduced from the findings of this study that the implementation of the laws and policies that protect women demands a two way process. Firstly, there is need to build capacity of the social service providers and provide the necessary resources, and secondly, the widows need to report the abuse they experience for the policies and laws to be implemented.

Whilst it has been revealed that implementation of the policies and laws is problematic in the District, the Village Head (BN) is more critical of the government

which he blames for not paying the Village Heads for implementation of the policies and laws. He was doubting whether social service providers can effectively implement the policies and laws of the government without remuneration as motivator. He stated:

> *"Yes, the law is there to be enforced and we are doing that, but the government does not pay us for enforcing the law. How do we enthusiastically enforce it without getting anything as a reward for the work we are doing?"*

Lomba (2014:36) concurs that finance is critical and impacts significantly on implementation of the laws that protect widows. The writer found that in Malawi the localized initiatives have been hard hit by shortages of financial resources to oversee the implementation of the new laws that protect widows in the country and this had resulted in some initiatives failing. Whilst lack of payment of the Village Heads can be attributed to lack of funding and be blamed on the central Government, of Zimbabwe, sometimes corrupt top local government officials convert money that is intended to benefit lower structures of the communities to their own use and thus negatively impacts on service delivery.

The Village Head (BS) emphasised that current policies and laws did not seek to protect widows but rather they protect women in general. He emphasised the need to develop specific policies and laws that protect the widows and even their children when they re-marry. He made reference to men to whom widows get re-married revealing that the widows are forced to leave young children under the care of their relatives because it is common for their new husbands to reject their children or maltreat them. The Village Head (BS) further emphasised that *"there is need for the law to be specific on care of the widows in the country. That law must be in place".*

Dube (2013:13) also noted a loophole in the laws of Zimbabwe in that women and children are not protected enough in the event of the death of a spouse and then recommended that there was need to change the laws to offer enough protection. Brewer (2011:4) also lamented the gap that still exists in protecting widows despite much endeavors to protect women in many African countries. Deducing from the findings of the study, unless policies and laws specifying the protection of widows

are put in place, the widows' protection under the general laws protecting women is not guaranteed.

5.3.3.2 Suggested improvements on Policies and Laws protecting women

The researcher asked the participants to provide their views on improvements that might need to be considered in regards to the policies and laws that protect widows, basing on their experience in service provision to them. Various suggestions were made by the service providers.

One important suggestion was the need for alignment of the policies and laws protecting widows. The participants alluded to the fact that Laws and Policies exist but they are fragmented and not harmonized and they are fragmented which then leaves room for different interpretations from different stakeholders which affects the services rendered to the widows. This is what the District Development Officer highlighted during the interviews:

> *"I think with what is happening now in the country, there is a need for amalgamation or alignment of laws. We have so many laws that we inherited from the old constitution and now we have these new laws. You see one law says a girl can consent to sex at 16 years and the other law says a girl can get married at 12 years",* (District Development Officer).

Chifamba (2015:2) maintains that the new laws enacted in the constitution need revision to truly reflect the protection of widows as the laws seem to not be aligned for proper implementation. Due to misinterpretation of the laws, police officers in Marondera, Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe, for example sided with those who were evicting a widow instead of protecting her. Due to fragmentation of the laws in Zimbabwe, Simbo (2014:70) made recommendations requesting the Ministry of Justice in Zimbabwe to consider amalgamations and alignment of the laws to assisting service providers to make consistent interpretations and implementations. Simbo (2014:34) for example makes the explicit recommendation that the law needed to be clear in the Marriages Act that "it is a crime to force a surviving widow to abide by some cultural practices that infringe their rights". Thus apparently there is confusion among service providers on the interpretations and implementations of the laws that protect widows, and this has a significant bearing on the protection of

widows. Hence widows will always find themselves unsafe until laws are harmonised in Zimbabwe.

Another recommendation from the participants relate to the need to educate the community members and sensitizing them on the policies and Laws that protect the widows. Suggestions included the need to allocate more human resources, (District Magistrate), and intensification of awareness campaigns, (Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS)), to ensure maximum sensitisation and education of the people in the communities on policies and laws protecting widows.

The social service provider needs to play an educator role which according to Zastrow (2009:37), is crucial in providing information to the communities and relevant structures (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2010:101). Education of community members is a form of capacity development which results in increased community competence to address the issues of the widows. This author maintains that the involvement and capacitation of the community itself has a positive impact on the community's ability to deal with the problems affecting them, as their ability is taped and channeled towards useful community positive relationships for community solidarity in fostering the well-being of the widows.

5.3.4 Services offered to widows who fall victims of abuse

This thematic area focused on the services offered by service providers to widows who needed their help when they faced multiple psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands. The discussions with the social service providers were demarcated in the following sub-themes:

- Help offered to victims of abuse and
- Service providers' opinions on additional assistance needed by widows to cope with their situations.

The findings in the succeeding discussions indicate the information from the social service providers.

5.3.4.1 Help offered to victims of abuse

Social service providers were asked to share information on the help they offered to widows who were victims of abuse in their service areas in Binga District. Again the

social service providers had varied responses due to the diversity of services they render to the widows in the communities.

Service providers with an orientation towards the helping professions such as the District Development Officer and District Social Welfare Officer indicated that they inter alia offered counseling to the widows who sought their services. Two of the officers trained in the helping professions had this to say:

> *"What we do is to provide counseling to them. We have been trained to do counseling of widows and victims of abuse",*(District Development officer).

> *"…We also provide them with counseling and psycho-social support",* (District Welfare Officer).

Counselling is very crucial for people with psycho-social challenges and as a support mechanism it helps clients to engage in professionally guided and planned change process (Kist-Ashman & Hull, 2010:28). The intense psycho-social challenges that the widows undergo after the death of their husbands makes counseling an indispensable intervention process that can help the widows to adjust to their situations.

In instances where the service providers could not assist the widows and realised that another social service provider could assist, the social service providers indicated that they assisted with referrals, (District Social Welfare Officer), to other service providers. For example, widows in need of medical care would be referred to medical practitioners, (District Development Officer). This has been described by Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:49) as the "broker" role where clients are linked to "resources and services" needed.

It was evident from the findings of the study that many widows did not receive the services they needed because of lack of knowledge on where to find help. The broker role would then facilitate the process of receiving the much needed services on the part of the widows where they themselves did not know where to access services.

The District Welfare Officer reported that he assists widows with the processing of pension funds in the event that the husband who died was an employee of some

entity. They had noticed that many widows did not have the knowledge on how to access the pension funds and hence this was one form of help the District Social Welfare Officer provided to the widows. Additionally, the District Welfare Officers helped with processing of court reports to determine custody of children. Often there is controversy over the custodianship of a child between the widow and the in-laws. The reports are used by courts to determine the rightful person to take care of the child who also coincides in the best interests of the child.

Mediation services also are offered to the widows where controversy with their in-laws has arisen. The District Magistrate and Village Heads indicated that they provided mediation between the widows and their in-laws, to have common grounds, mutual agreement and harmony. This is how some of the participants put it:

> *"We mainly offer mediation and punish perpetrators accordingly",* (District Magistrate).
>
> *"We also ask those that are troubling the widow to stop doing that so that the widow can have peace and forget the stress that she is going through"* (Village Head (BN)).
>
> *"We then bring them together for mediation so that they can live harmoniously"* (Village Head (BS)).

Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:48) believe the effectiveness of the mediation role is critical in resolving conflicts at all three levels of the intervention in social work: micro, mezzo and macro levels. These writers highlight that the mediator role facilitates the resolution of conflicts. As many widows and their in-laws are usually entangled in disputes over property inheritance and custody of children, mediation is necessary in order to create harmony between the parties.

Chief Saba (BS) advises widows and in-laws to unite for the sake of the children and observes that lack of unity negatively affects the children and that children may be trapped in problems and lack of freedom to visit their relatives from both families. This is what the Chief had to say during the interviews:

> *"There are times when we advise the in-laws and the widows to unite and stay united. We look at the welfare of the children so that they should not face difficulties. If there is misunderstanding, children face*

difficulties. So we try to prevent that from happening. We want them to have freedom to visit either side of the parent: the father's side and the mother's side. We don't want children to get stressed about the loss of their father" (Chief Saba (BS)).

Some service providers noted that many of the widows need help with food. The social service providers have indicated that they assist widows to get food to meet their nutritional needs and during funerals to feed the mourners. The Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN) and the Village Head (BN) revealed this during the interviews:

"We also have women's network where police women are empowered to help women in the community who are in need of food…" (Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN)).

"During the funeral, we help with food to feed those who attend the funeral service. We call all the people together and ask for contributions in terms of mealie-meal to cook meals for funeral attendants" (Village Head (BN)).

Ho and Hanrahan (2010:12) and Sithole (2011:38) see as crucial the provision of food aid to people in the rural areas in times of crisis and need. Since widows are confronted with many challenges and drastic changes in their lives, the findings suggest that food aid is necessity in the event that a woman is widowed. Food aid enables widows to meet funeral expenses and the needs of her children as they suddenly become vulnerable.

5.3.4.2 Social service providers' opinions on additional assistance needed by widows to cope with their situations

The participants were asked their views on additional assistance that might be necessary for widows to cope with their situation. This question provided for the participants to add any thoughts from their practice experience which can be helpful for widows to cope which the study may not have covered.

In responses the participants seemed to note lack of education among the community members in the Binga District and hence suggested that much effort need to be put to educating the community, (District Development Officer, District

Magistrate), on laws that pertain to girls for example early marriages, women and widows. Educating the community can also sensitise them on matters affecting women, with awareness campaigns being a possible medium suggested to sensitise the community members, (Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN), Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS)).

Not only do widows need to be educated about their rights enforceable by laws, but also the need to be taught about income generating projects that will enhance their economic wellbeing (District Development Officer, Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS)). Three participants put it this way:

> *"I think there has to be a lot of education… they need to be trained in income generating projects for themselves and their children. They need education and have to be exposed to the laws that protect women",* (District Development Officer).

> *"There is need for income generating projects for the widows. There is also need to prevent early marriages through awareness campaigns",* (Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS)).

Kirst-Ashman (2013:48) noted the educator role as being very essential in informing and teaching the people. The writer however, warns that the educator needs to be knowledgeable and be good in communication. The findings of the study indicate that there is a great need to educate widows on a wide range of issues affecting their psycho-social wellbeing. Education can impact positively on their awareness of the laws that protect them and can give them leverage on information regarding economic and other matters affecting them.

It was suggested that the support system for the widows needed to be improved. The District Welfare Officer emphasised the need for support groups for the widows where space will be created for them to share their experiences. Also emphasised the need to empower the community structures such as the community leaders to provide the necessary support for the widows. Additionally, interventive programmes needed to be put in place that target the widows because the current programmes excluded the widows and hence there has been lack of support from the welfare programmes. This is what the District Welfare Officer suggested in the interviews:

"Yes, if there can be some support groups where other widows can get some information or some women lobby groups in the district…… We do not have the community driven support systems for the widows. We need locally based community support systems that can support those widows…. For social work services, I feel that widows are generally under targeted and are deliberately left out in the whole system of the vulnerable groups and yet they are vulnerable groups from a social welfare point of view. When we look at programming, it mainly deals with the elderly, the disabled, the children, the orphans and we hardly have a programme that is targeting the widows… They have always been an afterthought".

In emphasizing the importance of programming, Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:227) argue that there is need to include the widows in decision making as recipients of the services and other stakeholders who are pertinent in providing services to the widows. Proper programming is envisioned to enable the formation of the much needed proper support system for the widows at all relevant levels of intervention.

A socialist approach to providing help to community widows was also suggested where people in the community help one another in their neighbourhoods. This is how one participant put it during the interviews:

"I wish to say to people that as neighbours living in the same locality we need to help one another especially the widows so that they can have ways of getting food for their families", (Village Head (BN)).

In support of the suggestion by the Village Head (BN), SOS Children's Villages (2013:1) notes that community members need to support one another and gives an account of a caring neighbour who helped Mary, a widow dispossessed of a house by a brother in-law, linked her with SOS Children's Villages for help. The suggestions provided by the Village Head (BN) can be very helpful if all members of the community could unite in helping widowed women.

Interestingly, a culturally conservative and controversial opinion was raised by Chief Saba (BS) who pronounced that widows need to stick to their traditional cultures and avoid control of the church Pastors have over funeral services and cleansing

ceremonies because the Pastors have caused a lot of controversy and fights between the widows and their in-laws. This is what Chief Saba (BS) had to say:

> *"I just want to add a few things that if someone dies, people should follow their culture. Most widows follow Christianity and they do not cooperative with the in-laws in following the culture. The Pastors are now controlling deaths and funerals. This has become a very strong source of controversy if the in-laws do not believe in that. People should take care on that one".*

Chief Saba (BS)'s suggestions directly echoes the findings of Maririmba (2015:1) who emphasise that church leaders play a pivotal role in the lives of widows citing the case of Victor and Anna, (a widower and widow), who were helped to make a living by the Christ Alive Gospel Ministries chaired by Bishop Tichaona Maume in Zimbabwe. In another view the suggestions of Chief Saba (BS) that people must stick to tradional practices may be palatable only to strong adherents of customs and traditions and also receive disregard and antagonism from those who have abandoned them to follow Christian beliefs.

5.4 SUMMARY

The information from the thirty-three participants of the study has shown that widows experience serious psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands. Despite the many challenges they face, the study findings suggest that they do not get all the assistance they need. For a few who get some form of support, the help is professionally dispensed, ad hoc, piecemeal and often does not meet the basic needs of the widows. This being the case, professionally structured intervention model is needed for widows to cope with their psycho-social problems.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As has already been elucidated in the study, widowhood brings a myriad psycho-social challenges to women, especially given the oppressive nature of African society. The death of a husband leaves a widow with numerous challenges. This final chapter of the study discusses the findings of the study, draws conclusions and makes key recommendations based on these findings. The three phases of this study, namely in-depth one-on-one interviews with the widows, focus group interviews with the widows and key informant interviews are the basis on which the discussions of findings, conclusions and recommendations are centred. The themes of the study will be significant and central to the discussions of the summary of findings in this chapter. In prrsenting the recommendations, a practice model for social workers is ultimately suggested and discussed.

6.2 RE-STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

It is important to state again the objectives of the study before concluding the report. The objectives emanated and the gaps that were observed from the literature study. The objectives that guided this study included to:

- Analyse the psycho-social problems faced by widows in their communities. This objective was achieved by conducting individual and focus group interviews in the North and South of Binga District. Further key informant interviews were conducted to determine the views of the social service providers on the psycho-social challenges experienced by the widows in the district, and also to help to suggest a way forward.
- Appraise the intervention measures available for the challenges faced by widows in Binga District. The individual and focus group interviews with the widows helped in finding out what form of help was sought and given to them for the challenges they faced. The key informant interviews helped reveal the interventions the social service providers afford widows facing challenges.

- Assess gaps that may exist in intervention measures employed. The objective was achieved in the study through the individual, focus group and key informant interviews which determined the available interventions, whether or not the interventions are adequate to deal with the psycho-social challenges faced by widows.

- Determine the efficacy of social work intervention in the plight of widows. This objective was achieved through individual, focus group and key informant interviews. The widows in the individual and focus group interviews revealed the interventions provided by social workers and identified gaps and challenges.

- Develop a social work intervention model that addresses the plight of widows in Binga district in Zimbabwe. Through examination and analysis of the existing interventions in the psycho-social challenges, the gaps that exist and the needs of the widows, a model for social work practice to assist widows to deal with their psycho-social problems was formulated.

6.3 DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

A summary of findings of the study relates to the three distinct phases in which the study was conducted. The study findings are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

6.3.1 Phases one and two of the study

Phases one and phase two of involved widows as participants with phase one involves individual interviews while phase two involved focus group interviews. There were significant discussion areas in these two phases of the study.

On the onset of presenting the findings in chapter five of the study, the personal details of the widows were intriguing. Women are widowed at young ages in Binga District to older ages, with many of the women being widows between thirty and fifty years. The findings show that widowhood in the District cuts across ages with age ranges from twenty-seven years to sixty-eight years. This suggests that amongst the women of Binga, there is none of the age groups is exempt from widowhood. All age groups among women should therefore take specific measures to prepare themselves psychologically as they are at risk of being widowed. Woman older enough to be married are still within child bearing stages that are at risk of being

forced into levirate marriages. The findings of the study are partially similar to those of Peterman (2010:5) who found that widows in Zimbabwe mostly fall between the ages of fifteen and forty-nine years. This shows consistence in the age groups of women that are at risk of being widows from the previous five years that has passed since Peterman conducted the study.

The gender of the children possess a serious threat to inheritance of property by the widows. In the study, the widows' children were mainly of the female gender with few being males. Due to that factor, widows had challenges of inheriting property upon the death of their husbands especially when their progeny were female. Dube (2011:86) confirms this finding by arguing that the existence of female children among the widows heightened the chances of widows being abused by their in-laws who grab property after the death of their husbands because female children are not considered heirs to property left behind by their fathers in the baTonga culture. Radical feminist theorists, (Lord, *et al.* 2012:18) observe that patriarchal societies, such as Binga District, have higher levels of sexist oppression of women. This indicates the heightened levels of girls' and women's oppression in general in the District despite endeavors to fight for equality between genders globally. Zimbabwe has ratified various international instruments protecting women's rights such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women of 1979, the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 and the Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2002/49 and yet indications are that District Binga is trailing behind on social progress due to fervently holding onto outmoded cultural norms that suppress the female gender.

The background of women has significant implications and influence on the form of life they live. Most widows came from rural backgrounds, lacked formal education and survived mainly through subsistence farming. Lack of formal education is common among to rural women as Van De Walle (2011:5) and Steady (2006:80) in their work also found out. Inevitably, agricultural activities have been found to be the main source of sustenance and central to the lives of rural women in Zimbabwe (IRIN, 2015:1) especially among those without formal education. the combination of lack of formal education and practising of subsistence farming pose distinct problems for widows in Binga District. Firstly, widows without formal education are unable to find skilled employment to support and meet their needs and the needs of their

children which places them in abject poverty. Secondly, subsistence farming does not provide for surplus for sale or to store since this type of farming is hand-to-mouth in nature. It disadvantages them greatly as they can not be financially strong to embark upon input-intensive farming that could boost food security. It means therefore that the widows are continuously hit by hunger and struggle to get sufficient in Binga District.

The sizes of the widows' households have been found to be generally big (above six members on average) with some of the dependents of the widows being relatives or children left behind by relatives who are late. This is despite the fact they are themselves struggling to raise their own children with limited resources. This finding suggests that women generally tend to be generous, nurturing and caring. They are willing to share the little they have with others and take care of other people despite the fact that they do not have enough resources to do that. Even though some of these big family sizes are forced upon them through the obligation to take care of their deceased relatives' children, the widows have shown strength of character and compassion for taking over the caring role with limited resources. Further, this shows that apparently women in Binga District still prefer big family sizes as compared to the modern small family sizes.

As presented in chapter five of the study, there were significant findings on the psycho-social challenges and abuse experienced by widows in Binga District. The challenges emanated from marriage arrangements that women entered into which then presented various psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands.

The marriage types the widows entered into were mainly unregistered and polygamous. This is despite the fact that customary marriages can be registered under the Marriages Act (Chapter 5:07) in Zimbabwe. These findings confirm those of Share (2013:1) who found that eighty-four percent of widows in Zimbabwe are in unregistered, polygamous marriages. Hosegood *et al*., (2009:292) found that unregistered customary marriages in KwaZulu Natal are linked to loyalty to the religious beliefs of Shembe. This means they have been infused into the religious belief system which is ingrained in the lives of the people. As revealed in this study, unregistered customary marriages expose widows to abuse from their in-laws and yet widows lack the necessary legal protection against abuse and property grabbing

by their in-laws after losing their husbands by registering such marriages. Since the husbands are in control of the marriages entered into and the decisions made in marriage, unregistered customary marriages in African communities, and Zimbabwe in particular, tend to be capitalized by men who take advantage and have many wives which consequentially leads to HIV and AIDS infections.

Most widows reported that their husbands had died because they succumbed to 'this new illness.' The widows are themselves infected, which adds an extra burden on them. In Southern Africa, Zimbabwe is one of the countries that has been hardest hit by the HIV and AIDS pandemic leaving behind a trail of widows and orphans and many socio-economic difficulties. If men continue to die due to HIV and AIDS related illnesses in rural areas of Zimbabwe, the abuse of widows and their children will remain unchecked as many of the people in the rural areas adhere to strict traditional beliefs that are abusive of widows, especially accusing widows of having infected their husbands with HIV which then becomes a passport and a favourite avenue for abusing accused widows. this is all done without tangible evidence.

The plight of widows in Binga District is aggravated by the experience of challenging misunderstandings with their in-laws and are not accorded the protection and comfort that they desperately need. This is shown in chapter five that widows faced challenges that included public humiliation during the funerals and accussations of bewitching their husbands. Such accusations are difficult to erase from the mindset of the in-laws who believe in witchcraft even though this cannot be proved in a court of law. This is despite the fact that the widows at that moment would still be grieving following the death of their loved ones. The Child Welfare Information Gateway (2013:4) has shown that depriving the widow of the much needed support constitutes emotional abuse, adding that criticising the widow and condemning her for the death of her husband is emotionally abusive behavior. The ecological perspective holds that if viewed from an interactional standpoint, such interactions of the widows with the immediate environment have negative connotations (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman, 2013:29). This finding indicates that immediately upon the death of their husbands, widows experience deep psychological anxiety and fear over how the in-laws would treat them. This state of affairs contributes significantly to immense psycho-social problems that widows continue to face in Binga District.

The widows revealed that being subjected to harmful cultural practices like sexual cleansing and levirate marriages was commonplace. Due to their awareness of the dangers of such cultural practices, most widows apparently did not succumb to these dangerous cultural practices but stood their ground. The widows' refusal to participate in the traditional rituals resulted into cold relationships with their in-laws and stirred further misunderstandings. This shows that women are commoditized, an element very much against their human rights. In CEDAW's Article 5 (a), all nations have been urged to take specific measures to fight against commoditization of women as such practices militate against widows' rights. Apparently in Binga District, the repeal against marginalizing widows has not been in evidence since the current study shows that women are still commoditised. Radical feminist theorists have long argued that culture is one instrument that patriarchal societies have used to control women, and hence have condemned it and reiterated that there is need to denounce and speak against it (Lord, *et al.,* 2012:18). Widows seem to be completely unsafe from various forms of psycho-social abuse. If they manage to barely escape one form of abuse, another counter abusive practice awaits them.

The challenges widows face in Binga District extends into property ownership. Widows experience property disinheritance by their in-laws leaving them economically and social disadvantaged. Widows lost property to in-laws despite the fact that they had dependents including young children who needed such resources to cushion them against poverty. A refusal to surrender property and assets has been found to expose widows to physical assault. The unlawful practice of property grabbing among widows in Zimbabwe seems to cut across geographical locations and social class. This entrenched practice is rampant as both the less formally educated rural widows and urban educated ones are subjected to property grabbing. This is baffling given the access to recourse and have higher probability of legal awareness. This shows that tradition tend to be deep-rooted and sits at the apex of a disempowering discourse, especially where women and widows in Zimbabwe are concerned.

The widows are continuously isolated by their in-laws and hence resort to rejoining their natal families as a way of seeking support and comfort. This seem to suggest the critical importance of the natal family to women especially at the onset of widowhood.

The court processes available in Zimbabwe to assist the widows in change ownership of assets and property to their names after the death of their husbands has been found to be very demanding, long, unfamiliar and stressful to the widows. Court process are energy-sapping and widows normally lack the needed energy to follow up legal interventions due to intense psychological distress associated with the death of their husbands. Given the lengthy nature of the court processes, widows' fragile psychological state and limited resources continue to limit thir effort to seek court interventions. This suggests that in addition to court intervention, social work intervention which is more sensitive to the psychological wellbeing of the widows from an empowering strategic position, should be utilised in conjunction with legal intervention.

The internal demands of widowhood are intense and widows experience stress and loneliness when their husbands die. These psychological challenges significantly affect widows' coping mechanisms after the loss of their husbands. Scholars such as Martin-Matthews (2011:345), Holden, *et al.,* (2010:10) and Keister and Destro, (2008:438) also found similar psychological challenges among widows. The psychological challenges that widows experience are mostly at the individual level and are potentially extremely damaging to their psychological wellbeing and functioning. Hence something needs to be done by stakeholders, social workers included.

Added to the psychological challenges, it has been shown that widows experienced social challenges including loss of dignity and support on the part of the widows to meet the needs of their children. Chenube and Omumu (2011:3613)'s work resonates with the findings of this study when they lament the low status of women in Nigeria and their inability to meet the demands of raising children due to unprecedented income decline. Dignity and respect is every human being's basic right and as such its loss thereof signifies loss of the essence of human life. Children's wellbeing and fulfilment of their needs represent a daily dream for mothers across the globe. Being unable to support and meet the needs of their children therefore is an acute social problem for widows which makes adjustment and to recovery from the loss of breadwinners unbearably difficult.

Widows felt relieved and better after sharing with the researcher and others in the focus groups the psycho-social challenges they experienced after the death of their husbands. This signifies the need for emotional catharsis when widows face psycho-social challenges. This proved to be essential for the psychological wellbeing of the widows.

6.3.1.1 Intervention measures for the challenges experienced by widows

Widows are amassed with survival needs including those of their children which interventions need extensive focus on. Additionally, widows struggled to meet their own needs, and the needs of their children and they needed help for the children's proper development. Chenube and Omumu (2011:3613) and Holden *et al.,* (2010:6) found that failure to meet the needs of their children and their own needs is a prominent challenge among widows. These findings indicate that husbands play a significant role in providing resources to the widows and their children, hence the husband's death reduces the availability of indispensable resources.

Widows needed spiritual support and upliftment. Apparently, the deaths of their husbands lent widows to spiritual downturns where they sought spiritual upliftment and support to cope with the deaths of their husbands. Some of the widows received prayers from their churches. In the views of Cohen, (2007:274) widows resort to spiritual comfort as a way of coping with the distressful experiences of their husbands' death. As shown by the findings of this study, spiritual needs form part of the aggregate of interventional needs of the widows in Binga District.

Despite the stinging financial shortages to meet the various demands in their lives and the souring and volatile economic situation in Zimbabwe, it was surprising that an insignificant number of widows expressed need for income generating projects to provide sustainable income. This study found that some organisations provide direct financial help to widows. Given the donor fund-driven nature of the NGO sector and suspicion by the government of Zimbabwe that the sector may be politically linked to opposition parties, NGO driven support may not be sustainable.

Despite the widespread agricultural activities practiced by widows for their sustenance in the district (IRIN, 2015:1), apparently the need for agricultural inputs was not common among widows. This is surprising because farming without inputs

negatively impacts on the harvest widows get from their farming activities. This can be one factor that confines the widows in the contionous need for food aid.

Seeking help for their problems paused as a challenge for some widows despite the apparently needed help. Widows do not seek help from the social service providers because they do not know where to get help for their psycho-social problems. Interestingly, Dube (2011:104) found that when widows live far away from their natal homes, they fail to seek help from anybody because they feel alienated. This is a clear indication indication that services for widows are not well established in Binga District. This leads the researcher to argue that that services for widows are not well established in Binga District and hence widows did not know interventions available for them.

From among the widows that managed to seek help, the Chiefs and District Magistrate were the main sources of help and provided mediation services. The widows demonstrated familiarity and sources of help sought the services of the named service providers. The findings of the study underscore the fact that widows mainly seek mediation services, be they from traditional courts such as the Chiefs or from professionally trained service providers such as Magistrates. Ndlovu-Bhebhe, (2012:2) points out that many widows in Zimbabwe have attempted legal recourse for the abuses they experience after the death of their husbands. While interventions by custodians of the law are essential, stipulated steps of an empowering nature through social work interventions remain indispensable for the psycho-social problems of the widows.

Intermittent help in the form of food was not a lasting solution. Normally, the relatives' of the widows provide less sustainable interventions through food aid which is inadequate and disempowering in Binga District. Similarly, Van De Walle (2011:26) found that Mali widows suffer the same as safety nets for food used and owned by the government and the NGO sector are unlikely to reach the widows and their children. This points to the inherent unreliability of food aid programmes for survival of the widows and the undeniable need for sustainable food sources.

It was not surprising that widows identified proximity and the capacity of the service provider as factors to consider in choosing whom to seek help from. Naturally, the service providers who were closer to the widows with the necessary capacity would

be preferred to provide services. Muwaniri (2014:1) also found similar reasons for selecting help providers. Widows considered respect and custodianship of cultural norms for seeking assistance from Chiefs. It is worth noting that the Chiefs tend to be closer to the people they serve, are on top of the community leadership pyramid and enforce customary law and hence people are bound to respect, trust and seek their help. In addition, minimal resources are needed to seek the Chiefs' help so widows prefer seeking help from them.

Having been in civil marriages determined whether or not to seek interventions of the magistrate for services such as to change ownership of property and assets. Civil marriages require legal procedures for the processing of papers for property ownership change. Ndlovu-Bhebhe (2012:2) maintains that legal processes are required in order that the magistrate administers property ownership in accordance with the Administration of Estates Amendment Act and the Succession Act of Zimbabwe on behalf of the widow. This points to the fact that once entered into civil marriages, widows have better protection by the law from property grabbing common among the in-laws in Binga District. Although this is the type of marriage that best protects the widows, the lower literacy level among women seems to be a problem as they do not comprehend the processes that they need to undertake to claim property should their husbands die. Civil marriages have often sparked hatred between the widows and the in-laws since the in-laws are legally prohibited from grabbing property that constitutionally belongs to widows.

Another factor considered by widows in seeking interventions was membership affiliation. Among other organisations that widows can affiliate to, the church stood prominently for the widows. Widows sought help from various religious denominations because they were affiliated to those religious denominations. Ndlovu (2013:39) found that religious leaders have a responsibility to care, for the congregation through pastoral care a finding confirmed by the current study. Affiliations to various religious groups by widows extends their eligibility to spiritual consolation and upliftment which widows require after the loss of their husbands.

Seemingly, bereavement and loss predisposes widows to depletion of energy and helplessness. Lack of energy to pursue intervention for the challenges they faced was a factor that hindered widows from seeking help. When their husbands die,

sometimes widows lack power to seek the necessary help they need to cope with the loss. This lack of energy to seek help is at times a function of attempts to avoiding re-living the experiences of the death of their husbands. To avoid re-experiencing pain of the loss of their husbands, widows decide to avoid seeking intervention and in Cohen's (2007:269) view point, widows take what author termed "pain-avoiding mechanism."

In the context of the empowerment approach, this experience of the widows is due to focus on the "damage model of thinking" in which the mind of the widows is preoccupied with pain and discouragement (Saleeby, 2009:16). The writer emphasises embracing optimism in healing and opportunities. Such an approach is significant for both the widows and the helper. For the widows, it gives them power and encourages them to seek help from hope and resilience for their psycho-social problems. The helper feels encouraged to provide help by focusing on the strengths of the widows and their fortitude against loss experienced.

Long distances travelled by widows to the service providers inhibited them from seeking help. Widows failed to seek help because the professional service providers geographically are far away from their area of residence and accessibility is problematic. Similar results were established by Dube (2011:112) who found that widows could not get help due to limited resources in cases where they had to reach far-flung areas.

The widows revealed that the interventions offered to them by those who isought to address their problems were not adequate to meet their needs. The reasons cited included the widows being dissatisfied with the help, the help being unsustainable and that there were problems that remained unsolved and continued to linger in their minds such as stress that had not been dealt with. Whilst this study established that the widows received inadequate interventions from service providers, in Indiana Scott *et al.,* (2007:250) found that the widows were satisfied with the social support they received for the challenges they experienced due to proper programmes that were set for the widows. The contrasting findings seem to suggest that properly set programmes for widows could suffice as opposed to *ad hoc* approaches to interventions that were identified in Binga.

The empowerment approach holds that people faced with adversity have the ability to rise above it and begin to contribute meaningfully to improving their situations because they have an “innate ability” and “strength” to do so (Saleeby, 2009:11). Further, people who need help have to be seen as “directors of the helping efforts”, (Teater, 2010:41), if the helping process has to make meaning to them.

Widows in Binga suggested a number of improvements in interventions that would help in meeting their needs. The widows suggested that there was need to improve financial support, income generating projects, the scaling up of food aid, an introduction of counseling services and increased visibility of social service providers in the communities. Scholars such as Holden *et al.,* (2010:13) and Chenube and Omumu (2011:3615) agree that widows’ financial needs demand satisfactory intervention because their economic situations provoke sympathy which lends them more vulnerable to abuse by in-laws. Improved sustainability through financial resources empowers the widows, especially if these take the form of income generating initiatives. Roberts (2014:110) concurs with the suggestions of the widows that income generating initiatives empowers them and their children and the entire community.

Widows suggested that food aid schemes needed improvement because they w are faced with food shortages. Unless the criteria for selecting beneficiaries for food aid, apparently many widows may not qualify for aid because of their young ages. In the current study, the critieria to qualify for food aid has been found to be old age. Due to persistent droughts, Zvobgo (2009:360) observed that food aid in Binga District is a common phenomenon. Without food, widows find it difficult to meet the nutritional demands of their children and their health needs as many of them are HIV positive.

To deal with psychological pain, counseling for the widows is a necessity that should be scaled up as it is critical for them in dealing with the psycho-social pains resulting from the deaths of their husbands coupled with torment from in-laws. to facilitate coping, Idialu (2011:8) suggested that the psychological pain that widows undergo needs special attention, especially given the unfriendly nature of the practices that follow the death of the widows’ husbands.

Further suggestions from the widows were that social service providers need to be visible in the communities in which the widows live. Lack of visibility was the proble

culprit why many widows were unable to seek help because the providers of such intervention were ‘invisible.’ Visibility of the social service providers could improve sensitisation among the widows of the services available to them from various service providers. This was a concern not only picked up by the current study, for example, Dube (2011:113) also found that most women were not aware of their rights because they lived in the remote areas where service providers would hardly reach to disseminate such rights. Hence visibility of the social service providers in the communities needs to be scaled up to enhance service uptake of the widows.

The widows had opinions that targeted both men and the NGO sector. In the study, widows suggested that men need to consider HIV testing seriously as the communities they live in are hit by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. This plea from the widows was affirmed by Ndlovu (2013:30) recommended that all people need to know their status as they are not safe from HIV infection. Further, the widows suggested that the NGO sector should be sensitive to the widows to avoid complicating their problems as some seemed to add more problems to them. UNIFPA Zimbabwe (2011:2), on the contrary, applauded the work of the NGOs that have centred their interventions on the rights of women in Zimbabwe.

When widows share their experiences with people that listen to them and are provided a platform to share with each other, they feel relieved from bottled emotions. The rare opportunity they get to vent their emotions seems to have a healing effect on them. On the contrary, Dube (2011:119), however, found that widows get emotionally drained when they discuss their experiences of loss. This signifies the fact that engaging participants in a study that may be emotionally taxing needs caution on the part of the researcher.

6.3.2 Phase three of the study

This was the last phase which involved social service providers to the widows who experienced psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands. The discussions of the findings were interesting and informative.

The work experience of the social service providers to the widows was revealed in the study to give an overview of the length of service in intervening in the challenges faced by the widows. As indicated in chapter five of the study, the social service providers had varied length of service in assisting the widows in the communities

with the Community Relations Liaison Officers in the police department having the least experience. Other social service providers had relatively longer work experience. Spread (2014:6) re-iterated that work experience contributes positively and is beneficial to service delivery. The little experience among Police Officers in Binga might have been a function of transfers to other work stations this is a common occurrence in the police service.

The areas covered by social service providers also varied spatially. The social service providers located in the district, (District Development Officer, District Social Welfare Officer, District Magistrate), had larger spatial areas to cover as opposed to those located in the community where people resided (Chiefs, Village Heads, Community Relations Liaison Officers). The larger service areas demands more resources to deliver services (Dube, 2011:110), and as such covering large areas may result in case backlogs.

6.3.2.1 Forms of abuse experienced by widows in service areas

The abuse experiences revealed by social service providers were similar to those provided by the widows in phases one and two ot the study. Many of the fights widows experience with their in-laws emanate from property inheritance issues and the custody of children. The in-laws grabbed property from the widows and demanded custody of the children. Other scholars (Brewer, 2011:5; Idialu, 2012:8), support the findings of this study that property grabbing including widows is rampant once their husbands die. Van de Walle, (2011:3) also records that custody of children is fueled by bride price which disempowers widows in issues connected to custody of children.

Controversially, widows were accused of killing their husbands as the study revealed. The widows were held to account for the death of their husbands with suspicions of witchcraft and infecting the husbands with HIV and AIDS being prominent accusations. Widows also tend to be psychologically through humiliation in the presence of people, particularly during the funerals. Other scholars have found similar psychological abuse of widows. Idialu (2011:7) identifies accusations against the widows in Nigeria while Mgbako and Glenn (2011:395) found similar accusations and humiliation meted on widowed women in Malawi. The findings of the study show

vulnerability to emotional torment and turmoil which adds to powerlessness, experiences that are widespread in the communities.

Despite the global call to combat sexual abuse of women, the social service providers revealed that widows were sexually abused in the communities of Binga. This was rampant despite the scourge of HIV and AIDS that has claimed the lives of so many people, including many of the widows' husbands. Scholars such as Brewer (2011:14) and Lomba (2014:34) also found that rape and sexual perpetration in the context of widow cleansing were common in India and Malawi. This seems to suggest that sexual abuse of widows might be hard to stop as there is institutionalised sexual pervasiveness against the widows through cultural practices.

Widows face many psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands as already shown in chapter five that particular people are in the forefront in abusing the widows. The in-laws mainly are the responsible for abusing the widows once their husbands die.

Mainly, the in-laws have been found to be responsible for grabbing property from the widows, accusing them of killing the husbands and they believe that since bride price was paid for the widow, she belongs to the in-laws family and the widow cannot marry again or is mandated to follow the demands of the in-laws unquestionably. Many scholars such as Lomba, (2014:35), Mughal, (2010:100), Nwabueze, (2010:145) and Rusere, (2010:1) agree with the findings of the study and have that in-laws are the main culprits when it comes to abuse of the widows in the African communities over countless disputes and accusations. The widespread onslaught on widows by in-laws for various reasons causes division between the family of the widows and those of the in-laws thereby causing numerous confusion among the children of the widow who has to live with the bitterness of both families.

A constellation of factors that were contributory to the abuse of widows in Binga District. Culture of the baTonga people is one huge contributing factor. There is a culture of mandatory sharing of property and assets of the deceased and the relatives usually forcibly do so which culminates in property grabbing. There is also deep rooted belief in witchcraft in the District and widows often succumb to the demands of the in-laws for fear that they or their children may be bewitched.

These violent acts imposed on the widows are contrary to the provisions of CEDAW article number 5 and objective *number 7* of the Gender Policy of Zimbabwe (2013:13) which set to abolish oppressive culture and any other harmful practices against women and girls in Zimbabwe and advocate for their elimination. Such acts prepsent a gross violation of the international instruments of human rights and the policies and law in Binga District.

Jealousy among the in-laws also emerges as a factor contributing to abuse of the widows. The in-laws would preferably want the widows to re-marry within their family because they believe that the bride price that was paid to the family of the widow binds the widow to stay within the family of the deceased. The in-laws strongly believe that no other man outside their family should be allowed to marry the widow.

Gunga (2009:170) found similar circumstances among the Lou people of Kenya and recommends a liberal feminist approach (Appelrouth & Edles, 2011:316, Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111) which emphasises that widows should be liberated from such oppressive practices. Contrary to that view, Ogolla (2014:288) however takes a functionalist viewpoint and asserts that marrying of the widow within the family of the deceased constitutes what is called “widow custody, care for the widow, or management of a deceased brother’s home”. Nevertheless, the above findings represent the diversity of views of communities on the issue of re-marriage of the widow and the difficulty that many communities have in addressing the matter which results in thriving and survival of the practices in some segments of the society.

Grudges and pre-existing conflicts were also contributory to the abuse of widows. The study found that before the death of their husbands widows could already be harbouring disagreements with their in-laws and hence the death of their husbands leave the widows more vulnerable and exposed as their allies for support have died. This has been found to be the reason why widows do not get the emotional support they deserve when their husbands die. Idialu (2012:6) found that in the communities of Nigeria widows instead of receiving the compassion they deserve, they were subjected to further torment. It is clear from the findings of the study that in African communities, widows have limited space for comfort after the death of their husbands despite the fact that the demise of their husbands constitute a moment

when she needs compassion the most, to cope and adjust from the consequences of the death of her husband.

6.3.2.2 Legal Policies and Laws protecting widows

There were pertinent findings from the study in respect of policies and laws that protect widows in Zimbabwe. The study revealed a number of factors which service providers suggested improvements that needed to be made on existing policies and laws protecting the widows.

The service providers to the widows and implementers of the policies and existing laws of Zimbabwe critiqued that implementation of the policies and laws protecting women and widows was lacking. The reasons for the lack of implementation of the laws pointed to lack of needed resources explicitly financial and human resources to implement the policies and laws to secure the protection of widows. Additionally, apparently the Village Heads in the communities receive no incentives to carry out the duties of enforcing policies and laws of the State which lessens their motivation to implementing them. The lack of needed resources affected programmes of the social service providers and reduced areas of coverage in creating awareness on the polices and laws protecting women.

Chirawu (2012:6) maintains that numerous laws existed to protect women but there was a problem with capacity of the social service providers in Zimbabwe. The scholar suggested the need for their capacity to be be built to facilitate efficient implementation of the laws of the country especially in respect of the customary laws given that they are prone to misinterpretations. Lack of critical resources to implement legal polices and laws coupled with lack of capacity needed for social service providers signifies a gap that needs to be filled. If not addressed, the policies and laws remain office documents and not beneficial to women in general and widows in particular who suffer from abuse.

The policies and laws specificially spelling out the protection of widows were not available. The available policies and laws were related to women in general which excludes specific challenges encountered by widows in Zimbabwe. Brewer (2011:4) and Dube (2011:13) share similar findings and lamented the gaps that exist in international instrument such as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, Zimbabwean policies and laws which seek to protect women. The authors criticised

the policies and laws, noting they were not beneficial to widows as this cohort of the population has special needs unique to it. The lack of policies and laws specifically for protecting widows leaves implementers guessing on how to intervene in the challenges experienced by widows or at the very worst never structure helpful intervention programmes that benefit the widows.

The suggestions were made by social service practitioners on they thought could be improved on the policies and laws protecting women that also provided protection to the widows. The suggested improvements of the social service providers were mainly based on the applicability of the policies and laws in practice.

Social service providers suggested that policies and laws protecting women needed to be amalgamated and harmonised. Apparently some of the laws are new in Zimbabwe and hence still fragmented and confusing implementers in the process. Chifamba (2015:2) criticised the new laws in Zimbabwe on the basis that they are not aligned to each other which made it easier for police officers in Marondera to aid the in-laws in victimising the widows instead of protecting them from abusers. New laws need to be correctly communicated to the enforcers so that stakeholders have a common understanding to prevent misinterpretations which can lead to untold suffering among those that should be protected such as the widows.

The social service providers added that there was need to educate the community members on polices and laws that protect women. The social service providers realised that the community members were not educated and sensitised on these. Sensitising and educating the community members could assist the community at large and widows in particular who experience challenges after the death of their husbands to seek recourse from the relevant social service providers to meet their psycho-social needs. Adding substance to this suggestion by the social service providers, Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2010:101) posit that educating community members become more meaningful once the relevant community structures are followed.

6.3.2.3 Help offered to widows who fall victim of abuse

Even though widows experienced a host of social challenges in Binga District, social service providers revealed different kinds of interventions emlpoyed in assisting the widows who fall victim to abuse. The social service providers indicated the various ways in which they intervene when widows face designated psycho-social

challenges after the death of their husbands. They further made suggestions and expressed opinions which they felt could be helpful in assisting the widows to deal with the psycho-social challenges experienced by widows.

Various social service providers revealed the many kinds of help they offered the widows according to their areas of expertise and programmes, and these counseling provided to the widows by those social service. Kirst-Ashman and Hull (2010:28) support the notion of providing counseling to people who experience psycho-social problems and highlighted that this helps with professionally guided change processes for those in need of help. Counselling servies are very crucial services needed by the widows especially given the intense emotions that accompany the death of a loved one within an environment that is not supportive enough for the bereaved women to cope and adjust. It is noteworthy that widows in phases one and two of the study had indicated inaccessibility and lack of visibility of the social service providers in their communities. It means that those that access counselling services have to use their meagre resources to travel long distances to access professional counselling services or they lose out on this essential service needed for coping. Given the rural nature of the district and the poverty that widows are faced with, one might anticipate and postulate only a few widows had access to counselling services if little effort was put by the social service providers to make outreach programmes into the communities.

Linking widows with sources of help was seen to be a service that the social service providers helped the widows with. Social service providers could not help the widows and were aware of where the widow in need could get help, they linked them to other service provider through referrals. The brokering role is very critical for the widows in Binga District as many widows do not know where to find help and hence if the brokering role could be widely utilised by social service providers, the widows will eventually know where to find help by themselves in the event that they need help.

Widows are assisted with processing of pension funds in the event that the husband who died was employed and the widow could not navigate the process involved by herself. In many instances, the processing of the funds generated controversy forcing the social service providers to intervene through mediation services. Mediation was not only useful in the processing of pension funds, it was found to be

equally important in determining the custody of children which often generated conflicts. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:48) maintain that mediation plays a very crucial role at the three levels of social work and needs to be used extensively at all the three levels of social work intervention which are the micro, mezzo and macro levels. Conflict has been shown by the study to be one of the endemic psycho-social challenges experienced by the widows. Conflict resolution mechanisms (like mediation) can be very useful to ease the conflicts which widows often find themselves in.

Given the intensity of the psycho-social problems with which widows find themselves, it was revealed that advice was given to them. Advice helped widows to make better choices about their situation and possible course of action. Situations surrounding the custody of children have always been confusing to the widows since children still need to be in contact with the relatives of the father who are the greates abusers to the widows. Advice on such matters has been found to be crucial as the widows have to consider the needs of the children as well when making their decisions. Dube (2011:126) concurs that widows need advice when confronted with crucial decisions and that social service providers play a crucial role in that process.

The social service providers also assist the widows with food during the funerals. The rural areas from which the widows come predispose them to nutritional deficiencies related to poverty and hence need food aid (Ho & Hanrahan, 2010:12; Sithole, 2011:38) especially that many of the widows were HIV positive needing proper nutrition.

On additional opinions on what else could be helpful for the widows to cope with their situations, the social service providers revealed the eminent need for community education. Communities in Binga District need education on laws affecting girls and women as the people are not conversant with them. Further the social service providers suggested that the widows need education on income generating projects to help them generate income for their families. Toseland and Rivers (2012:285) agree that the educator role is critically important where the social worker uses to present new information that they need to solve their problems. Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013:48) however warn that there is need for an educator to be well-informed and to be grounded in information before embarking on the educator role.

Education in the ciontext of Binga District is very crucial bearing in mind that Binga District is rural in nature with many women that did not go to school. Educating widows would be one way of disseminating very important information which the widows need and are deprived of.

Social service providers vehemently suggested the improvement of the support system to the widows. Apparently, the community support system of widows needed to be improved as it was astonishingly deficient in Binga District. The suggested mechanism included forming support groups for widows where they can be able to share their experiences. Additionally, service providers' intervention programmes have been found to astoundingly exclude intervention for widows. Widows come as an afterthought in their programmes. Therefore, social service providers suggested that embarking on programmes that specifically target the widows is crucial to intensify the interventions that are deficient in the plights for widows. For people that have experienced stressful life events, Toseland and Rivers (2012:20) endorse the use of support groups arguing that these groups have a different approach to intervention in that their primary goal is a focus on "mutual aid, to help members cope with stressful life events and to revitalize and strengthen members' coping abilities". Such a suggestion can be helpful to the widows if the implementation can succeed in Binga District as the study has shown that widows have limited space to vent their emotions.

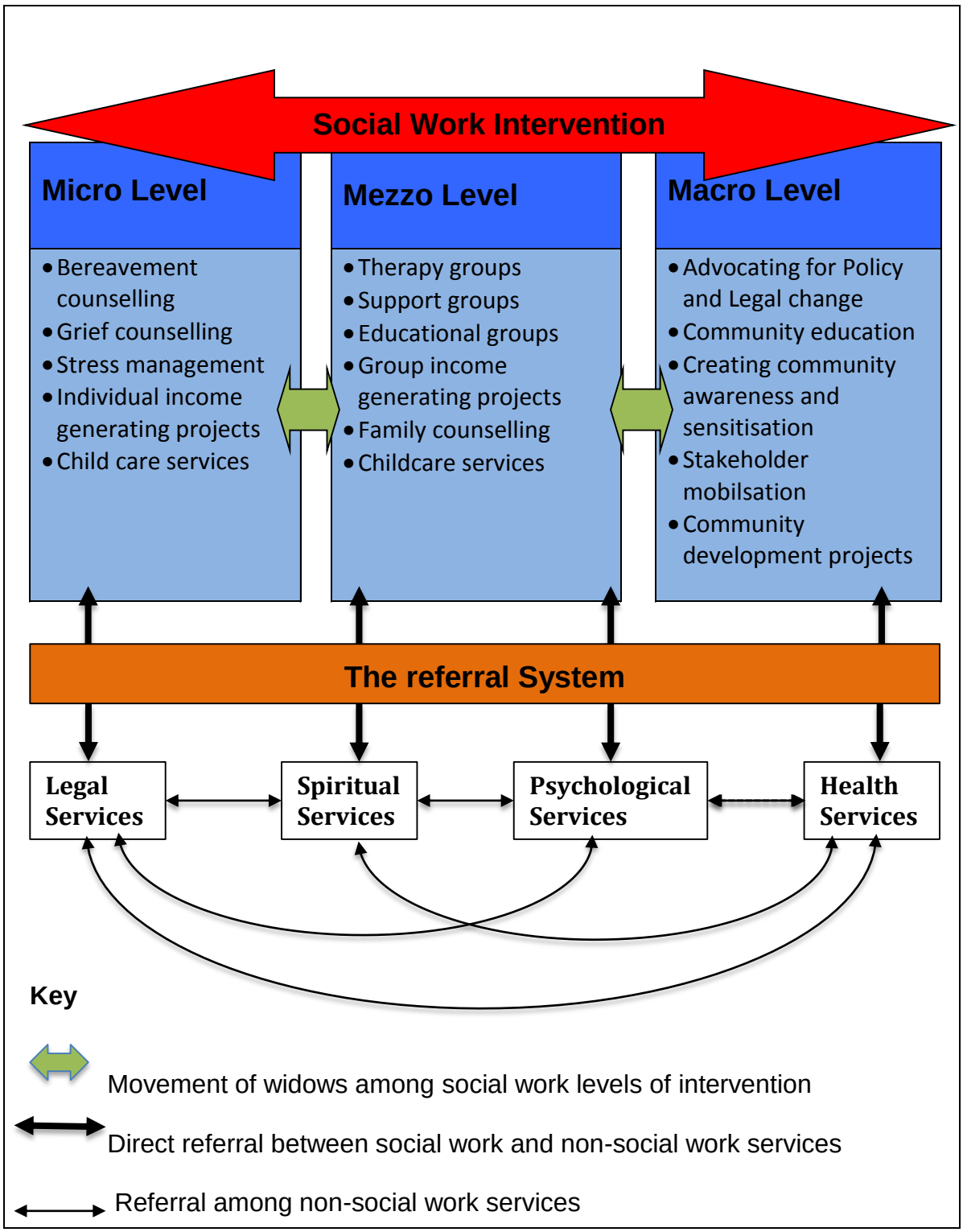
An interesting suggestion from one social service provider was that widows need to stick to their traditional practices as they tend to mostly follow Christian orthodox approaches to handling funerals, something that has predisposes the widows to misunderstandings with their in-laws. Whilst sticking to traditional practices may be functional, many people have adopted the Christian life and that reverting to traditional values may be defaulting on and contradictory to the Christian values which have been found to be friendly to most widows. That may face another level of controversy from the widows who normally find Christian life very helpful to them.

The discussed findings that emanated from the information gathered from the widows and social service providers provided significant information for incorporation in building a social work model that can address the needs of the widows. The proposed model is discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

6.4 The proposed Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model

The study gathered information from both the widows and the social service providers that led to proposing an intervention model for the psycho-social challenges experienced by the widows. The proposed model is expected to sensitively address the psycho-social problems of the widows. The researcher names this model the ***Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model for widows*** (see Figure 7). The succeeding paragraphs explain the Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model for widows.

Figure 7: Proposed Social Work integrative basic care model for widows.



Source: Dube, 2016

6.4.1 The Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model for widows explained

This proposed model is an informed model and has been built on real and existing information in the study. It is built on the concept of empowerment, (Saleeby,

2009:11), where the widows' and the social service providers' ideas on suggested improvements to the needs and interventions into the psycho-social problems of the widows are considered. The widows are considered as experts in their experiences and can be trusted for the improvements they need so see happening in their situations to guide practice (Saleeby, 2009:15). This is important if the model is to have relevance to the needs of the widows. The literature review aided in determining what interventions are necessary for the widows to cope with the circumstances they confront after the death of their husbands.

- **The thrusts for the development of the Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model**

This model has been developed from three main thrusts:

1) The first thrust was the literature reviewed in the study which informed it and indicated what interventions exists or the ideal interventions in social work practice for the widows and the levels at which social workers can intervene into the psycho-social plight of the widows.

2) The second thrust and reference source was the information given by the participants to the study. They explained the kind of help they got from social service providers, what they could not get and suggested improvements on existing interventions. Social service providers also had input on what interventions exist and what needs to be improved for the widows to cope with the psycho-social challenges they experience. This approach is empowering to the widows as it tapes on their needs which must be translated into actual social services. That gave directions on what is needed and should be incorporated in this proposed model.

3) The third thrust was the researcher's comprehension and interpretation of the problems experienced by the widows from both literature and filed work which provided first-hand information from the widows themselves and the key informants who participated in the study and also documented evidence from literature. In developing this model, the researcher had both the theoretical comprehension and an empathetic understanding of the widows' psycho-

social challenges which have been crucial in developing helpful interventions depicted by the model.

- **The salient features and concepts of the Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model**

The proposal is called Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model in that the domain field championing this model is the field of social work. It is based on the empowerment approach and rights theories of social work practice evidenced by incorporating the views of the participants in the proposed practice model. This is an important aspect and principle of “dialogue and collaboration” as well as “suspension of disbelief” in the clients abilities and the empowerment approach to social work practice (Saleeby, 2009:13). The empowerment and the rights approaches are central to the practice of Social Work. It is also based on Social Work theory as shown in chapter three of the study.

The model can be said to be integrative in two ways: it is built on the amalgamation of useful information from different sources; theoretical and scholarly sources, practice experience of the social service providers and lived experiences of the widows; and secondly, the model has a holistic approach signifying the unification and integration of different services. Some of the services might not be provided directly by social workers but through referral services or through team work approaches to practice and building alliances with other professionals. The social worker can also play the critical role of a broker or link the widows to needed services (Kondrat, 2010:22). This is consistent with the empowerment approach to social work practice.

This is an initial step towards building a more comprehensive social work model that could inform practice. The proposed model responds to the fundamental coping needs of the widows as suggested by the widows themselves and the suggestions of the social service providers as informed by the findings of the study. This is consistent with positive liberty of the rights theory (Fagan, 2009:18) where people actively get involved in issues that affect their lives. The model could be developed further through testing in practice, filling in gaps and identifying perceived improvements.

The notion of care in the model denotes the fundamental empathetic responses that social workers need to embrace in assisting the widows. The care needed relates directly to the three levels of intervention for social work, explained in chapter three of the study, namely micro, mezzo and macro level interventions.

The micro level interventions target individual widows, the mezzo level interventions target groups and families of the widows whilst the macro level interventions are aimed at the larger communities and the society. These levels of intervention are indicated on the model in figure 7 corresponding to each of the levels. For example, for micro level interventions, bereavement counseling can be provided, mezzo level interventions, support groups can be formed whilst at macro level interventions, advocacy for law and policy reforms can be done.

For the proposed Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model, referral services are very important. To meet the psycho-social needs of the widows, social work practitioners can refer them for legal services and the legal practitioners can equally refer widows for social work interventions. Similarly, social workers can refer the widows for other needs such as the spiritual, psychological and health services as shown in figure 7. The widows can also be referred by practitioners from spiritual, psychological and health services to access social work interventions. In this proposed model, the referral of widows can also happen among the legal, spiritual, psychological and health services. The social workers need to coordinate these services for the widows to access them.

6.5 CONCLUSIONS

The study reached interesting findings concerning widowhood in Binga District. The question that is critical is in regard to the generalizability of the results of the study. Generalisability of the study results in qualitative research discourse is mired in controversy even when detail provided such as in this study has been limited to the specific area of study (Braun & Clarke, 2013:280). The psycho-social challenges experienced by widows might differ from one individual widow to the other and from one spatial context to the other given also the small sample size involved in qualitative research. This makes generalisability of the results difficult to apply.

There are certain aspects of the study on widowhood that apply to many widows however: the stress associated with loss of their husbands, the oppressive nature of

the social environment in which widows live, and lack of programmed intervention measures specific for the challenges experienced by the widows. More so, the study involved social service providers that intervene at district level and are knowledgeable of the situations of widows in the entire district which made it informative to glean into experiences extending to the entire district in their jurisdiction. These aspects make it possible to understand what psycho-social problems widows experience in general throughout the district. Due to such considerations, there is growing acceptance in qualitative research that some results of the qualitative study could be transferrable to similar situations elsewhere (Braun & Clarke, 2013:282). The succeeding paragraphs present conclusions drawn.

6.5.1 Conclusions in relation to the psycho-social problems experienced by widows

Widows suffer a host of psycho-social challenges that cut across all age groups among women who are widowed. The study indicates that many women were widowed when they were young and as such experienced intense psycho-social challenges from a young age.

It is concluded that other demographic characteristics of widows have a significant bearing on the psycho-social challenges they experience after the death of their husbands. The demographic characteristics that this study found are discussed below.

- Lower levels of education among the widows significantly impacts negatively on their ability to understand their constitutional rights and available interventions for the psycho-social problems they experience after the death of their husbands.
- Women are widowed at a time when they have young children under their care. These children are young and still attending schools. The care and support for the young children makes widows experience more psycho-social problems without the support of their deceased partners.
- The rural backgrounds of the widows predisposes them increasingly to less favourable cultural practices such as levirate marriage and widow sexual cleansing practiced by the baTonga people ingrained and followed fervently among the rural populations which the widows are a part of. Even though the widows may be oppressed as a result of such practices, they are by default

disempowered to seek liberation from them. Liberation from oppressive societal practices is at the core of the arguments of liberal feminists (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2013:111), who see eminent need to liberate women. Liberation of the widows in rural areas is choked an overdose of ingrained discipleship to their traditions, custom and norms despite the fact that they may be oppressive to the widows.

- Subsistence peasant farming as a mode of sustenance does not serve to provide enough food reserves to cushion the widows from food shortages. This is basically basically hand-to-mouth farming which leaves widows vulnerable.

Women in Binga District mostly enter into customary marriages and many are polygamous and unregistered even though constitutionally, marriages could have been registered under the Marriages Act Chapter 5:07. Polygamous, unregistered customary marriages tend to be problematic for widows as they are expected to succumb to traditional practices that conspire against these widows, resulting in the widows suffering from dispossession of property, assets and money left behind by the decreased husbands.

Further, a substantial number of women are widowed in Binga District due to HIV and AIDS related illnesses. Apparently, the HIV and AIDS prevention measures and support mechanisms for men infected have not been optimised and this leaves trails of widowed women to battle psycho-social challenges in the District.

The conclusion is made that widows are affected by widowhood at two substantial levels: the individual and the immediate environmental levels. At the individual level, the widows experience intrapersonal and psychological challenges that include intense mental stress and loss of dignity among other community members. Further, the widows feel isolated and lonely as they have lost companions they were intimate with and close to. Writers such as Holden *et al* (2010:10) and Keister and Destro (2008:438) comment that stress and loneliness constitute a common phenomenon that disturbs the psycho-social functioning of widows.

At the immediate environmental level, widows experience a series of psycho-social challenges that are brought about by people around them. There is lack of support during the time of bereavement even though the widows need it desperately. The widows are exposed to cultural practices such as widow cleansing to exorcise the

spirits of the dead from them. Additionally, widows are subjected to levirate marriages which over time has sparked immense controversy.

Further, the immediate environmental level of psycho-social challenges have also been intensified by property grabbing and custody battles over children involving their in-laws. If widows resist, they risk physical assault. Widows also tend to have a diminished income base which reduces their ability to meet the needs of their children. This indicates that widowhood entangles women to a web of psycho-social problems that deplete the individual widows' resilience.

6.5.2 Conclusions regarding available intervention measures for widowhood

Available interventions to deal with the challenges experienced by widows come from the social service providers who are closest to the widows in the communities they live. These are mainly the Chiefs and Village Heads. The engagement of traditional leaders for intervention was seen by Muwaniri (2014:1) as central to the rural people. Other trained social service providers are far away from the villages and rural widows can hardly access their services with the limited resources they have.

Due to the inadequate structured social service interventions, widows cope by seeking help from their families and the religious denominations they are affiliated to. These have been found to be available resources for coping by women that are widowed (Dube, 2011:109, Izumi, 2006:41).

The main form of interventions known to the widows take the legal route in the form of traditional dispute settlements in the communities and mediation in magistrates' courts. The legal interventions are devoid of the necessary humane approaches to address the psycho-social needs of the widows making them live with deep seated mental stress and unresolved intrapersonal volatile emotions. This emerged from reports by widows of frequent stress attack episodes, and unsatisfactory interventions. Not surprisingly, some were subsequently diagnosed with High Blood Pressure when they sought treatment for physical ailments.

Further, the policies and laws that seek to protect the widows are not harmonised and aligned. The policies and legal frameworks characterise bits and pieces of information and newly enacted laws do not have common interpretations. This

subsequently affects proper interpretation and implementation of the laws by the service providers.

The interventions available for the widows have significant gaps that need to be filled as these are mainly *ad hoc* (interventions) and usually afterthoughts. The service providers (Department of Social Welfare) confirmed this when they indicated that the widows are an afterthought and mainly left out in the programming of the interventions. Due to lack of specific programmes for the widows in the District, interventions are minimal and not prioritised.

Whilst the service providers offer counseling services (for example Department of Welfare and Department Women Affairs) to the widows when sought, the resources needed to structure more deliberate and proper intervention measures tend to be inadequate for the social service providers. Whilst professionally trained social service providers acknowledge the need for well-structured and programmed interventions for the psycho-social challenges of the widows, the financial and human resources have been found to be the most acute limiting factors.

It can be concluded that the services needed by the widows are profoundly inaccessible to them. The widows complained of lack of knowledge of the available services and invisibility of many of the service providers. The service providers, on the other hand, complained of lack of education on the part of the widows in terms of the help they could access from them. Additionally, the service provider from the Department of Welfare highlighted the need for improving the support system of the widows. To add further substance to this conclusion, both the widows and the social service providers suggested and itemized various improvements in service provision, indicating how the felt gaps could be filled.

Networking among social service providers is lacking. The social service providers seem to have no coordinated way of knowing what other services providers have for the widows and hence they lay the blame on each other. Where networking occurs, the service providers have minimal formal constructive feedback on how the partner service provider could enhance services for the widows. This affects the quality of services they have for the widows.

6.5.3 Conclusions regarding the efficacy of social work intervention

It can be concluded that social work interventions are indispensable for the psycho-social problems faced by the widows after the death of their husbands for them to cope. The researcher conducted the interviews applying social work skills in an empathic manner and at the end of the interviews the widows felt better, relieved and empowered. There was confession among the widows that they have never been given a chance to share their experiences. The widows alluded to the fact that they could not believe that there are people who are concerned about their problems such as the researcher and wished that such engagements with them could continue and further culminate into the much needed sustainable well-structured intervention programmes.

In this study, the empowering nature of the profession of Social Work for people who have faced adversity in their lives stood out prominently as the widows felt listened to by the researcher. Not only did the researcher demonstrate sensitivity to the problems of the widows, cultural sensitivity was also shown. This is one of the competencies expected from the Social Worker in showing the efficacy of Social Work interventions in such sensitive problems.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found that widows face multifaceted psycho-social challenges after the death of their husbands. The interventions available need supplementary interventions to meet the coping needs of the widows. Based on the findings of the study, there are various recommendations that can be made.

6.6.1 General recommendations

The study found that the communities of Binga District are not supportive to the widowed women. The widows are treated differently from other women and subjected to many forms of abuse.

- It is recommended that the general public perceptions about widowhood be changed in the district to create positive perceptions in the communities that widows deserve rights and humane treatment like any other human being in the communities. Initiatives such as awareness campaigns to educate the general

public with a view to change their attitude can be put in place by social service practitioners

- The study revealed that the widows suffer property grabbing from the in-laws resulting from the unregistered customary marriages that women enter into before the death of their husbands. It is recommended that all stakeholders, including the Chiefs and Village Heads in the rural areas, be equipped with knowledge to advise girls and women at large on the available options of marriage types that can guarantee them protection from property grabbing when they are widowed. Males need to know the various marriage options available as well.
- Many widows could not seek help from professional social service providers for the challenges they experienced after the death of their husbands citing lack of knowledge about the available services. It is recommended that the social service providers devise intensive marketing mechanisms to target the communities spelling out the services they offer to the widows and also service providers must increase visibility in the communities for the people to know the services they provide.
- There is a great need to provide effective networking among the social service providers in Binga District in order to improve and enable feedback among the social service providers in the District. This has the advantage of improving the referral system among the social service providers and may facilitate efficient use of resources to meet the needs of the widows.
- This study established that men are in control of power, leadership and headship of the homes in Binga District resulting in subordination of women. It is therefore recommended that women empowerment efforts should not sideline men, rather men should be brought on board through so that a bi-focus approach, which includes men and women, in prevention of the abuse of widows is facilitated in Binga District.

6.6.2 Recommendations for social work practice

- The study revealed that widows are oppressed, victimised and subjected to various forms of abuse in the name of culture in Binga District. It is recommended

that more social workers be recruited in the district to actively uphold social justice as a value and mandate for professional practice.

- Despite the growing respect for the rights of all human beings and calls to respect the rights of women globally, the rights of the widows are violated in Binga District which militates against the position of the Choice theory of human rights (Fagan, 2009:16). Consistent with the global demands to accord widows their rights, social workers need to intensify advocacy efforts to ensure rights of the widows in the entire district and the country at large. In their advocacy agendas, social workers need to openly criticise the oppression of widows and demand that the rights of the widows be observed by all the communities.

- Social Workers need to prevent the abuse of widows at micro, mezzo and macro levels of interventions. The Social Work practitioners should play a part in rehabilitation of the widows who have been affected psycho-socially after the death of their husbands. This can be possible through the employment and application of various skills and playing of relevant roles.

- For social work practice, the the Intergrative Basic Care Model is explained earlier, recommended for intervention for the psycho-social problems experienced by widows. The model takes into account the psycho-social needs of the widows that encompasses the referral system.

6.6.3 Recommendations for laws and policies protecting widows in Zimbabwe

- It is recommended that the laws and polices protecting widows in Zimbabwe be amalgamated and harmonised for easy and proper interpretation and implementation. The laws and policies protecting women in Zimbabwe are currently fragmented and prone to different interpretations and implementations by concerned stakeholders. For example, the Customary Laws which were amended in 2001 were inherited from the colonial past that oppressed women and now need to be amalgamated with the amended laws in the current constitution of Zimbabwe to prevent grey areas which may be prone to misinterpretation and improper implementation. Land acquisition legal frameworks also need to address sustainable land ownership of widows as these

women are the most active people in the agriculture sector yet easily dispossessed of land upon the death of their husbands. Further, laws relating to the protection of widows specifically have been glossed over and this study recommends that laws specifying the protection of widows should be enacted and incorporated into the mainstream of the general laws protecting women.

- The policies for social service delivery relating to women such as the Gender Policy of 2003 lack specificity on interventions for widowed women and should be revamped radically to stipulate the provision of services for widows in Zimbabwe. For example, objective number seven of the gender policy which gives a general approach to protecting women should specify and make mention of the protection of the widows. This would mandate the social service practitioners to incorporate interventions of the widows in their programmes as service delivery imperatives. Currently, such policies have been found to be lacking widows have not been given priority attention in the current intervention programmes of the social service providers.

- The "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989" and the "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child of 1999" brought about changes in legislation on children in Zimbabwe, specifically influencing the "Children's Act of 2013, Article 19." This urges state and society to protect children from all abuses and harmful practices (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2011:11). This should be disseminated at community level and Chiefs and Village Heads need to be educated on the Children's Act as a preventative mechanism against early marriages that girls are forced into in Binga District. This can effectively facilitate the sensitisation of the entire community on the rights of the girl child in the district as the chiefs have influence over what the community believes in and acts upon.

- The available policies and legal frameworks for the prevention of women abuse follow the top-down approach in addressing the psycho-social problems encountered by women and their widowed counterparts. An approach that is bottom-up is needed in enacting the policies and laws that include the views and

inputs of the grassroots. The current top-down approach is cold and insensitive to the needs and cultural aspects of the communities and hence not sufficiently functional towards prevention of the abuse of widows. It is recommended therefore to have an Afrocentric sensitive approach that considers the needs of the beneficiaries and the unique nature of the sources of abuse as the current approaches are ineffective.

- The language of the policies and legal frameworks needs to be “indigenised” to meet the comprehension levels and requirements of the local traditional leaders so that they can understand and implement them in their efforts to prevent and intervene in problems of the abuse of widows in the communities.

6.6.4 Recommendations for further research

- This study investigated the psycho-social challenges of the widows in Binga District. Further researcher needs to be done on the psycho-social challenges experienced by widowers not only in Binga District but across the country. This could assist in creating an integrated and holistic understanding of the phenomenon of widowhood in its totality between the genders.

- The study’s demarcation area was predominantly rural in nature; it would also be beneficial if further research were conducted to investigate the same phenomenon in urban settings so that the psycho-social challenges of widows in the urban areas can also be documented and even compared to the rural set up.

- It was surprising to find that sisters in-law and mothers in-law also participate in abusing the widows. Further research should be conducted to establish the reasons why women participate in abusing fellow women when they are also women prone to the same fate.

- Further research needs to be done to establish ways in which the curriculum for training social workers could be modified and revamped to incorporate gender sensitive approaches to social justice that eventually help change positively the

perspective of the communities in Zimbabwe on the girl child, widows and women in general.

- This study has built and recommended the Social Work Integrative Basic Care Model for social work practice. The model has been developed based on the needs and experiences of the widows and the social service providers and reviewed literature. The study recommends that the model be tested through further research to determine its applicability and possible improvement for enhanced social work interventions in the psycho-social plight of the widows in Binga District.

6.7 THE LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The first-hand information from the widows helped the research to gather information on the lived experiences directly from the widows. Similarly, the researcher managed to directly gather information on the experiences of the social services providers. The inclusion of widows and social service providers significantly enabled a multidimensional interrogation of contesting views about the experiences of the widows. This was essential in documenting full accounts of the experiences and needs of the widows which was helpful in building the Social Work Integrated Basic Care Model.

Interviewing the widows directly by the researcher enabled the use of social work skills to understand their plight. This approach enabled the validation of the importance of social work intervention in the challenges experienced by the widows. Though the researcher managed to interview the widows once and focused on the research themes only, the interaction with widows enabled the use of social work skills on a small scale: larger scale interaction could have produced more exhaustive data.

The study's limitations emerge from interviews that involved much travelling for appointments before the actual interviews which came at high cost to the researcher. This was so especially with the social service providers who were spatially scattered over extensive geographical distances.

During the data collection process, interruptions happened in the homes of the widows such as the ringing of cellphone, crying of attention-seeking babies and visitors coming into the homes of the participants. This reduced the concentration of the participants in the interview process meaning crucial insights may not have been captured.

The language translation presented another problem in that some words the participants used in ChiTonga language were difficult to translate into English. This made the researcher use descriptive phrases because of the unavailability of English equivalence.

It is anticipated that the study, which dealt with the experiences of the widows in Binga District, provided in depth investigations and that its findings make an essential and significant contribution for the field of Social Work and that it generates interest within the research community.

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ANNEXURES OF THE STUDY

ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A:
ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE - NWU

NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITJ YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
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ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE OF PROJECT

Based on approval by the Human Resource Research Ethics Committee, Mafikeng Campus, the North-West University Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (NWU-IRERC) hereby approves your project as indicated below. This implies that the NWU-IRERC grants its permission that, provided the special conditions specified below are met and pending any other authorisation that may be necessary, the project may be initiated, using the ethics number below.

Project title: The psycho-social plight of widows in Binga District in Zimbabwe: The efficacy of Social Work intervention.

Project Leader: Dr NG Phetlho-Thekisho
Student: M Dube

Ethics number: INlwlul-lolol4lslI91-11lsl-IAI91
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Approval date: 2015-11-25 Expiry date: 2018-11-25 Category I N/A I

Special conditions of the approval (if any): None

General conditions:

While this ethics approval is *subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:*

- *The project leader (principle investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the NWU-IRERC: -*
  annually (or as *otherwise requested) on the progress* of *the project,*
  - without any delay in case of *any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course* of *the project.*
- *The approval applies strictly to the protocol* as *stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course* of *the project, the project leader must apply for approval* of *these changes at the NWU-RERC. Would there be deviated from the project protocol without the necessary approval* of *such changes, the ethics approval* is *immediately and automatically forfeited.*
- *The date* of *approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date,* a *new application must be made to the NWU-IRERC and new approval received before* or *on the expiry date.*
- *In the interest* of *ethical responsibility the NWU-IRERC retains the right to:*
  - request access to any information or *data at any time during the course* or *after completion* of *the project;*
  - withdraw or *postpone approval if:*
  - *any unethical principles* or *practices* of *the project* are *revealed* or *suspected,*
  - *it becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the NWU-IRERC* or *that information has been false* or *misrepresented,*
  - *the required annual report and reporting* of *adverse events was not done timely and accurately,*
  - *new institutional rules, national legislation* or *intemational conventions deem it necessary.*

The IRERC would like to remain at your service as scientist and researcher, and wishes you well with your project. Please do not hesitate to contact the IRERC for any further enquiries or requests for assistance.

Yours sincerely

Linda du Plessis

Digitally signed by Unda du Plessis
ON: cn=Unda du Plessis, o=N'NU, ou=Vaal Triang~ Campus, email=6nda.duplessiS@nwu.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2015.12.0819:48:04 +*OZOO'*

Prof Linda du Plessis
Chair NWU Institutional Research Ethics Regulatory Committee (IRERC)

ANNEXURE B

CONSENT FORM IN ENGLISH

I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we can start, I would like you to know that:

1. Your participation in this study is voluntary;
2. You may decide not to answer some questions;
3. If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may to do so without any penalty;
4. The information you will share with me will be recorded so that I do not miss any I information shared. The shared information will be used for academic purposed only

The information shared will be confidentially kept and no personal information and contact details will be asked from you.

As required by the North-West University Research Ethics Committee, may you sign this consent form for me to indicate that I have clarified everything about this study and you understand?

Participant signature: _____

Date: _____

CHIYUNGIZYO CHABILI (B)

CHIZUMINANO

Ndiyanda kumulumba kapati akuzumina kunjila mukati kamabambe aya. Katutanatalika ndiyanda kuti muzibe eezi zitobela:

1. Kunjila mumabambe aya nkwakulisalila;
2. Mulazumizigwa kutasandula pe imwi mibuzyo njimutayandi kusandula;
3. Kuti mwazoyeeya kuzwa akati mulazumizigwa;
4. Zyaambo nzitutaabane zilandolwa kuchitila kuti tazindisweeki pe. Eezi zyaambo nzingasikubelesegwa kuchikolo biyo.

Eezi zyaambo takwe umbi pe muntu utakazumizigwe kuzibona alimwi takwe nimutakumbilwe kuzibinkana nkumukkala pe.

Mbuli mbuziyandikana a kkomiti yabuyandauzi ya chikuchikolo cha North-West University, mulakumbilwa kuzilinga awa kuchitila kuti zizibinkane kuti ndamupandulwidwa zilikuchitika muchiiyo echi.

Nzilingo yamuntu wanjila mumabambe aya: _____

Zuba: _____

ANNEXURE C

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS WITH WIDOWS IN ENGLISH

THEMES	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS	1. Please tell me about yourself.	-Age -Area of residence in the district -Children and their sex -size of household -Educational level -mode of sustenance (work, welfare, farming).
PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND ABUSE EXPERIENCES OF THE WIDOW	2. What kind of marriage were you in?	-Civil -Customary (single wife) -Customary Polygamous
	3. Share with me about your husband's death.	-when he died. -How he died
	4. What were your experiences after the death of your husband?	-during the funeral(in-laws treatment, community treatment) -after the funeral (in-laws treatment, community members' treatment)
	5. Share with me the psychosocial challenges you experienced after the death of your	-Lost esteem -lost friends -blamed for husband's death

	husband.	-stressed -traumatised - failed caring for children -property taken away
	6. How do you feel right now about the situation you went through?	-better -worse -no difference
INTERVENTION MEASURES FOR THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY WIDOWS	7. Share on the kind of support that you needed after the death of your husband.	-Social (Care and custody of children, friendship, support groups) -Economic (property ownership, social grants, food, land ownership -Psychological (counseling, stress management) -Spiritual (prayer, traditional ceremonies and rituals)
	8. Who helped in the problems that you encountered?	-Own family -friends -village head -chief, -police -Magistrate, -Social worker -nobody helped
	9. What kind of help did you receive for the	-mediation

	problems you encountered?	-counseling -re-claiming property -custody of children -did not get any help
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF INTERVENTION SOUGHT BY WIDOWS	10. What did you consider when choosing the kind of help you were given. (If you got help). 11. What factors contributed to your failure to seek help (if you did not seek help)	-distance -availability of service -Did not know where else to seek help -was referred -did not know where to find help -distance -I felt powerless -I was afraid of bring rebuked (by family, other women, community members)
GAPS THAT EXIST IN INTERVENTION	12. Do you think the help you received was enough to cater for your needs as a widow? 13. What improvements do you suggest for the intervention you received from social service providers? 14. Is there anything you want to share that we may not have	-if not explain why not -if yes explain why -counseling (for grief and loss) -help with child care - safety shelter -self-help projects

	discussed about? 15. How do you feel about what you went through at this moment?	

We have come to the end of the interviews. Thank you very much for participating in this study.

CHIYUNGIZYO CHATATU (C)

KWAAMBUZYANYA ABAMUKA MUFU KABATALI MUKABUNGA PE

MUTWE WAMAKANI	MIBUZYO	ZILANGILWA
MAJWI ABWIIME BWABANTU BATANJILE MUMABAMBE AYA	1. Awumwi awumwi ngalyambe atala abuumi bwakwe?	-Minyaka yakuzyalwa -Nkumukkala muleeli bbooma -Mulabana bangane -Mwakasika aali mulwiiyo -Mupona anyamanzimode
BUYUMUYUMU BUSWANANA ABAMUKA MUFU.	2. Mwakali mulukwatano lulibyeni?	-munsi lyamulawu wakwaalika na? (mwakali banakazi bangane) -munsi lyamulawu uzumina mwanakazi omwe na?
	3. Mundaambile atala alufulu lwamulumi wenu	-mulumi wenu wakafwa lili? -alimwi wakafwa byeni?
	4. Awumwi ngandaambile kuti mwakaswaanana azili nibakafwa balumi benu?	-mwaka jatwa byeni kumakwatwa muchiindi chadilwe, (kuzwa katanafwa mulumenu amusule akufwa kwakwe.) -mwakajtwa byeni abantu mbimukkezyenye aabo. kuzwa katanafwa mulumenu amusule akufwa kwakwe.)
	5. Mwakalimvwa byeeni musule akufwa kwabalumi benu?	-ndakabula kulisyoma -bakandichija bazolwani -ndakapegwa mulandu

		wakujaya mulumaangu -zyakandilemena -zyakandichisa -kwakandilemena kulela bana.
	6. Nimwazwaa kwambula atala abuumi bwenu kuli ndfimwe abamwi mukabunga mulikulimvwa byeeni?	-nduubilwa -zyandichisa -takwe nchindamvwa pe
ZINGA ZILACHITILWA BAMUKA MUFU BALAMAPENZI	7. Mwakalikulangila lugwasyo lulibyeni nibakafwa balumi benu?	-mubukkale (kulelwa kwabana,buzolani, abamwi batubunga) -buvubi (lukono, mali zyalugwasyo, chakulya, myuunda na kuti bulongo -kulayigwa atala akuselezya kuyeesesya Kukombela na kuchitilwa zimwi zya tunsiyansiya
	8. Ngwani wakakugwasya muma penzi aya?	basinzubo zyako -bazolwani -masabbuku -simwaami, -bakapokola -Simutonga twaambo, -basilugwasyo -takwe wakagwasya pe
	9. Mwakajana lugwasyonzi mumapenzi	-kwiimininwa -kulayigwa -lubono lwakaboola

	ngwakaswaanana awo?	-mwabwedezegwa bana -takwe pe lugwasyo ndumwakajana
IZYEETELEZYA INZILA ZYALUGWASYO ZISALWA ABAMUKAMUFU	10. Nimwakayandula lugwasyo, niinzi nchimwakali kubona kuti nchipati azintu nzimwakalikuyanda? (kuti kamuli mwakajana lugwasyo). 11. Niinzi chakapa kuti ukachilwe kujana lugwasyo (kuti katakwe nimwakayandula lugwasyo)	-musinzo -lwakajanika na lugwasyo -takwe kumbi nkundakezi kujanika lugwasyo -kulibakandi ndiye nkuko -tendakezi pe kujanika lugwasyo -musinzo -ndakabula manguzu -ndakayoowa basinzubo kuti balandikasya (mpumpuli, bamwi banakazi ma, abamwi bantu mucheengele)
BUYUMUYUMU BUJANIKA KULUGWASYO.	12. Mukubona kwenu mubonanga lugwasyo ndumwakajana lulazulila na kumugwasya mbuli bamuka mufu? 13. Nzezili nzimuyanda kuti zisumpulwe kuzwa kulibakamupa lugwasyo.? 14. Nga kulaba zimwi na nzimunga mulayanda	-kuti katakwe bupanduluzi.. nkaambonzi nibutawo Kuti kakuli bupanduluzi mupandulule lubo kuti nkaambonzi. -kulayigwa (kazitobela machise ngimwakaswaana) -lugwasyo lwakulela bana - busena bwakukkala. -imabambe akulibelekela

	kutwaabila nzitwataambuzyanya awaw.? 15. Awumwi awumwi ngaabe mbuli mbalimvwa kwiinda mukuzuwa nkutwachita kuzosika lino.?	

Ndiyanda kumulumba kapati akunjila kwenu mumabambe aya.

ANNEXURE D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS IN ENGLISH

THEMES	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS	16. Can each one of you tell me about yourselves?	-Age -Area of residence in the district -Children and their sex -Size of household -Educational level -mode of sustenance (work, welfare, farming)
PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND ABUSE EXPERIENCES OF THE WIDOW	17. What kind of marriage where you in?	-Civil -Customary (single wife) -Customary polygamous
	18. Share with me on the death of your husband	-when he died - how he died
	19. Can each one of you please share with me what you experienced after the death of your husband?	-treatment from in-laws (before and after husband's burial) -treatment from community members (before and after your husband's burial).
	5. Share with me the psychosocial challenges you experienced after the death of your husband.	-stressed -blamed for husband's death -failed to care for children

		-stigmatised by family and community member -property taken away
	6. After sharing with me and others in this group on your experiences, how do you feel?	-better -worse -no difference
INTERVENTION MEASURES FOR THE CHALLENGES AND ABUSES EXPERIENCED BY WIDOWS	7. What kind of support was each one of you expecting to get after the death of your husband?	-Social (Care and custody of children, friendship, support groups) -Economic (property ownership, social grants, food, land ownership -Psychological (counseling, stress management) -Spiritual (prayer, traditional ceremonies and rituals)
	8. Who helped in the problems that you encountered?	-Own family -friends -village head -chief, -police -Magistrate, -Social worker -nobody helped
	9. What kind of help did you receive for the problems you	-mediation -counseling -re-claiming property

	encountered?	-custody of children -did not get any help
FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF INTERVENTION SOUGHT BY WIDOWS	10. When you sought help, what did you consider to very important factors? (if you got help). 11.What factors contributed to your failure to seek help (if you did not seek help)	-distance -availability of service -Did not know where else to seek help -was referred -did not know where to find help -distance -I felt powerless -I was afraid of bring rebuked (by family, other women, community members)
GAPS THAT EXIST IN INTERVENTIONS	12. In your opinion, do you think the help you received was enough to cater for your needs as a widow? 13. What improvements do you suggest for the intervention you received from social service providers? 14. Is there anything you want to share that we may not have discussed about?	-if not explain why not -if yes explain why -counseling (for grief and loss) -help with child care - safety shelter -self-help projects

	15. Can each one of you share with me on the feelings about what you went through at this moment?	

We have come to the end of the interviews. I would like to thank each and every one of you for participation in this study.

CHIYUNGIZYO CHANE (D)

MIBUZYO YAKUZUWISYANYA KUTUBUNGA

MUTWE WAMAKANI	MIBUZYO	ZILANGILWA
MAJWI ABWIIME BWABANTU BATANJILE MUMABAMBE AYA	1. Awumwi awumwi ngalyambe atala abuumi bwakwe?	-Minyaka yakuzyalwa -Nkumukkala muleeli bbooma -Mulabana bangane -Mwakasika aali mulwiiyo -Mupona anyamanzimode
BUYUMUYUMU BUSWANANA ABAMUKA MUFU	2. Mwakali mulukwatano lulibyeni?	-munsi lyamulawu wakwaalika na? (mwakali banakazi bangane) -munsi lyamulawu uzumina mwanakazi omwe na?
	3. Mundaambile atala alufulu lwamulumi wenu	-mulumi wenu wakafwa lili alimwi wakafwa byeni?
	4. Awumwi ngandaambile kuti mwakaswaanana azili nibakafwa balumi benu?	-mwaka jatwa byeni kumakwatwa, (kuzwa katanafwa mulumenu amusule akufwa kwakwe.) -mwakajtwa byeni abantu mbimukkezyenye aabo. kuzwa katanafwa mulumenu amusule akufwa kwakwe.)
	5. Nimwazwaa kwambula atala abuumi bwenu kuli ndfimwe abamwi mukabunga	-nduubilwa -zyandichisa -takwe nchindamvwa pe

	mulikulimvwa byeeni?	
ZINGA ZILACHITWA KULI BAMUKA MUFU BATAJATWI KABOTU	6. Mwakalikulangila lugwasyo lulibyeni nibakafwa balumi benu?	-mubukkale (kulelwa kwabana,buzolani, abamwi batubunga) -buvubi (lukono, mali zyalugwasyo, chakulya, myuunda na kuti bulongo -Kwizyayizya -Kuzunda kuyesesya -Inkombyo -Makande
	7. Ngwani wakakugwasya muma penzi aya?	-basinzubo zyako -bazolwani -masabbuku -simwaami, -bakapokola -Simutonga twaambo, -basilugwasyo -takwe wakagwasya pe
	8. Mwakajana lugwasyonzi mumapenzi ngwakaswaanana awo?	-kwimininwa -kulayigwa -lubono lwakaboola -mwabwedezegwa bana -takwe pe lugwasyo ndumwakajana
IZYEETELEZYA INZILA ZYALUGWASYO ZISALWA ABAMUKAMUFU	9. Nimwakayandula lugwasyo, niinzi nchimwakali kubona kuti nchipati azintu nzimwakalikuyanda? (kuti kamuli	-musinzo -lwakajanika na lugwasyo -takwe kumbi nkundakezi kujanika lugwasyo -kulibakandi ndiye nkuko

	mwakajana lugwasyo). 10. Niinzi chakapa kuti ukachilwe kujana lugwasyo (kuti katakwe nimwakayandula lugwasyo)	 -tendakezi pe kujanika lugwasyo -musinzo -ndakabula manguzu -ndakayoowa basinzubo kuti balandikasya (mpumpuli, bamwi banakazi ma, abamwi bantu mucheengele)
BUYUMUYUMU BUJANIKA KULUGWASYO.	11. Mukubona kwenu mubonanga lugwasyo ndumwakajana lulazulila na kumugwasya mbuli bamuka mufu? 12. Nzezili nzimuyanda kuti zisumpulwe kuzwa kulibakamupa lugwasyo? 13. Nga kulaba zimwi na nzimunga mulayanda kutwaabila nzitwataambuzyanya awaw? 14. Awumwi awumwi ngaabe mbuli mbalimvwa kwiinda mukuzuwa nkutwachita kuzosika lino?	-kuti katakwe bupanduluzi.. nkaambonzi nibutawo Kuti kakuli bupanduluzi mupandulule lubo kuti nkaambonzi. -kulaya (kazitobela machise ngimwakaswaana) -lugwasyo lwakulela bana - busena bwakukkala. -imabambe akulibelekela.

Ndiyanda kumulumba kapati akunjila kwenu mumabambe aya.

ANNEXURE E

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR KEY INFORMANTS

THEMES	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
PERSONAL WORK EXPERIENCE IN HELPING WIDOWS	1. Can you please share with me on your work experience in helping the widows?	-position held -area being serviced -length of service
	2. What forms of abuse do widows experience in your service area after the death of their husbands?	-beaten, -humiliated -blamed for husband's death, -property and land grabbed, -custody of children battles -forced levirate marriages -widow cleansing
	3. From who does most widow abuse come from?	-in-laws -community members -other women (married)
FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ABUSE OF WIDOWS	4. What are the causes of abuse of widows in your service areas?	-culture of abuse -lack of protection -property and land disputes -various suspicions by communities -children's custody
LEGAL POLICIES AND	5. What is your view of	-adequate legal protection

LAWS PROTECTING WIDOWS	the legal policies that protect women and widows? 6. What can be improved on the laws protecting women and the widows?	-Implementation of laws -implementation and staff -sensitisation and education of community -amendments
HELP OFFERED TO WIDOWS WHO FALL VICTIMS OF ABUSE	7. Share with me on the help offered to victims of abuse. 8. In your opinion, what else need to be done to assist widows cope with their situations?	-counseling -mediation -education -advice

We have come to the end of the interviews. Thank you very much for participating in the study.

ANNEXURE F

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS FOR INDIVIDUAL, FOCUS GROUP AND KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS WITH THE WIDOWS

PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Researcher: Please tell me about yourself.

Anna (BN): We are 9 in this home**.** I am 43 years old now and my husband died when I was 30 years old. 13 years have passed by since his death. I come from Sikalenge and I have 5 children, 3 girls and 2 boys. I went to school up to grade 7. I live by means of subsistence farming, doing piece jobs and small business that I do on my own.

Maria (BN): I am 48 years of age my husband died when I was 33 years old in the 2000. I come from Kelamenda ((*an area in Binga North of Sikalenge Ward*)). I have one child, a female one. He is grown up but I am staying with my 3 grandchildren now. Altogether, we are 4 in this household. I went to school up to grade 2. I live by selling Busika ((*a local sour fruit for making porridge*)) and also I do subsistence farming.

Kumbayile (BN): I am Kumbayile and I am 54 years of age. I was 39 years when my husband died. I come from Kelamenda and I have 1 child who is a boy. We are 3 in the family. There is also my granddaughter who is a girl to make us 3 in the family. I went up to grade 1 a long time ago. My husband died in the year 2000 my child was 6 years old by then. I have a very difficult life. There is no help offered to me. I do not get any help for my survival, not even a piece of soap from anybody to say let me give it to that woman…NOTHING…NOTHING! ((*Emphasises*)). As you can see….look at my hand, it got broken. The hand is painful and I can't grow crops anymore as I used to do. I am also asthmatic and also I have this new disease ((*meaning HIV and AIDS)*). My body aches as I walk.

Julia (BN): I am Julia and I am 37 years old. My husband died when I was 34 years old. I come from Sikalenge. I have 3 children, 2 girls and 1 boy. In this household we are 5 including myself. I went to school up to Form 2. I do farming for survival. I had started also teaching at the Early Child Development (ECD) centre but I don't earn

anything. Sometimes I also keep chickens. They help me fend for food for my children after selling them.

Choolwe (BN): My name is Choolwe. I don't know my age but I have the identity document with me *((Participant hands it to the researcher to see the age Researcher tells the participant that she was born on 12 November 1959. The participant was 56 years old)).* I come Sikalenge ward and I have 7 children, 5 girls and 2 boys. I am supporting 3 children directly under me and I am the 4th one. I never went to school. Long ago we used to stay at home even if a few managed to go to school. I don't get welfare help, I don't want to lie to you. Even the cattle I had died so my children dropped out of school because I could not manage to meet their school needs. I live through subsistence farming and that is not enough to meet my food requirements. As you can see, I broke my hand at some other time and I can't do hard labour. It becomes painful. So I climb these trees to fetch Busika, ((*a local sour fruit for making porridge*)), for sell.

Siphiwe (BS): I am Siphiwe. I am not working. I live through piece jobs, like brick laying and fetching building stones for those who need them. I even fetch thatch grass for those that need it. That's how I survive. I was born in 1963 ((*participant was 52 years during interviews*)). I come from Simbala. I have 1 child who is a boy. Altogether we are 5 in this household with others that I take care of. I went to school up to grade 5 I didn't finish even my grade 5 because my father died and I could not get financial support to continue.

Esnathi (BS): My name is Esnathi. I don't know how old I am and I lost my identity document. I will go and process another one soon. I come from Simbala area. I have 2 children, 1 boy and 1 girl. We are 4 in this family including myself and 1 grandchild. I never went to school so I am not educated. We live by farming for food and we even get piece jobs from other people's farms to fend for the children. Save The Children is very selective and they don't even help us. I don't even earn food for the elderly. They say that I am are still young and we are still young.

Chipo (BS): I am Chipo and I am 68 years old. I come from Simbala. I have 5 children, 4 girls and 1 boy. We are 5 in this household including me. I never went to school. I do subsistence farming, just from hand to mouth. The food cannot even last up to winter after the harvest. I also depend on piece jobs as well.

Bina Chi (BS): My name is Bina Chi. I am 58 years old. I have 1 child who is a girl. I take care of another child now since my child is now married. This makes us 2 in this home now. I did not go to school for proper education. I survive by farming. I don't have any other source of sustenance. I also do gardening and I sell vegetables. That's how I survive.

Esy (BS): I am Esy and 27 years old. I come from Simbala area in Binga. I have 3 children and they are all girls. We are 5 in this household. I went to school up to form 2 and I couldn't get money to continue with my education. I survive through subsistence farming. We go to the fields with my mother.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND ABUSE EXPERIENCES OF THE WIDOW

2. Researcher: **What kind of marriage were you in?**

Anna (BN): I was in unregistered customary marriage. I was in a good marriage. My husband paid all the bride price as required. I was in a monogamous marriage. My husband had married before and the wife died and that's when he married me.

Maria (BN): I was in unregistered customary Marriage. I was in polygamous marriage. My husband had three wives. One of the wives died and the two of us remained live.

Kumbayile (BN): I was in a polygamous unregistered customary Marriage. My husband had 3 wives. There was a first wife that I found already married and I was the second one then a third one joined us later.

Julia (BN): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. My husband had 2 wives.

Choolwe (BN): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. We were 2 married to him.

Siphiwe (BS): I was in a civil marriage. That one with a ring and called Chapter 37. It was a monogamous marriage.

Esnathi (BS): My marriage had papers from the court and it was a customary marriage. Firstly, I was the only wife and as time went on he married another wife and we become 2 married to him.

Chipo (BS): I was in registered customary marriage but my marriage certificate was destroyed when my hut burnt down. It was a polygamous marriage though. The other wife died first before my husband died.

Bina Chi (BS): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. We were 2 with the other woman.

Esy (BS): I was in unregistered customary marriage but I was the only wife in the marriage.

3. Researcher: Share with me about your husband's death.

Anna (BN): My husband died in 1997. My husband got ill in August, then he was in in September, October and November 1997. He got ill for about 3 months with swollen legs and in 4th month of December, he had a running stomach together with swollen legs. On December 3, 1997, he them died.

Maria (BN): My husband died in the year 2000. He got sick and his legs were swelling until he died in hospital.

Kumbayile (BN): My husband died in the year 2000. He got ill from this new illness,

((meaning HIV and AIDS)).

Julia (BN): My husband died on the 12th of May 2012. My husband got sick and he was in South Africa where he stayed. I just heard that he was sick from people. He never sent anything to us from where he was. He came back on the 31st of December 2011. He was very sick now. He went to hospital and he got better. It was promising that he was recovering. When he started being sick again it was only a few days and he died.

Choolwe (BN): In 2002 that's when my husband died. Many years have passed by now. The child he left as a little boys is now grown up. ((*The participant was widowed at 43 years))*. People put *muti ((witchcraft))* in his way and when he crossed over he got sick and died. He could not even urinate. We tried to go to traditional healers but all efforts failed. We even took him to Binga hospital and they referred him to St. Luke's Hospital for specialists' attention and before he could go, he passed on.

Siphiwe (BS): My husband died in 2007 on the 21st of January ((*the widow was 44 years old*)). I died from severe malaria. His bile burst inside and then he died.

Esnathi (BS): I am not sure when my husband died but check here on his death certificate. ((*Researcher found that he died on 01 December 2007)).* He got very sick and then died.

Chipo (BS): I can't remember when he died but my children had no children that time. But he died in October. That man got sick. He was urinating something like stones.

Bina Chi (BS): My husband died in 2006. He got ill. First the other woman got ill and I suggested that he should take her back to her parents because if anything happens, they will blame him. He then left her there and followed the other day. I don't know what ate there and when he came back I was sick and sleeping in the house. The other wife was also there. They came together from the natal family of the wife. He woke up to tell me that he was not feeling well. He has hike-ups. We slept and in the morning he was still ill and the other wife went back to her natal home. When I asked her why is she leaving because the husband is ill, she replied that she is ill also and then she left. I tried to take him to the traditional healers but it didn't work. One day, he tried to wake up and he fell down and I called his brother to come and see. He came and we all saying "You see, we told you not to go to the natal home of your wife. You see now?" We took him to the clinic and he was referred to Binga and he died there.

Esy (BS): My husband died in 2010 and 5 years have passed by now. I was 22 years old when he died. He died from stomachache. He complained of the stomach and then he died.

4. Researcher: What were your experiences after the death of your husband?

Anna (BN): When my husband died I had a problem of finances. He was even buried without a coffin. I had serious financial problems. After the funeral there were many other problems like there were problems with sharing of domestic animals. Also they gave me all the children and never helped me to support them. I found it hard to raise the children alone. One of the boys got a chronic illness. Even today he has never recovered. I just put it in the hands of God. God knows when he will take

his soul to rest. The community cannot help as I wish. They just helped me with food during the funeral until it was over. The Chief is the one who helped with a place to build my home. The in-laws after the funeral told me that I can now go back to my natal home which is what I did until my parents died as well.

Maria (BN): We had a misunderstanding with my husband's brother about the land we used for growing food ((*meaning fields*)). Then I thought it's better to go back to my natal family. The people who had given us the land for ploughing wanted it back since my husband had died. My husband's brother took it upon me that I should go and show him the size of that land and if I don't do that properly he will beat me. Then I was wondering why somebody's husband can beat when my husband never did during his lifetime. Then I packed mine and went to stay with my father. This pained my heart. He then followed me to apologise but I told him that I am fine staying with my father and I am already here ((*at father's home)*).

Kumbayile (BN): My in-laws never beat me…NO! You see, if you don't have anybody to take care of you it hard to survive. So I just built my small house there and that's where I stay. So they don't even think of supporting me and the child I was left with. No one thinks about that.

Julia (BN): When he died, both of us as his wives had gone to our home. They called us to tell us about his death. The funeral was done without any problem. The problem came when it came to the traditional marriage of the widow as we do it in Tonga tradition after the funeral. I refused and also the other wife refused to get married to the brother to our late husband. They then punished us by not cleansing us. For me it was time to go for training for ECD teaching. I just left for training and when I came back they said if you want us to cleanse you, you need to pay 1 heard of cattle. Even today, nothing has happened but God is watching all this. Even this young child I have, all his relatives are there but they cannot contribute anything. I am also quiet about that. I provide what I can for my child and where I cannot I just leave it like that.

Choolwe (BN): Bringing my husband for burial was not difficult as the Chief provided the transport to bring the body for burial. People gathered well and all was done and the burial went well.

Siphiwe (BS): A-a-a-a, I suffered…, (*paused*), paper work in High Court! ((*Exclaimed)*). The money that my husband left in the bank and that all papers to be in my name, a-a-a-a-a, I suffered! ((*Exclaimed)*). Firstly I went with my late husband's young brother and we paid money to prepare the papers and for the second time he was busy I went and lied at the High Court that he was at work. I was afraid that he would be arrested. I got into deep thought in High Court and then I went outside where I met my sister's son but he died this year as well. He then asked me that aunt why are you here at High Court? I explained to him and he offered to help me. I went back inside the High Court and lied that I went to fetch the young brother to my mother in-law and here he is. Magistrate Mpofu listened and said go and look for 5 other people to sign. The four of us signed and the fifth queried it and said do you want to get me arrested? I said to him, this is what the magistrate said to me. It is an instruction. He said it's not my job to sign papers. I let him go and another person came in and I asked for the signature and the man of God listened and helped.

When I submitted the papers to the magistrate, I was told that the Judge is busy to sign. That was a Friday. I had nothing with me except for water and I had gone for two days without food. The money was there in the bank but needed to be changed so that it is in my name. Pfe-e-e-w, ((*signed)),* I set down in the High Court until I fell asleep. I woke up and even cried inside the High Court until I fell asleep again. Magistrate Mpofu had to wake me up. I told him that I have to sleep because I have stress. It was now about 15:00 and my papers were not yet signed because the judge was busy. I asked myself as to what I was going to do. They started closing the gates since on Fridays they normally work half the day. I just prayed to God that God have mercy on me. Where will I sleep I have already bought the train ticket and I do not know Bulawayo well ((*The second capital City in Zimbabwe)*). I fell asleep again. I dreamt a train accident and I woke up again. Magistrate Mpofu came and said to me the Judge is still busy. Pfe-e-e-w! ((*Sighed)*), I asked even now he is still busy? What will I do because I come from Hwange? ((*About 400 km away)*). You better leave me at that Prison where I will sleep. Criminals will do what they want. There is nothing that I can do. The Judge kept quiet and went into deep thought. I said to the Judge, see here is my ticket and I don't have any more money. The

money for the ticket came from my Pastor and I don't have relatives since all my young brothers and sisters have died.

I was referred to the Judge's deputy to sign. They had closed and some had gone out already. The papers were signed and stamped. They said these papers we have given you, will help you to get the money because it is getting finished with bank charges. Those in-laws that refused to help you never give them anything. Even that brother in-law who refused to come, give him this paper. Don't hide away from him. I thanked them a lot and I left to board the train.

I was very hungry in the train and when set quietly a Shona speaking lady asked why I was like that then I explained that I was hungry. She gave me bread and a cool drink. I think she was sent by God. When the train left, its head went of the trail just like the way I was dreaming. We were almost involved in an accident. I just prayed that God have mercy on me. The train went off and when I arrived in Hwange, I gave the papers to the young brother of my late husband and after reading, he shook his head. I asked him why he was shaking his head and he said there isn't anything.

Since I am a Christian, I took all the clothes of my late husband after the church ceremony ((*umduduzo in isiNdebele)*) and said they should give them to Ishmael to use because he stayed with me for a long time. My brother in-law didn't say anything but he was angry because he wanted to get the refrigerator.

During the funeral they insulted me, each spoke as they wanted to. A-a-a-a! They spoke all they wanted to say! ((*Exclaimed))*. When we were at the graveyard, they spoke to the corpse and said *"We told you to divorce this Nambia woman and you ran away from us at went to live with her in Simbala! See now what has happened to you! You never even said good bye to us. Is this how you say good bye to us?* They asked me why I ran away with him to Simbala this is why he has died now. In this community, it's only the church members that visit me. As you know nowadays people stay away from you if you don't have anything. Community members have stayed away from me. It's only the church members are relatives to me now.

Esnathi (BS): The problems I encountered was hunger. I suffer to get food to eat. I also don't have good shelter to live in. During the funeral, it was quiet and I didn't experience any problem.

Chipo (BS): During the funeral all went well. Now later when they started to fight on their own, they accused me of killing my husband. The community members treated me well. Even today here I am. Nothing is wrong. It's the relatives that have been a problem to me. After the funeral, they did the ceremony for cleansing but no one slept with me or was interested in marrying me.

Bina Chi (BS): When he died the brother came back home and we all marveled why he had come back. When I asked him why he had come back, he said I have to come back because we buried my brother yesterday. Hh-a-a-a-a-a!, (*marveling*). I asked him why they buried him without notifying us here. He them replied that my sister had arrived so we decided to bury him. The sister did not even spend a day here. She left back to her home. The sister told the brother to take care of me because the brother is dead and when they were young, I took care of him. Later, news started spreading that I bewitched my husband. Then they also said if it's not you then it is the other wife because he got sick there. I also added that as for me, I just saw a sick person and when I asked him he said nothing. The in-laws accused me and the other wife of killing him.

Esy (BS): My relatives refused that I go and see where my husband was buried. Even today I do not know where he was buried. My cousins refused that i should go to burry my husband being the only one from my family. There were many of my relatives from Siachilaba ((*a place in a long the main Binga road were relatives live))* who wanted to go for the burial but my in-laws couldn't have a bigger transport for them and they said the transport was small. Then when my relatives heard about that they said no one will go its better if we all stay.

5. Researcher: Share with me the psycho-social challenges you experienced after the death of your husband.

Anna (BN): When my husband died I developed a lot of worries and I got ill for about 1 month. My in-laws were just watching me. I never got any help from them. What was troubling me was that I felt so lonely and now who will help support my children? When I thought about the good life we had with my husband, I developed an unimaginable stress thinking whether I will manage to live alone to maintain the life we had before he died. People told me that this is a big loss. The life you had will never come back. I could go deep down in thoughts thinking about these young

children. Thinking of the food they used to each before and what they will eat now in the rural areas. I was not living in rural areas before. I lived in urban areas.

Some friends used to visit me to comfort me saying I should not think too much about it. I need to be strong and take care of my children since the relatives of my husband are not contributing anything towards the children. This all emanated from the fact that the brother to my husband wanted to marry me and I refused to do so. When I refused to marry him that's when he ordered me to go with all my children and leave the home. He instantly stopped helping me.

The in-laws also blamed me for the death of my husband. When he got ill, his relatives did know anything. For the 3 months he got ill, I was with him alone. When he died, they said you know what killed him. When I tried to explain, they never got to understand it. As for property, they took everything. My husband had clothes that filled 3 suitcases and they never gave me anything. Kitchen utensils were also taken but I had to stand up and take some that I bought with my money. They said now you can choose the ones you bought with your money and I did. The rest they took them all. They also took the wardrobes, and I took one of our beds, and two beds for my children. The other beds were taken away. As for domestic animals, they grabbed everything. They took the goats and cattle.

At the end of 2011, one of my late husband's step brother came here alone when I was already here. I think he had guilty conscience and he called me to meet him. I was so afraid and didn't know what it was. What I told myself was that, I didn't do wrong to my in-laws. That's what gave me strength to meet him. I was surprised to hear them saying, there is nothing much we have called you for here. We are giving you thing cow. I never asked any questions from them as to why this is happening today. I just said thank you a lot.

Maria (BN): I feel not respectable, and my value has gone down among community members and other women. I was thinking hard when he died. You know, even if you were not in a proper marriage and he didn't care well for you, when your husband dies you feel left alone. The other problem that I encountered was that of the land that was taken away from us. For now feel I should have the strength to support my grandchildren.

Kumbayile (BN): I am alone in supporting the child. They let me look after the child alone despite the challenges I have to fend for him. I just have no dignity in the community. As a woman when your husband dies, you immediately loose dignity and respect. I lost friend, perhaps they thought I will be asking for help from them due to my many problems I am facing. It pained me a lot in my thoughts until at the hospital I was diagnosed with High Blood Pressure. (HBP). I always thought who will now take care of me, who will even give me a piece of soap now? Who will build a house for me? This makes me suffer even now. Even for my child to grow, care and support was not an easy one.

My husband had no expensive property or cattle. We had buckets we used for fetching water. In-laws took them all. We thought they would leave them for us to use for fetching water.

Julia (BN): My value and respect went down because now I am no longer a wife to someone. It's now different from being Mrs. I actually started borrowing some money from other people to buy food for my children because they would die from hunger. Due to the good care that I took of myself and child, my husband I remember used to vow that he would kill that to live such a beautiful wife to other men. The other problem came on getting a birth certificate for my child. I didn't even know who was going to give me his death certificate for me to be able to process my child's birth certificate. I just put my trust in God because I am a Christian and believe in prayer and that whatever I say to them they should listen. Exactly that happened. I asked them to give the death certificate to me and they did just that. I then asked for my husband's sister to accompany me to registration office.

There was a time when we separated with my husband due to the problems we had. When we re-united, his father gave some property to use such as the wardrobe and the bed. My father in-law said everything that I give to someone belong to that person. Even if I die, she must take with her. But when my husband died and I was coming back home, my sisters in-law refused that I should take them. I just forced to take them. Because it seems that we were now fighting for the property, the cart I was using to transport them got involved in a serious accident and everything was damaged and lost. I managed to arrive home with only things like blankets only. The

elder sister to my husband even followed to collect the dishes that were left and said I need to give her. I didn't care and I gave her back.

Choolwe (BN): When the burial was over, the young brother to my husband wanted to marry me ((*meaning levirate marriage)*). His wife was very bitter about it and refused that this should happen. The sexual widow cleansing ceremony was done by her and her husband and not me. I was just put aside. From that time I was neglected as a widow. That is when the relationship we had got sour. The children were left for me to support them. Even if any child got sick, there was no help offered. I have difficulties in supporting my young child since my late husband did not get along with his relatives. They could not support the children. Sometimes I even try to take the children to the relatives of my husband, they refuse to support them.

Siphiwe (BS): The ceremony was done in a Christian way because the Bishop was there and the brother in-law also goes to church of Christ. So they also don't follow the traditional way of cleansing the widow. All was done in a Christian way. They didn't take any property away from me but they took the money that was there and they said it's will erase tears for their son. My dignity and respect has gone down now. I am suffering to get everything in my life. I have stress since I lose appetite due to stress. These huts are falling also. Rain is falling on my property. Even my prayers have been affected. I always think about losing my husband. Caring for my child has changed a lot. I can't afford anymore. Now I get $28 a month for National Social Security Agency (NASSA). Pension funds disappeared. I don't know where it has gone to.

Esnathi (BS): I used to have painful thoughts after his death. I used to think about who would help me fend for my children or renovate these huts. Now it has subsided and I have accepted that I will have to stand up and fend for myself. If I really find it hard to get food, I really think that if only my husband was there to help me with food. Support for the children changed by far. There is no more support I received for the children.

Chipo (BS): I feel less dignified of a human being. It's common that when your partner dies, respect from people goes down and belief in myself is reduced. Thinking a lot sometimes attacks me when I think that if my husband was still here then it was going to be easy to fend for my children. I failed to care for my children.

My son dropped out of school in grade seven. I had no money for him to continue with education.

Bina Chi (BS): When my husband died, I thought deeply that hey what would happen since my husband is dead. But I said God knows. Also I was thinking about the allegation that I killed him. I just said God knows. They never took anything from us…. ((*A visitor came and interrupted. The interview was paused))*. The in-laws didn't take anything away from me.

Esy (BS): I only experience stress sometimes when I think a lot about my husband's death, especially immediately after his death. There was a time when my child who is in Bulawayo got sick and I had no money for medical care. That was the time when all problems were on my shoulders and I started thinking about my husband. It was also hard for me to support my children and then my sister in-law came and asked that she could help with their education. They are now in Bulawayo and attending school there under the care of their aunt. They shared all the property. They took the wardrobe and the bed and gave them to my children. They are using them now in Bulawayo were they live with the aunt.

6. **Researcher: How do you feel right now about the situation you went through?**

Anna (BN): Pf-e-e-w! *((Sighed)*). This was a tough problem when it happened as for now, it's getting better and out of my mind.

Maria (BN): For now, I don't feel anything now. I am fine about it.

Kumbayile (BN): I feel having let go something heavy when I talk about something that bothers me in my heart.

Julia (BN): I have hope that God will intervene and that things may be fine in the future. As you can see that this drought will put me in a very difficult situation for supporting my child. This conversation is good and helps me to refocus on being strong for my children.

Choolwe (BN): I sometimes have High Blood Pressure. People talk a lot and it pains me a lot. People accuse me that since I am not married, I will take their husbands and that is being spoken about a lot here. Some even say my hut shout be burnt just for no apparent reason. People no longer respect me since I got widowed. THIS A

BIG PROBLEM THAT I HAVE! *((Adds emphasis)).* At night I don't even sleep. All this comes strong in my mind and troubles me. Even if I try to remember the good things I shared with others at the borehole where we fetch water, these thoughts come back to trouble me even at the present moment. My heart pumps hard when I try to sleep. I get palpates.

Now I feel surprised why they are not helping me in any way right now for supporting my children in any way. I feel that they hate me so much for the reasons I don't know.

Siphiwe (BS): I feel having let go something heavy in my heart and supported. I am wondering that in Zimbabwe there are people like you who are interested in knowing our problems. I didn't expect this. I am so comforted.

Esnathi (BS): As we talk about the problems I came across I feel relieved. I feel like the problems are gone.

Chipo (BS): I am fine. I accepted that death is a way of life. That's is how we live on earth people die.

Bina Chi (BS): It is now past and I have buried it.

Esy (BS): I am used to it now. I am fine with it and have accepted.

INTERVENTION MEASURES FOR THE CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY WIDOWS

7. **Researcher: Share on the kind of support that you needed after the death of your husband.**

Anna (BN): I needed support on care of my children because they are still at school and food as you can see how hard it is to survive. That way the problem would have been better. As I am talking to you right now, I am thinking of fending for my children. All these children you found here are directly under my care. From church members I needed prayers when I find problems. Even now they come to pray for my ill child. They pray for this little business I am doing for it to go well. I never thought of psychological counseling. When I got stressed, I went away to look for a job and care for my children. The people I worked for were elders and the woman was a

nurse. She is the one who was always comforting me. She encouraged to even work because what I experienced has passed.

Maria (BN): I just needed money for supporting myself, especially through income generating self-help projects. I never thought of seeking counseling.

Kumbayile (BN): I wanted cattle that I will use for ploughing the land to grow food. Also I needed financial support to take of the many needs of my life.

Julia (BN): I wanted help with educating my children, at least paying for fees and buying needed books. At times my child can go to school and spend the whole week without writing because of not having books. Hunger is another thing that affects my child. I needed help with money for food. I need help with field implements and tools like ploughs in the fields. At least also a bigger field would be fine.

Choolwe (BN): I wanted and today still need financial support. Even if a child gets sick I can have means to take the child to the hospital. I can even pay the debts I have from people. When I have no means to get food, I borrow money from people and financial support can assist me pay off the debts.

Siphiwe (BS): I needed help to deal with stress and even to renovate my houses.

Esnathi (BS): I needed help with support of children but I did not get any. From my church I needed spiritual support which they did and above that they contributed with food for the funeral.

Chipo (BS): I needed financial support and I got it from those that give funds. When they came they asked me whether I have cattle then I said no. She was a lady who came here. She asked whether I have a wardrobe then I said no and for sure she looked around and found that it was true. So in January, I will be paid but for now I did not get paid for December. I get $40 but not monthly. It comes after months pass by.

Bina Chi (BS): Even if I was struggling to get many things I needed as I still do, I never thought of getting support to easy my problems. There was no support I imagined that I could need.

Esy (BS): I only wanted to be helped with the education of my children. They should not stay at home like me so needed care and support for my children.

8. Researcher: Who helped in the problems that you encountered?

Anna (BN): In the problems that I encountered, no one helped me. My brothers also died and all their children came under my custody. From the 9 children mentioned earlier on, I have only 5 children. Even my mother also died. That woman there is my mother's young sister. She is also under my care.

Maria (BN): No one helped me except for my father who gave me a place to stay. He accepted me and said come my daughter there is nothing we can do. You will stay with us in this home.

Kumbayile (BN): No one helped except for last year when we got money worth $28 from Save the Children (*NGO*) through the phones ((*Ecocash transferred through the phones for collection at any Ecocash point)).*

Julia (BN): The person who helped me in the problems I had is the Chief. I told the Chief about my problem and he listened and understood. He is the one who told me that all the property that I owned with my husband belonged to me even though when I took the property the sister in-laws were not happy about it.

Choolwe (BN): My brother sometimes helps me when I cry for help from him. He sometimes helps me with mealie-meal. But since he is a family man, it is hard to get help from him time and again and he is a grown up man. He is aging now. So I can't really say I got real help for the problems I had.

Siphiwe (BS): The Colliery Company helped to carry my property home from town. They always do that when their workers die. That helped me a lot. They asked me whether they should take my property to Jambezi at my natal home or to Binga. I said to them my property should go to Binga. I left my natal home and got married at 16 years. I was very young and I can't stay home anymore. They carried the property using their lorry. The village head didn't help me. The church members helped during the funeral with food. Now they have stopped. I have an operation and the doctor said I should only work for one hour to avoid health problems. If I go beyond one hour I develop health problems.

My cousins also help me with pills when I cry to them. This is because they are nurses. They also help me with clothes. The magistrate also helped me to get my

funds as I mentioned earlier on. The Social Welfare people said I am young and I do not qualify for the grands. They look at the age.

Esnathi (BS): Church members helped me with food during the funeral, burial and a church ceremony for cleansing me ((*umduduzo* in isiNdebele)). People from my family wanted me to go back to my natal family and asked why I was still here. I told them that this land is beautiful. If anything wrong happens I will come and join you. It's me who actually refused to rejoin my natal home.

Chipo (BS): People from an organisation in Binga helped me financially and now I get $40 of pay even if it does not come monthly. When my house got burnt, my friends gave me clothes to wear. My Village Head just came to see my house when it burnt but did not help me with anything.

Bina Chi (BS): There is no body who helped me for the problems I encountered and I never thought of looking for help.

Esy (BS): The aunt of my children who stays with the children helped. When there a misunderstanding, she gave me money to come back home. The aunt cares for my children as well. She has only one grown up child who is in London so she only lives with my children.

9. **Researcher: What kind of help did you receive for the problems you encountered?**

Anna (BN): I did not receive any help with my problems.

Maria (BN): I did not get help from anyone for the problems I encountered.

Kumbayile (BN): No help was given to me.

Julia (BN): As I have already mentioned that it is the Chief who intervened by advising me to take the property.

Choolwe (BN): Except for the little help with food I got from my brother when I cried with hunger, I didn't receive real help.

Siphiwe (BS): The magistrate helped with signing of papers so that I can get my money after my brother in-law refused to help me get the money my husband left in the bank.

Esnathi (BS): I received food donations and prayers from my church members. They also helped with the burial.

Chipo (BS): I received money for buying little things. There was a time when I collapsed and had to go to the prophets to seek help with prayers that's when I was told that I collapsed from bad spirits.

Bina Chi (BS): I didn't receive any help from anyone for the problems I faced.

Esy (BS): I received financial support and care for my children. The aunt is also taking care of my children's education.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF INTERVENTION SOUGHT BY WIDOWS

10. **Researcher: What did you consider when choosing the kind of help you were given? (if you got help).**

Anna (BN): No I did get help

Maria (BN): There was no help they I got from anyone.

Kumbayile (BN): I did not get help.

Julia (BN): I went to the Chief because he is nearer to me. Also if the problem could not be solved by him, he would have send me to get help from others. Also I went to him because the Chief is respectable in the community and the in-laws can listen to him.

Choolwe (BN): It's because he was my brother and I could bring my problems at times to him though he did not always help as I mentioned earlier on.

Siphiwe (BS): It is the marriage that I had entered into that saw me seeking help from the magistrate and those people that helped me. As for seeking help from the Christians, it's because we fellowship together, especially, the daughter in-law to Obert Mpofu the Minister. She is one of the fellow Christian who has been helpful with food even to today when I go there she helps me.

Esnathi (BS): Help came from church because we fellowship together in church. So we visit one another in our church when a member is bereaved.

Chipo (BS): These people who helped me with money were just writing names *……((grandchild interrupts and participants attends to her)).* That was a long time ago. They had to follow me here looking for me and I had forgotten. I asked them whether I was arrested and they said I should relax I am not arrested. They reminded me of the lady who was writing names and they said she was the one who brought the issue forward for financial help.

Bina Chi (BS): I did not seek any help.

Esy (BS): The aunt was willing herself to assist with the education of my children when she saw that I was not able to take them to school and support them accordingly.

11. Researcher: What factors contributed to your failure to seek help?

Anna (BN): The problem is that when I lost my husband, help was very scarce, we did even know about getting help. I think it was also lack of knowledge on where to get help.

Maria (BN): I never thought of getting any help and I was not aware that there is help that I can get. The only thing that I thought about was going to the hospital for an HIV test. I was not feeling well since the death of my husband. I was found HIV positive and as I speak I on antiretroviral (ARV's) treatment.

Kumbayile (BN): I did not know where to find help in this ward where I am. I marveled that some NGOs come and write down the names of other people but as for me they don't.

Julia (BN): I got help from the Chief.

Choolwe (BN): Sometimes you will hear from people that people are registering their names for help and you are away when all that is happening. So you miss out. Sometimes you have to travel to Binga Centre to get help and you don't have the money to do that. The distance involved needs money and when you don't have money, you miss out. The other thing is that, my late husband's brother is the Village Head who writes the names for those who should be given help of any kind in our people in the community. At the same time he is the man whom we are not in good books with. For any kind of help it's likely that I will be left out and only those that he likes will have their names written down for help.

Siphiwe (BS): I got the help that I talked about.

Esnathi (BS): To be honest I never knew that I can get help for my problems from welfare in Binga. I didn't know that widows can be assisted.

Chipo (BS): I don't know why I could not get help from the Village Head but as for the family, I don't normally go there. I am not close to them anymore.

Bina Chi (BS): I was powerless to go and find help. I never had that energy.

Esy (BS): Other forms of help, I could not get them because I didn't know that a person can get that form of help, such as counseling. It never came to my mind.

GAPS THAT EXIST IN INTERVENTION

12. **Researcher: Do you think the help you received was enough to cater for your needs as a widow?**

Anna (BN): Since I did not get any help, I can't say anything there.

Maria (BN): I did get any help from anywhere.

Kumbayile (BN): I did get help from anybody.

Julia (BN): For the disappearance of the cattle that we owned with my husband and the lack of explanation of where the cattle are, I am not satisfied with the help offered to me. My child could not get anything. This didn't satisfy me.

Choolwe (BN): The help I got from my brother was by far not enough to meet my needs as a widow. Even has stopped working now because he is now old. Two years have passed by now without getting help from him. He has his family to look after also.

Siphiwe (BS): The help I got is not enough because I am suffering and I don't know who to tell about this. I have to find a piece job to get anything. With me there is a health problem since the operation and I can't work as expected.

Esnathi (BS): The help I got from the church is not enough at all.

Chipo (BS): A-a-a-a-a! *(Exclaims*). The help is not enough.

Bina Chi (BS): No. there was no help that I got. I just help myself.

Esy (BS): I never thought there could be more than that. For me that was enough.

13. **Researcher: What improvements do you suggest for the intervention you received from social service providers?**

Anna (BN): People whose husbands die experience widowhood differently. Some before their husbands died had something, others had nothing at all. Some widows' husbands were working and need help with pension funds. Those whose husband had noting and never worked need more help. As for me it's all about educating my children. Ntengwe for Community Development Trust helped with income generating projects and many widows joined but they were not successful. We really need income generating projects.

Maria (BN): Widows need food. There is need to help them with food, especially that many of us are HIV positive and need food for treatment. The Catholic Development Commission (CADEC) gave us a project of goats and none of the goats survived. I don't know what kind of bad luck I have.

Kumbayile (BN): There should counseling provided to widows. Like myself I have developed "pressure' ((*meaning High Blood Pressure*)) because there was no one to talk to. There must be someone to who provides counseling to the widows to reduce to much thinking. But I need to thank one of the NGO that took over the expenses of my child's education. They paid everything for his education. It's only that I forgot the name of the NGO that supported my child. Look the house we live in are not good, we need help. As for self-help projects, I even don't know who to ask from. I really need self-help projects to cater for my finances.

Julia (BN): Here in this community, people were educated on property inheritance. But many people like in the community where I was married, they know a lot. So for us to get meaningful help and intervention…..A-a-a-a-a-a-a, ((*Sighed with shaking of the head*)), I fail to put it in the right words! Like here in Manjolo, ((*area where the participant lives*)), people were educated but I DON'T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN IT! ((*Puts emphasis))*. H-h-m-m-m, ((*participant thinks deeply)*), may be where the husband dies and property is being shared, those in power such as the Chief and the District Administrator need to be present to explain the law themselves as people who keep the law, maybe people will begin to take such matters seriously. In other ways this problem despite people's knowledge about inheritance laws and the need

to set the widow free, it will not change. It will stay the same here. This is why I say maybe if those people who keep the law can be present to oversee property sharing, or TAKE OVER SHARING OF PROPERTY THEMSELVES, ((*emphasis added*)), maybe things will be better.

Choolwe (BN): There are two main things needed by widows from the way I see it. One it's food and the second one is money. Money covers many problems such as going to hospitals when you are ill, for example if my child has a chronic illness or even myself if I develop a disease like a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI). Income generating projects are also very good for us as widows to have and participate in.

Siphiwe (BS): I think the people from Social Welfare in Binga should not discriminate the widows. They should help them because it is hard to survive when you are a widow these days. Even if you think of getting married again for that man to support you, he won't support you. Some from another organisation which is not social welfare came here some other day writing the names of people. But they are not from Social Welfare. I am hoping they will offer some help. All in all, Social Welfare from Binga should provide help to the widows especially with food and maybe blankets….((*baby cries and interrupts))*. They should help us with income generating projects and also with huts renovations.

Esnathi (BS): The church members should on top of food parcels, also help with monetary donations for me to buy material for roofing. As for Social Welfare people, I do not understand what they do and they have never come to us for us to know how they work. Income generating projects would also help if they can be brought to us. I will participate.

Chipo (BS): They need to help us more on food and educating our children. They should consider help with renovations of our huts. Just look at how it looks. ((*Points at the hut)).* Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! ((*Participant laughs)).* If they can just give you iron sheets for roofing.

Bina Chi (BS): I don't think of anything for now.

Esy (BS): The issue of getting help was never in my mind. So there is nothing I can suggest here.

14. Researcher: Is there anything you want to share that we may not have discussed about?

Anna (BN): I will just add a little. What we talked about today is very important and very good. I wish you were there the time I lost my husband perhaps I would have found help.

Maria (BN): I just want to add that men should go for testing at the hospital. There is a disease nowadays ((*meaning HIV and AIDS*)). This is not my normal body. I am normally bigger than this. It shows I am ill.

Kumbayile (BN): I just wish that such a good conversation we had can perhaps become a project in the future, maybe we can get assisted in various ways.

Julia (BN): One thing that I can just say is that sometimes programmes come to us, like now the questions you asked are very useful, but when they say let's participate in the projects, may be say in groups of 10, nothing becomes successful. We were in a mother's support group, with Ntengwe for Community development with the late Salia. We tried it but when it comes to go to other places for training a problem arises because our resources and poverty levels are different. Money should be allocated enough to assist all members of the group. For example, if they say we need to go to Australia for training, people like me who do not have a passport, will I manage to go to such trainings? So I will miss what they will learn there. Even if a support group member who managed to attend comes to educate me, she will only remember 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 and forget the rest. So if all of us manage to attend, we will have different understandings all of us. We can then share and grow together in thoughts and way of surviving in such difficult life situations. So if we are to raise the money for training ourselves, it becomes difficulty and we end up having people who say friends, I am dropping out of the group.

Choolwe (BN): Look at the huts we have here, they are thatched with grass and the grass needs replacement time and again. Now tell me if you don't get help how do you do that as a woman? It is a big problem for a widow.

Siphiwe (BS): I can just say no matter how small the help is, the Welfare Department should play a role in assisting the widows. It will reduce stress and you

will feel consoled as a widow. I can't ask for more because I am not the only widow, we are many.

Esnathi (BS): No. I think we have covered everything except saying small businesses can also help us but money is needed for that.

Chipo (BS): I don't think there is anything. I have told you everything about my life.

Bina Chi (BS): No, there is nothing to add.

Esy (BS): No, there is nothing.

15. Researcher: How do you feel about what you went through at this moment?

Anna (BN): I feel so encouraged after our conversation. I have the energy to move on now.

Maria (BN): I am fine and feel better after this conversation.

Kumbayile (BN): It is so good to talk to someone like you. I even forget the problems I have at home.

Julia (BN): I thank you for this conversation and I say God should intervene for us to be helped by such initiatives as your research or if we cannot be helped as widows, maybe our children may benefit in the future. Some of us may die anytime, but the children will remain. Thank you so much!

Choolwe (BN): I feel happy that I had some time to talk to you about my problems. I feel also happy that somebody's son whom I don't know where he comes from has come to give me a chance to talk about my problem will make me sleep well today at night. I will definitely sleep peacefully today. God bless you and travel back safely.

Siphiwe (BS): I feel so relieved. I had stress to tell you the truth. This is not how I am. Most of the days I don't eat. My son sometimes worries about me when I am just seated. I think of my late husband's words when he said I don't have relatives. I will remember him. Last time I cried when I thought of dry planting in the fields because I can't afford to pay people to plough for me. So today I got relieved a lot.

Esnathi (BS): I feel relieved and this talk we had is really good to me.

Chipo (BS): Talking to you has been very helpful. It is good to talk like this.

Bina Chi (BS): I don't feel anything. There is no feeling.

Esy (BS): I am fine with the conversation.

Researcher: *We have come to the end of our interview. Thank you for the information we have shared and for your time to share with me on your experiences. You really experienced a lot but you are still strong and moving on to care for your children as well. Plus you have the strength to uplift yourself. Thank you very much.*

Thank you very much for sharing with me on what you encountered in your life. The information shared with me is very useful.

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS (BINGA NORTH AND SOUTH)

PERSONAL INFORMATION OF PARTICIPANTS

1. Researcher: Can each one of you tell me about yourselves?

Participant A (BN): I am 54 years old and I come from Kelamenda. I have 2 children. I have 1 boy and 1 girl. We are 3 in the household. I just attended school up to grade 1 long ago. I don't earn any social grant. I live by just fending for myself in any way I see that I can get food.

Participant B (BN): I don't know my age. ((*Participant hands the identity document to the researcher to check the age. She was born in 1959. She was 56 years old)).* I come from Sikalenge and have 4 children who are all boys. The household has 4 people. I went up to grade 1 only like my neighbour here. I do gardening and sell Busika ((*sour fruit used for making porridge)*) for survival.

Participant C (BN): I am 48 years old and I come from Kelamenda. I only have 1 grown up child and I have 3 grandchildren I am living with, 2 girls and 1 boy. In this household we are 4. I attended school up to grade 2 only. I survive through subsistence farming.

Participant D (BN): I am 40 years old. I come from Sikalenge ward and I have 3 children. There is 1 boy and 3 girls. In this household we are 5 together with myself and my brother's son. I went to school up to form 2 only. I survive through small business and people know that I work at the ECD but the money for my pay doesn't come out.

Participant E (BN): I am 42 years old and I come from Sikalenge ward. I have 5 children, with 2 boys and 3 girls. I went to school up to grade 7and we are 9 in the household. I live by gardening and selling any commodity that is selling like fish.

Participant F (BN): I am 43 years old from Sikalenge ward. I have 3 children and 2 are boys and 1 is a girl. In this household, we are 6 together with my daughter in-law. One of my sons got married recently. I went to school up to grade 7. I do gardening and get vegetables that I sell around these homes.

Participant G (BN): I don't know my age and I have no identity document here. I come from Sikalenge ward and I have 3 children. I have 1 boy and 2 girls. We are 5 in the household. I only went up to grade 1and dropped before I could see the words. I do gardening for survival. I work with the mud.

Participant 1 (BS): I am 55 years old**.** I come from Simbala Centre and I have 5 children with 4 boys and 1 girl. My household has 7 people, including myself. I went up to grade 7 for my education. I survive through subsistence farming.

Participant 2 (BS): I am 53 years old. I come from Simbala. I have 1 child, a boy. At home we are 5 all in all. I have gone up to grade 4, I didn't finish my grade 5. I survive by doing piece jobs.

Participant 3 (BS): I am 28 years old and I come from Simbala in Chisawu area. I have 3 children who are all girls. I am in my mother's care now and we are 6 altogether. I went to school up to form 2. I survive through subsistence farming.

Participant 4 (BS): I don't know my age but I have an identity document for you to check. ((*Participant hands in the identity document and the researcher tell her that she was born in 1947 and had 68 years)*). I come from Simbala and I have 5 children. 1 is a boy and 4 are girls. We are 6 in the household and I did go to school. I survive through subsistence farming.

Participant 5 (BS): I was born in 1957 ((*the participant was 58 years old)*). I come from Simbala and I have 1 child. She is a girl. We are 2 in the household and I never went to school. I survive through subsistence farming like others.

Participant 6 (BS): I don't know my age. I even lost my identity document but I have the numbers. I will use them to get another one. I come from Simbala. I have 2

children, 1 boy and 1 girl. We are 4 in the house hold. I didn't manage to go to school. I live through subsistence farming.

Participant 7 (BS): I don't even know my age. Here is my identity document.

((*Participant was born in 1959 and was 56 years old)*). I have 5 children, 2 girls and 3 boys. In the household, we are 5. I never went to school and I live through subsistence farming. Since there is no rain this year, we will all die.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHALLENGES AND ABUSE EXPERIENCES OF THE WIDOW

2. Researcher: What kind of marriage where you in?

Participant A (BN): I was married customarily and in a polygamous marriage. We were 2 married to him.

Participant B (BN): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. We were 2 in the marriage.

Participant C (BN): I was in an unregistered customary polygamous marriage. We were 3 married to him.

Participant D (BN): It was an unregistered customary polygamous marriage with 2 of us as wives.

Participant E (BN): I was in unregistered customary monogamous marriage.

Participant F (BN): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. I found another woman in marriage and I became the second one. We were 2 and he could divorce women.

Participant G (BN): I was in unregistered customary marriage and I was alone. It was funny because I got to know the man when I was already married to him. He sent people to negotiate bride price (*lobola*) before I even knew him.

Participant 1 (BS): I was in unregistered customary marriage and I was in a polygamous marriage. My husband had 2 wives.

Participant 2 (BS): I was in registered Civil marriage called Chapter 37. I was in monogamous marriage.

Participant 3 (BS): I was in unregistered customary marriage but I was the only wife to my husband.

Participant 4 (BS): I was in registered polygamous customary marriage and we were 2 married to my husband. The other wife and died and I remained alone.

Participant 5 (BS): I was in an unregistered polygamous customary marriage. We were 2 married to my husband.

Participant 6 (BS): I was in registered customary marriage. We were 2 married to my husband.

Participant 7 (BS): I was in unregistered customary polygamous marriage. We were 2 in the marriage.

3. Researcher: Share with me on the death of your husband.

Participant A (BN): My husband died in the year 2000 and he died from this new disease ((*meaning HIV and AIDS)*). He got ill for a long time and died.

Participant B (BN): My husband died in 2000 and he got sick and could not go to the toilet. We tried to take him to the hospital but he just died.

Participant C (BN): He got ill and his feet were swelling. He had HIV.

Participant D (BN): My husband died from HIV and it was on the 8th of May 2012.

Participant E (BN): My husband died in 1997 his feet were swelling.

Participant F (BN): My husband died recently, in December 2015 but I just forgot the date. He stroked first. His leg and hand could not function. He was almost recovering but had High Blood Pressure (HBP). On his death, he never got sick. He just died.

Participant G (BN): My husband died in November 2008. I was going to church and I cooked food for him and he just said today I won't eat. I went to church and when I came back people told me that your husband had collapsed in the toilet. I took him to hospital where he was admitted for 4 days and was discharged and when we were at home, he just died. There was no specific illness that he had.

Participant 1 (BS): My husband died in 2012 and at hospital they said he had HIV and AIDS.

Participant 2 (BS): My husband died in 2007 on the 21st of January. He died from severe malaria and the bile burst inside.

Participant 3 (BS): He died in 2010 and he died from stomach ache.

Participant 4 (BS): My husband died in 2006. He could not urinate and then he died.

Participant 5 (BS): He died in 2006 and he died from Hike Ups.

Participant 6 (BS): He died on 1 December 2007. His legs were swelling and had running stomach.

Participant 7 (BS): His legs were swelling and had stomach problems. He died in December 2007.

4. **Researcher: Can each one of you please share with me what you experienced after the death of your husband?**

Participant A (BN): When I remained alone, another man wanted to beat me. Since my place of origin was far away, I just turned a deaf ear and stayed there. The brother in-law wanted to beat me over the land we had. He complained why we couldn't show him the size of the land we owned. Perhaps he wanted to take it. The other wife to my husband went back to her natal home and I remained alone there. It became hard for me too to stay there. They gave me unfriendly looks. The daughters in-law also married in this home thought I was staying to get married to their husbands. So I had to leave their home and built my own home elsewhere. Even the community members themselves didn't welcome me anymore.

Participant B (BN): From the time my husband got sick and he died and was buried, we were all united as one. The problem came during the cleansing ceremony. The discussion amongst elderly women was that it should be done sexually with a relative, but the major issue was that he was married. The wife refused and was saying the husband will contract HIV. The fight began. The cleansing ceremony passed and from that time to now, there is no communication. Even if my child gets sick, it's my own look out.

Participant C (BN): During the funeral all was well. The problem started when we were fighting over the land after the funeral. The relatives wanted to take the land and we were promised to be beaten over that land. As for me, it gave me heartaches to beaten by somebody's husband when my husband did not do it until he died. I left and re-joined my natal family.

Participant D (BN): Hhmmm, mine is tough! ((*Exclaimed)*). Fighting began when my husband was still alive and was sick but staying in South Africa. I wanted to go back home with the property and the sister in-law refused and we were fighting. The chief had to intervene that I should take the property with me. When my husband come back home, then I will take it back to our home. I never got home with anything, there was an accident on the way and all the property got damaged. Only things like blankets and clothes, that could not get damaged, remained.

When my husband came from South Africa, he was very sick. My brother is the one who went to fetch him. He stayed with the sister who helped him to take tablets because he used to default treatment. That was in December 2011. In May 2012, he was hospitalised and died there in Binga hospital. We went there and one could sense that there was no unity.

The problem arose on the cleansing ceremony. They had already given me a husband before cleansing. The brother in-law had already said he will marry me before I knew it. All the relatives fought against me that I should get married and why am I refusing. I stood my ground and refused to enter into levirate marriage. The cleansing ceremony was stopped because all of us refused to be sexually cleansed. I left for Bulawayo to the College to learn about ECDs. I went there for three weeks and they had to call a traditional healer from Zambia to carry on with the cleansing ceremony.

When I came back to inquire about the cleansing, they wanted me to pay one heard of cattle for them to cleanse me. I said to them, this doesn't kill. I will remain like that. From that time they never had interest in even supporting the child who is now going to grade 3. They don't even know him and they only know him when you are together. When he is alone they can't recognise him. These problems about death of a husband I experienced makes me lack interest even to re-marry.

Participant E (BN): A-a-a-a! ((*Exclaimed)*). These problems just like what others are saying, it's hard to be a widow. It's hard because the widow gets into problems. My husband was put to rest well, the problem came to sharing of property. During that time, everything was put outside and they said show us what is yours because we are taking everything. Then when I started pointing at some property items, there was too much fighting then I got nothing. I got my clothes, my children's clothes, and some other items which I had bought with my own money. After that they began saying I know how my husband died.

I had to leave after that and I went to look for a job because they were not caring for my children anymore. When I came back home, they had already done the cleansing ceremony and they gave me all the children to look after. The brother in-law vowed not to help me with supporting children because he said I ran away from him so that he cannot marry me. Even on educating the children, they never care about that. There is a lot of anger on the fact that I refused to marry my brother in-law.

Participant F (BN): Since my husband passed away, I haven't got any challenges. He just died recently, but when I look at it, those in-laws have a mentality of marrying the widow by force. Everything is still quiet. Nothing has been shared so far. The property is still looked in the house. Because I was now with my family, I am lucky that I have property to use, otherwise I would be in trouble now. So all that property that was with him is looked in the house.

Participant G (BN): I never experienced any problem. I never followed the traditional way of doing things. I followed the Christian way. I was bold on that and they understood. The only thing that wanted to be a hustle was when the woman who did the traditional ceremony with the man and sexually cleansed wanted me to pay her one heard of cattle for doing that. The Chief ruled it out and said I should not pay. So I didn't pay at the end.

Participant 1 (BS): A-a-a-a-a-a! ((*Participant paused)*). The way the relatives of my husband treated me changed. They first said that I gave him a love portion when he was coughing. So they still hold to that. After the burial nothing much happened. The cleansing ceremony was done in a Christian way because that is what my husband had said. His father never came to the ceremony but he know about it. Even all other relatives did not come to the cleansing ceremony. Only one of the sisters came.

From my family, my brother and sister came. My son who is physically challenged got sick and I had to take care of that alone too.

Participant 2 (BS): I faced to many problems. The in-laws said I forced him to relocate this is why he died here. They said we told him to marry a Tonga woman and these ones from afar are not marriage material. They shouted at the corpse that "*hey see what happened for running away from us. Your God is small. We are bigger than your God!* People who attended the funeral were surprised. They spend about 1 hour shouting at the corpse at the graveyard. Even during body viewing. All the people who attended the funeral were surprised and quiet. My cousin even said that they are not shouting at the corpse, they are shouting at you because the corpse cannot hear. They poured all sorts of insults.

After the funeral, the cleansing church ceremony was done. His sister called me by the side to ask whether I will manage to stay in the home alone now. When I said yes because I vowed that even if you die, I will stay in your home. The sister said to me that your marriage certificate is only a paper you did and doesn't work here so you want all this property to be yours? Then I said to her, I didn't know that he would die first. Then she told me that "I am telling you Nambia woman, you can't stay here! Leave this place and go and build your home somewhere!" I refused and I stayed in that home from 2007 and 2008. They started sending me ghosts and I could see them during the day. I used to run away and sleep next door. I saw many things and I know the ghost with these naked eyes of mine.

One day we ran away and left the food. We only saw the gum boots walking. We ran away and went next door. I had to relocate to where I am now. That day when you did individual interviews, I was afraid to say it during the individual interviews. I thought they would hear me and finish me off. ((*Other participants laughed at this)*). Even at high court I had to lie to them that my cousin who helped me was my in-law.

I went to Bulawayo for two 2 days without food and when I got everything right, they were very angry. The pension that came out through his name they shared it all and they lied that I signed for it and I got it. Yea, that's what I experienced. They sent me away from my home and I built my home there. That is why my huts look like they are falling ((*Participant chuckles and others laughed)*).

Participant 3 (BS): I didn't experience any problems ever since my husband died. The in-laws still treat me well.

Participant 4 (BS): There was too much talk from the in-laws that they suspected that my husband was killed by witchcraft. They said I should tell them what killed him and then I said I wouldn't know about that. When they had that they kept quiet until the cleansing ceremony was over and they are still quiet even today. There is no more trouble they are giving me.

Participant 5 (BS): They complained much during the time of his illness. They asked me why I didn't tell them earlier that he was ill. I told them that he got ill when he was at the home of the other in-laws from his second wife and I was surprised also how he got sick there. He was taken to hospital and died there. I never even saw him when he died and when he was buried. They did that on their own. They took all the money that I wanted to use for bus fare and they used it themselves.

When the burial was over, they came back at my home and said that I was innocent and the person who was wrong is the other wife. After the ceremony, I made sure I gave them all his belongings and left mine. I didn't want to see anything that belonged to him. They wanted his brother to marry me and I refused and said I don't want to be inherited. When the other wife died, all her children can back to me to stay with me. I called the in-laws to take care of the children. They all said that they cannot afford to support them. My husband had given me the instruction to take care of the children if the other wife dies because she was sickly. I took care of the children and now they are grown up under my care.

Participant 6 (BS): I didn't experience any problem during the burial and funeral. After that, the cleansing ceremony was done in a Christian way and there was no problem again. The in-laws never took anything from me. They left everything and said the children will use them. Everything belonged to them.

The only problem that I experienced was my own poverty and not having a man to help with renovating these old huts. The problem is only poverty, nothing more. The in-laws are all understanding.

Participant 7 (BS): I didn't experience any problems from the in-laws during the funeral and burial. The burial and cleansing ceremony was done in a Christian way.

Even today they don't trouble me. The problem is only on these old huts that are about to fall on us. There is no one to renovate them. I am staying with girls only now. So they can't do that. When the boys were still around, at least they could assist. Now they left school and went to look for jobs.

5. **Researcher: Share with me the psycho-social challenges you experienced after the death of your husband.**

Participant A (BN): It pained me in my thoughts and I was diagnosed with High Blood Pressure (BP). I was thinking hard about the death of my husband and that I was left alone here and I do not come from this place. I come from Mucheso ((*about 90km away)*). The support for the child was the most difficult one for me. When the father died, the child was 6 years old and now he is 21 years old. No one thought of helping me. I used to fetch Busika in the trees for sell until I fell and my hand was broken. I didn't go back home though, I just stayed here in Sikalenge.

Participant B (BN): My stress will never end my son. I have lots of problems even now. Especially when the children of the deceased cannot talk to one another and every day there are issues and talks around that. I even wish to go somewhere and stay there, maybe I will rest. My parents died and my brother is old and a pensioner. So there is nowhere to go and stay peacefully. So I built my home just outside my in-laws' home. Unfortunately I built my home where the fired bullets are going. ((*Uses metaphor*)). It's worse off now! ((*Exclaims)*). When my child got married, they didn't even want to get involved in negotiating bride price (*lobola*). So I am not educated and can't even count the money properly, so it became another problem.

Participant C (BN): My husband was a drunkard. He used to stay in the pub. So supporting children even during his life time was my baby. I had stress though when he died because this child was 2 years old when he died. I always thought of how to raise my child.

Participant D (BN): I was numb with stress. I got a lot more stress when it came to processing the birth certificate of my child. I didn't know who to confront from my in-laws to give me the death certificate of my husband to process the birth certificate. I never told anybody. It was my own stress. I had to confront one of my late husband's cousin who went to talk to other family members. They gave it to me. One of the cousins went with me to process the birth certificate. So I began to wonder whether I

will be able to be a mother and a father at the same time. They also never supported the children. They are all my problems.

Participant E (BN): I was stressed a lot when my husband died. Before his death, I had good living. I had nothing to cry about. I was even blamed for my husband's death. They never even supported the children. They don't even know them even if they are walking in the road. So they never supported them. My family had received me and unfortunately they all died including my brothers. So the stress increased and I had to come and stay somewhere and look after myself and children.

Participant F (BN): The only stress I had was about thinking about my husband. He supported me very well. If I think of the 2008, I never think I was going to survive. He stood firm and strong for use all to survive at home.

Participant G (BN): The stress that I had was that I lost a husband. The support that I used to get has gone down. Fortunately, God is God and is a God that gives. All my things are going well now I am not suffering at all. But the problem is thinking about my partner. I always wish if he was around life would be more fulfilling.

Participant 1 (BS): Thoughts about his death come a lot, especially now that the huts are falling. When he was still alive he used to renovate them. The thoughts of wishing that if he was still alive it would be better always trouble me. His father wanted to claim the ox that is remaining. He was saying that it belonged to him. During the funeral, he was quiet but after wards that's when he started to claim it and ordered it to be sold so that he can get the money.

Participant 2 (BS): I had painful thoughts, even now they still attack me. These thoughts are very painful. People will think that at night I do sleep when I don't. My late husband used to say that I will suffer when he dies because I don't have relatives. I have seen that now. As for property, they wanted to take it but because of the Civil marriage that I was in, they failed to do that. They accused me of relocating with their son to Simbala from Dobola. So I brought him to be killed here. I defended myself that I didn't cause his death. He is the one who brought me here and he married me when I was 16 years old. I was under age. I could not influence his decisions. I even changed my identity document particulars because of him.

Painful thoughts don't end. Thinking of buying food and other needs, it is really difficult. Even working in the fields I am restricted because of the operation. The doctor said I should work for one hour only. Now I think of my health condition. As it is I need a fourth operation, it will be very hard again on how to make it happen. I only go to the Pastor to pray for me. There is nothing I can do. I only say God have mercy on me. Stress will never end. We are grateful to have someone like you who talks to us about our problems. We tend to forget them after talking about them. If you are a widow, you don't forget about the death of your husband. You will always wish if he was still around.

Participant 3 (BS): Sometimes I think about my husband. Most of the times I used to think about my children that they should get support to go to school and not to drop out of school like me. God heard my prayers that the aunt of my late husband took them and she is educating them now. The property like the bed and the wardrobe I left them for children to use. They are using them now.

Participant 4 (BS): Yes, thoughts come only about renovating these huts. I come to think that during the life of my husband, I never experience this. As for the property, it burned in the house, so there was nothing left. Taking care of the children became my responsibility until they grew up and some have started working now. Piece jobs in the fields helped me a lot to care for my children. The main challenge was on taking care and supporting my children because no one chipped in to help even today there is no one.

Participant 5 (BS): Yes, thinking too much is a problem as others have mentioned. I always think that if my husband was here, he would have done A, B, C and D. especially fixing these huts that we have. Now there is no one to cry to about the huts. On the support of the children, it's the same. There is no one to ask for help when hunger strikes at home. Now that I am a woman and alone, there is nothing I can do. This is when now thoughts and stress comes to say *"hey I don't know whether is it God's will or it's a human being who killed my husband. It's really hard!"* I have trouble with ploughing. I can't use the plough. So we join hands with my neighbours to assist one another.

Participant 6 (BS): Yes I get stressed when I think that I used to have a husband and now I don't have. You think about the huts that are falling. Also thinking about

this drought and fending for the children is a big problem. I always think that if my husband was still alive, he would have made a better plan. Now supporting my children is a major problem. I think about that day-in day-out. I don't stop. Ploughing in the fields, we work together with our neighbours. During winter I also go out to find materials for making brooms which I sell in Kamativi to get money for supporting my children.

Participant 7 (BS): What troubles me most is looking for food. As I speak I don't have food at home. Save The Children cannot help me even when it comes to the money that some people get, I don't get it. I am just someone who goes all over to fend for myself and my children. People's cattle invaded my field and grazed over all my maize that was growing there. I didn't sleep last night. I almost screamed. So if my husband was around I was going to share that problem with him. Also if you look at me carefully, this is not how I should look! ((*Participant exclaimed)*). I support myself and the children through selling of the brooms and I get money to support my children. Some of my children have grown up now. They left me a long ago and they never come back home. One of my sons has been away for 5 years now without coming back. I ask myself whether he will come back home when he is sickly. I woke up around 4 am in the morning today and came into the summer house where I was just thinking about my problems. Now that my husband has died, that's when I am facing the real challenges.

6. **Researcher: After sharing with me and others in this group on your experiences, how do you feel?**

Participant A (BN): When we sit together like this, and I listen to each and everyone's problems, I feel better.

Participant B (BN): If we share as a group, it feels like we are supporting and comforting one another. You tend to wonder that my friend is also suffering like me. You sometimes feel that this one's problem is better or worse and this one is similar to that one.

Participant C (BN): If we share our pains together, we understand more about our problems. You begin to understand how each and every one lives.

Participant D (BN): Since I am the youngest here and when I listen I find these problems with everyone here, they are common problems with widows. I begin to think that this is how life is. I feel having removed heavy feelings because I am not the only one affected by these problems that stress us as widows. I always heard that if you are not cleansed, you will die but I am still surviving now. Maybe death is still on my way. But it is now a relief to me especially at my age to be widowed and then they refuse to cleanse you. I thought things will come during the night to even disturb my sleep. It seems it's just scaring you so that you marry the person they want and have chosen for you. I have learnt a lot and I wish many other widows can get the lesson learned here, the communities would be better.

Participant E (BN): You begin to see that my neighbour has also the problem that I met. Even though the problems are different but you learn from your friends and that builds your strength as a widow. I also thought if you are not sexually cleansed you will die. My husband died in 1997 and the youngest child was 9 months old. Today that child has completed form 4 and I am still alive.

Participant F (BN): With all the words my friends are saying, I feel relieved because my problem is still new. Even if they don't cleanse me, I am well up with information. I am already against levirate marriage. Now I know that sexual cleansing is just something I can do away with. I am empowered already.

Participant G (BN): I feel that these words have built my character and I am empowered. When we exchange problems we make each other strong. We heard so many problems that differ and learned how people live out there.

Participant 1 (BS): I am relieved now since it feels like we are consoling one another.

Participant 2 (BS): I get relieved and excited that in Zimbabwe there are people who can talk to us like this about our problems. You know if you are a widow, people stay away from you. God has sent you actually to listen to us. Since that day you came to interview me I said God loves us and has sent someone to console us. I have never experienced this in my life since my husband died. I feel relieved and I am happy about this.

Participant 3 (BS): I also feel relieved a lot.

Participant 4 (BS): I feel like we have taken all our troubles and given them to you. If somebody comes to console us we feel loved. We will always remember that our son has consoled and comforted us.

Participant 5 (BS): I feel happy because all that was in my heart is now out. I felt like I should say all that is in my heart. When you are alone it is heavy. So when you say it out, it becomes better.

Participant 6 (BS): As for me, if I find someone to comfort me, just like you, I feel excited and I feel relieved.

Participant 7 (BS): If we meet someone like you and other widows and we begin to share our problems, I feel relieved. If I am alone there at home, I always think I am the only one with this problem. I never think that there is someone like me also widowed and facing these problems. Now I know and I am relived. Even the lack of sleep that I had last night, I think tonight I will sleep because I am relived. God has intervened to get someone to console us, ever since I became a widow, nothing of this nature has happened. It is the first time.

INTERVENTION MEASURES FOR THE CHALLENGES AND ABUSES EXPERIENCED BY WIDOWS

7. **Researcher: What kind of support was each one of you expecting to get after the death of your husband?**

Participant A (BN): Since my husband died and there is no support coming through and there has been droughts affecting us, I needed financial support like what others get to be able to live a decent life.

Participant B (BN): I needed support for taking care of the health of my children, and food for feeding my children. Also for school needs of my children. This can be covered through financial support.

Participant C (BN): Just like other said, if only they could support us with food for our families that would help a lot.

Participant D (BN): There are many things that we need, school fees for the children, food for the children, all these are heavy for us up until children grow. It's

like the whole Zimbabwe is on top of your head. We need all sorts of help that one can think about.

Participant E (BN): As others have mentioned, educating our children is difficult. We need help with that. The help that we always need is training on projects that can give us income for our survival because our problems will never end. This could be in the form of business and or income generating projects. Donations and free food do not sustain us. We need sustainable income generating projects.

Participant F (BN): I am also concurring with others. What my friends have said captures everything. There is nothing left. A grant will also help especial paying school fees for children and also buy food for them. Income generating projects are a great need for us.

Participant G (BN): I needed help with food and even now I still need it. Even financial support, we need it so much.

Participant 1 (BS): I was expecting support for my children but I didn't get it. The church members managed to give me support in the form of prayers and comfort.

Participant 2 (BS): I was expecting financial support and social grants but I did not qualify because of my age. Save The Children didn't even give food parcels. They said that I am still young and I do not qualify. I also expected church members to put prayers for me. My current church members didn't do that except Seventh Day Adventist where I was a member some time ago. They came to comfort me. They even asked me which song I loved most when I was still attending their church. I told them and they sang for me. Another Seventh Day Adventist Church member used to assist me to sell tomatoes at school.

Participant 3 (BS): I was in need of support for education of my children. I got it from the aunt of my child.

Participant 4 (BS): I expected financial support and I got it from Binga and I get $40 every month. Save The Children also gives me food aid. I get sorghum as aid.

Participant 5 (BS): I didn't know that I could get support so I was not expecting anything and I didn't get any help. Neighbours are the ones who sometimes visit and go back to their homes.

Participant 6 (BS): As for me I just hear that there is help given to people in the community. I do not even know whether they can help us. I was not even expecting any help. I expected church members to help me anyhow but they didn't.

Participant 7 (BS): I didn't expect any help and I didn't get any, even from the church members.

8. Researcher: Who helped in the problems that you encountered?

Participant A (BN): There is no one who helped at all my son. I don't know what people think of me.

Participant B (BN): There is no one who helped me. One has to fend for herself in her problems. We even have stiff bodies with hard work for fending for our children. We are just waiting for God to take us. If people with help drag their feet, then we will all perish, but if help comes quickly, I am sure we will be found alive.

Participant C (BN): There is no one who offered help to me.

Participant D (BN): The Chief is the one who helped with getting the property. He intervened in that problem. On the cattle that the in-laws were selling, we also got help from the police and up to the magistrate. They all helped a lot.

Participant E (BN): I was unlucky in my case. All things fell on me. I had to go to the Chief who gave me money worth $40 to go and work for my children. The Chief encouraged me to stop crying and be strong for my children. I am supporting these children by myself. All these 9 children I am supporting I am just thinking how possible it will be to support them.

Participant F (BN): No one helped at all. There are hardships I am facing just like others. I think hard at night about supporting the children. As you can see that this year, it is not raining. Some people earn about $50 from some NGOs and I am left out.

Participant G (BN): In my case, it is the hand of God that is helping. I help myself. I do gardening. I wake up early in the morning each day and come back in the afternoon.

Participant 1 (BS). I didn't get any help in the problems that I faced. No one helped.

Participant 2 (BS): The magistrate is the one who helped me with signing of papers for me to be protected from in-laws who wanted to take my property and so that I can get the pension funds.

Participant 3 (BS): My mother helped and she is still helping me. She supported me all the way and received me back home. My late husband's aunt also helped by taking care of my children and educating them.

Participant 4 (BS): There is no one else except the financial help I am getting from Welfare in Binga.

Participant 5 (BS): No one helped me.

Participant 6 (BS): All the people that were supposed to help didn't help me.

Participant 7 (BS): No one helped me. I am just fending for myself and my children.

9. Researcher: What kind of help did you receive for the problems you encountered?

Participant A (BN): There is no help that I got.

Participant B (BN): I didn't get any help.

Participant C (BN): I never got any help.

Participant D (BN): The Chief helped me to get back the property that was taken. Even though the property was damaged on the way to my home in a donkey cart accident but he help me. The police didn't do much to help on the dispute we had on the cattle. They simply referred it to the magistrate. The magistrate then said I should be given back the money I was robbed from cattle sales. The magistrate was aware of witchcraft and then ordered them not to hand the money in my hands but to bring it to her and get it from her. All they need to do is to tell me that the money has been given to the magistrate and she must come and collect it from here at the offices. Also pay for her transport. Do not hand her the transport money in her hands. Pay the transport directly. They all cooperated with that order.

Participant E (BN): The Chief helped with advice to go and work for my children. The Chief helped me with bus fare to go and fend for my children as they are now grown up. There is no other help that I got.

Participant F (BN): I haven't got any help as yet.

Participant G (BN): I didn't receive any help.

Participant 1 (BS): I went to Binga with my disabled child for help. I also met people from Ntengwe for Community Development Trust and they said they would take my child to Harare for training but all evaporated in the air. Nothing materialised. Even today I am still waiting. I was even told to take my physically challenged son to the doctor in Bulawayo at Central hospital. I went there 3 times. There first time I went there I found that he was not around, and the second time I went there I found him. I had to make a booking for another date. On the booked date I went to Bulawayo and I found that he was on leave. From that time my heart sank and was broken. I never went back again.

Participant 2 (BS): I got help by signing of papers from the magistrate. As for the other forms of help like food aid from Save the Children, I didn't get any help. I don't even know now whether I should date someone's husband now at my age. This is why older people can do prostitution even if it is embarrassing. You will end up in a fight and losing your teeth because of poverty. The Save the Children always say that we are young and can fend for ourselves. So they don't consider us for food aid. THEY WANT OLD WOMEN WITH WALKING STICKS! ((Adds emphasis)).

Participant 3 (BS): I never received help accept for my family that received me back and the aunt of my children who helped with caring for my children.

Participant 4 (BS): I just received financial support. I didn't get another form of help.

Participant 5 (BS): I did get any help.

Participant 6(BS): There was no help that I got from anybody.

Participant 7 (BS): Like others, I didn't get help as well.

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF INTERVENTION SOUGHT BY WIDOWS

10. **Researcher: When you sought help, what did you consider to very important factors? (if you got help).**

Participant A (BN): I didn't get help

Participant B (BN): I never managed to get help.

Participant C (BN): I didn't also get help.

Participant D (BN): I just thought to myself who was the nearest person who could help me solve the problem very quickly. Then the Chief came to my mind. I went there to get help and when the in-laws were called to come, they refused because they knew that the Chief would not make it easy for them. The Chief is closer and quick to solve problems. As for the magistrate, it was a referral from the police who said the matter needed a magistrate. I went to the police because it was a referral from the Chief who saw it fit to involve the police.

Participant E (BN): When I had that problem, I chose to go to see the Chief because I thought of him as the right person to help me. He is an understanding man. He was the only person I could go to since all my relatives have died and he knew all the problems I had before.

Participant F (BN): I didn't get help.

Participant G (BN): Like others, I also didn't get help.

Participant 1 (SB): I was referred to them even though I could not access help.

Participant 2 (BS): It is the marriage that I had. All needed to be changed into my name.

Participant 3 (BS): I didn't know who can provide help except for my family and the aunt of my husband.

Participant 4 (BS): I didn't know where else to get help.

Participant 5 (BS): I didn't know where to get help as I have indicated earlier on.

Participant 6 (BS): I had no knowledge about where to get help. So I didn't get any help.

Participant 7(BS): I did get help because I didn't know where to get help.

11. **Researcher: What factors contributed to your failure to seek help (if you did not seek help)**

Participant A (BN): I did know where to get help from. Even if I thought of finding a job, I thought about who was going to take care of the children. So I failed to get help.

Participant B (BN): I never knew where to go to get help. I didn't even know who to consult.

Participant C (BN): CADEC helped us with goats for rearing, but now all the goats are dead. All my neighbours know that I tried but the goats died.

Participant D (BN): I managed to get help as I have explained.

Participant E (BN): I managed to get help from the Chief.

Participant F (BN): My husband died recently and I haven't got help and it hasn't come into my mind to seek help.

Participant G (BN): I didn't know where to get help this is why I started a garden to help myself.

Participant 1 (BS): I tried but I failed and then I had to give up and my heart was painful. I never went back because of their empty promises.

Participant 2 (BS): We are not given food aid because they say we are still young and we can help for ourselves.

Participant 3 (BS): I did know where to get help.

Participant 4 (BS): I did know where to get help. I did know that we have such services in Binga. If you are widowed, you just live like that. There is nothing you can do.

Participant 5 (BS): I didn't know where to get help and whom to ask it from. I don't even know that there can be help given to us. As a widow, what I know is that I should just stay home and think of the best way to live.

Participant 6 (BS): I also didn't know of any help that I can get. I think those from Welfare should actually come in schools and call the widows and offer help.

Participant 7 (BS): I also don't know of any help given to the widows here. I am hoping the Welfare people will come here one day to help us.

GAPS THAT EXIST IN INTERVENTION

12. Researcher: In your opinion, do you think the help you received was enough to cater for your needs as a widow?

Participant A (BN): I never received help.

Participant B (BN): Like others I did get help.

Participant C (BN): I also didn't get help.

Participant D (BN): The help that I got is not enough for any widow. Sometimes people who write down the names of people choose who to include. These children we have need maybe a special NGO that can look after them. The problem we have as widows are too difficult to manage easily.

Participant E (BN): It is not enough. I am already suffering after the help I got.

Participant F (BN). I didn't get any help from anywhere.

Participant G (BN): I never got help. I helped myself.

Participant 1 (BS): I never received help. I gave up due to false and empty promises I got from the doctors.

Participant 2 (BS): The help I received was not enough. I just got help to sign the papers for property to be in my name and to get the pension funds. As for the hardships I am facing and stress, I didn't receive any help.

Participant 3 (BS): I didn't receive any meaningful help.

Participant 4 (BS): I didn't get help that I needed.

Participant 5 (BS): I didn't get help. There is nothing much to say.

Participant 6 (BS): I didn't receive help so I can't say anything on that.

Participant 7 (BS): Like others, there is no help that I received.

13. **Researcher: What improvements do you suggest for the intervention you received from social service providers?**

Participant A (BN): There is need to consider financial help and helping us with rearing animals that can multiply with time. We can sell these animals to sustain us for other needs.

Participant B (BN): I say they need to help us with food, money, or helping us with poultry keeping for sell or even keeping goats for sell. Goats can multiply and generate income.

Participant C (BN): I suggest that they need to help us with income generating projects. Rearing animals sometimes bring loss through death. They can die.

Participant D (BN): I had already hinted on that but I would love to touch on all the problems facing widows. People are taught everything, but implementation is a problem. The main thing that should be emphasised I think is to help people to create and maintain unity in the face of death. If a husband dies, unity should be promoted between the in-laws and the widow. I don't whether this needs the President of Zimbabwe himself to explain this or whoever. People must remain united for the children so that their growth, development and future is not affected. Knowledge should be disseminated to the communities that the children we had automatically unites the family whether the husband dies or not. We are still the same people and united because of the children. Even if I refuse to be married within the family of the deceased, there should not be grudges because we have children as a family.

Were a husband has died, maybe during property administration, the authority figures should be present to explain to the people how property should be shared. Maybe this can scare people as well from troubling the widows.

Participant E (BN): This problem will never end soon. Widows are despised a lot. It is better if they can assist with sustainable source of income. Donations and food parcels do not last for us.

Participant F (BN): I was just wondering that how about if they can support us financially for our children to be able to attend school? This can give our children a

better future. We are in debt at schools. We need to pay off the debts so that our children can attend school. This gives them a better future.

Participant G (BN): I personally cannot choose. Whatever help can be possible with the organisations I will be comfortable with. Whether it is food or money, I will be happy with that. Maybe when help comes, I will be dead by then. Ha-ha-ha-ha! ((*Participant laughs)*).

Participant 1 (BS): I suggest that they should consider financial support, animal rearing and paying for our children's education.

Participant 2 (BS): In my thinking, financial support needs to be considered. We can even renovate the huts with it. Food aid is also very important. Income generating projects are also needed but we do not know how they can be started. We need to be taught about them. Income generating projects will help us to use our own hands to get money to sustain us. Even the bible says that laziness doesn't pay.

Participant 3 (BS): I suggest that they should improve on assisting us with finance and food. Money will assist us to start small businesses that will help us to educate our children and buy food and toiletries for children. Even renovating huts will be easy when you have a business.

Participant 4 (BS): They should improve on financial support for us to be able to educate our children. They can also help widows with iron sheets for roofing and we will see what to do. Our roofs are leaking and that can help us a lot.

Participant 5 (BS): The problem lies with the houses. As others have said it, money will be of help so that you can buy building material and food. Business in the community doesn't pay. I think if I get $50 a month will be enough.

Participant 6 (BS): They should support us financially so that we can build our homes. Nowadays they encourage us to build toilets but don't have money to pay the builder. I have even stopped eating chicken because they are eating human waste because we don't have a toilet at home. I think $100 would be enough for me for all my monthly financial needs.

Participant 7 (BS): I suggest that they to support us financially to meet our financial needs such as renovating the huts. An amount of $100 per month can be enough for me to meet my needs.

14. **Researcher: Is there anything you want to share that we may not have discussed about?**

Participant A (BN): I don't have anything to add.

Participant B (BN): There is need to focus on these orphans we have. There is a time I will die like my husband. The orphans need to well taken care of. Children need also parent figures for their proper development including discipline. There is need to write in the Laws how orphans should be cared for.

Participant C (BN): My friends have said it all.

Participant D (BN): Just a little thing. Some help come in the form of rearing cattle and these cows must multiply and return the original number you got. When they don't multiply but they all die, some organisation said the cows that died are yours, ours should be brought back. As a widow I don't have a plan. The problem becomes worse than where I was before help came. I cannot get the money to pay back. Should I go and still somewhere to payback? I can see that I am already arrested and even into jail they can take me. They should make life easy for us than to make more difficult.

Participant E (BN): I don't have anything to add, but I am thankful with this topic you brought to us. This discussion has built some character in me and I feel rejuvenated.

Participant F (BN): All has been said.

Participant G (BN): They have covered everything.

Participant 1 (BS): No, there is nothing.

Participant 2 (BS): No. I am happy.

Participant 3 (BS): I am satisfied.

Participant 4 (BS): I am happy with everything covered.

Participant 5 (BS): We covered all the things about widows.

Participant 6 (BS): I have to add to what we covered. All has been discussed and we are happy.

Participant 7 (BS): We talked about everything.

15. **Researcher: Can each one of you share with me on the feelings about what you went through at this moment?**

Participant A (BN): I am happy about the discussion we had. I am hopeful that help will come one day.

Participant B (BN): I am happy and satisfied, but when I get home, I know these problems will come back to my mind. Especially looking at the children and their expectations from me. As I speak they will expect me to bring home something, yet I do not have anything. The children feel sad and hence I also feel sad.

Participant C (BN): We normally meet in the roads thinking that your neighbour is fine. Now bringing us together has made us listen to one another and share our problems. Now I understand better, both myself and my neighbour.

Participant D (BN): I am happy and I have learnt great things here. There are elders around me and I have heard something I didn't know off. My only plea is that, let this not end here today. It must help us to move forward and work hard for our lives and children. We should share this with other who are not here with us today. Everyone should know their rights and limitations even though it was not intended to teach us that. We have got some lessons. I feel this will help the widows and the orphans and even yourself as a student, even at your home as well. At the end of this I just want to ask you also one question…Did we answer the questions correctly? ((*Participant chuckles and they all laugh in unison*)).

Participant E (BN): Everything has changed me. If we put our heads together with each person discussion her problem, it feels differently. We now know the problems facing the widows. I thank you so much.

Participant F (BN): I will so happy with all that we shared and taught one another. As for me whose husband died recently, it has opened my eyes and I will be alert for any abuse if it comes by.

Participant G (BN): I am happy and hopeful for change in our lives. I don't know when this will happen. Please write everything and send it wherever it must go.

Participant 1 (BS): I am relieved with what we have discussed.

Participant 2 (BS): I am happy with all that we talked about today. It is rare to get such people to share our problems with.

Participant 3 (BS): I have learned a lot to day and I am happy.

Participant 4 (BS): I am very happy too today.

Participant 5 (BS): I am excited to have share my problems with others.

Participant 6 (BS): I am relieved with this discussion that has never happened to us since we were widowed. I am very happy.

Participant 7 (BS): I wish such discussions can translate into big programmes that can help us and our children. I am so excited to have share my problems with you and my fellow widows.

Researcher*: We have come to the end of the discussion and I would like to thank each and every one who made time for this discussion to be successful. I have learnt a lot from the discussions we had. Thank you so much.*

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

PERSONAL WORK EXPERIENCE IN HELPING WIDOWS

1. **Researcher**: **Can you please share with me on your work experience in helping the widows?**

District Development Officer: (Under Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development) I have been in the District since 2007 ((*9 years working with women issues)*) under the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. The area of service covers the entire district, meaning 25 wards in the district.

District Social Welfare Officer: I will start with introductions. My name is Mr. Mudungwe. I am employed under the Ministry of Labour Public Service and Social Welfare based in Binga. I have been here in the district for the past 14 years. My

position is District Social Welfare Officer. Basically, we are the Social Welfare people in the district.

District Magistrate: I am the District Magistrate and I am servicing the whole District of Binga. I have been in this position for 15 years but here in Binga I arrived in June 2015 meaning its 6 months now.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (B.N): I am the Community Relations Liaison Officer. I just arrived recently and I have been here for 4 months only. Our police services cover Binga Centre, Manjolo up to close to Siabuwa.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (B.S): My position is Community Relations Liaison Officer. We cover Kamativi, Pashu and Katete areas. I have been working here for 2 years now.

Chief Sikalenge (B.N): I am Chief Sikalenge and I have been in this position for 24 years now. My area is very big starting from Binga Centre to Kariangwe.

Chief Saba (B.S): I am Chief Saba. I have 3 years on this position. The area I cover is big from Sibbungwe to Gwayi.

Village Head (B.N): I am the Village Head here and I have been in this position since 2007. So I have 9 years working as a Village Head. I cover areas like Sikalenge and Manjolo.

Village Head (B.S): I am the Head of the Village Heads of ward 18 and in the area of Simbala. It covers sub-wards like Simbala, Mpati, Mudila and Kabwe. I have been in this position for 10 years now.

2. Researcher: What forms of abuse do widows experience in your service area after the death of their husbands?

District Development officer: There are so many abuses faced by women. They are physically and sexually abused. The third one is psychological where they are humiliated, especially the widows after losing their partners. The most common one is sexually abuse which cuts across…married women, girls at school and widows. There is also a problem with custody of children. The problem emanates from the legal system in Zimbabwe. We are preserving our culture where if one departs (dies) the widows is supposed to take care of the children but here the children are taken

by the uncles. On the other side, the law says the children should be under custody of the surviving spouse. There is now conflict between culture and the law on the other side. People still inherit the wives. In the past, they used to force marriages, but now people negotiate. They will say to the widow, since your husband has passed on, we want to take care of the children, the animals and the house or any property that has been left for the purpose of security.

When such conditions are set, the women has no choice but to follow where the property has gone. The uncle or the brother to the late can say can I have two kids so that can take care of them and pay school fees. That's a condition because the children have gone to the brother of the deceased. That's a plan to marry her. It's a way of inheriting her. Conditions have been set. With the issue of cleansing, the community are no longer doing it because of the issue of AIDS. But they do it with their wives. After doing it with their wives, that's when they cleanse the widow. There is a way of doing it. They are running away from HIV and AIDS. If you want to sexually cleanse the widow, we encourage that people go for HIV testing. The practice of cleansing, I don't think it will end in Binga and it will remain in existence.

District Social Welfare Officer: Widows are among what we call the vulnerable groups that we find in the district together with the widowers. But we are mainly concerned with the widows because here in Binga there are issues to do with inheritance. We have seen that when the husband passes away and there was wealth accumulation in the form of cattle, houses and so forth. When the spouse passes away there is a tendency to have disputes as to who is supposed to inherit the property that has been accumulated with the relatives of the deceased coming to say that this wealth was accumulated by our son. So you will find that because of fear that has to do with cultural practices and beliefs, most women believe that if they contest the notion that the property was accumulated by the husband, the woman get the property but some element of witchcraft is going to befall you. So that disempowers the woman to the extent that they automatically prefer to leave whatever was accumulated and they move on and start a new life. So we are talking of being totally disenfranchised, being disempowered that has a negative impact on the children. Children will be affected socially, economically and so forth. The woman is made more vulnerable.

Custody battles of children are directly linked to the wealth that has been accumulated in the household. The belief is that the one who remains with the custody of the children will have a claim on the wealth. You will find that custody battles are not premised on the best interest of the child which is what we expert as social welfare officers…the best interest of the child. But now you find that it is the material interest that is pushing the custody agenda. As a result, you will find that we have a lot of custody cases that are being referred to us through the courts. When you go deep to do an inquiry as to who is suitable for custody of the child. You will find that the parties contesting are after the wealth or estate of the late and not the best interest of the child.

Our job there is to balance those issues to say which party among those contesting is going to meet the best interest of the child. Again that fear of the cultural beliefs reigns, but there are the laws such as the inheritance Act, the Maintenance Act and Guardianship of Minors Act. You will find that women, maybe because of low literacy levels, they are fearful of some cultural beliefs. I had a case of one woman who had a serious case of the custody issue of the child with the in-laws. The in-laws wanted to take the child. We had to advise the woman to go to the courts to solve the issue. The moment we spoke of the courts, she pointed out that even if I am granted custody of the child by the courts, my child won't survive. My in-laws will bewitch my child and I will end up losing my child. So let's leave this this outside the courts and I will abide by what my in-laws are saying. When it is at that stage now, the person is beyond reasoning and locks the doors to logic. So there are lots of issues.

Forced levirate marriages are no longer an issue because of HIV and AIDS and people are now aware of the dangers. If that is still happening, maybe it is among the older generations. But what is happening is that those widows are re-marrying. It might not be within the family of the deceased, but they are re-marrying. People are now aware of the dangers and know that the brother succumbed to HIV and AIDS. Levirate marriages have relatively gone down.

District Magistrate: The main form of abuse since I started working here is property grabbing and custody battles of children. We have seen that these custody battles are targeted at property and not in the best interest of the child.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): There are no cases that have been brought forward so far.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): No cases have been brought forward. I think people understand the law.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): The problems widows face are there when the husband dies on sharing property with the in-laws. Fighting and grabbing of property is common and we say NO this woman was living well with the husband and this property must remain with her. She may give you some but she is the one to inherit it. Domestic animals like cattle and other animals we say the parents of the deceased should also get a little share of them so that they also remain with a reminder of their relative. The rest goes to the widow because she is the one staying with the children. Custody battles of children also are found when the widows wants to go back to the natal family. The in-laws want children to be shared. When they come for our intervention we say children should go with the mother. They can always come to see their grandparents on their own when they want to. They should not be forced to stay with grandparents. If fighting for children happens then we say the mother should take custody of the children.

Levirate marriages previously could be demanded on the widow, but she could refuse if she wanted to. This of course came with a lot of misunderstandings. Nowadays, they ask the woman whether she thinks one of the brothers to the husband can inherit her. She is the one to choose whom she thinks can marry her. It happens also that the widow can be cleansed without sleeping with her and without mentioning levirate marriage to her. Once all is done, that's when she will be asked whether she can get married to one of the brother in-laws but after she has been cleansed.

Chief Saba (BS): There are many abuses faced by widows. Some are accused of killing their husbands and in-laws bend together to accuse the widow. Others face the challenge of inheriting the wealth left behind by the husband whilst others face the challenge of being left without cleansing if she refused to enter into levirate marriage to the brother of the deceased.

Many widows nowadays refuse to be cleansed because they say they are Christians. In our African culture in this area we believe that for a widow to be sexually cleansed

by the husband's relative to remove the spirit of the dead. But because of HIV and AIDS, this is no longer happening. In our Tonga culture, we believe in traditional cleansing but widows sometimes refuse. So the family of the deceased leave her life that without cleansing. As time moves on, sometimes things don't go well for the widow, she comes back to ask for cleansing and that's when fighting begins. They say to her we told you to agree to cleansing, now you should pay us to it. Now you have gathered us again, you need to pay us….((*the cellphone rings and the Chief attends to it. There was a break in the interview)).*

I haven't come across a widow who has been beaten, but the widespread problem is custody of children battles. It is very common. Custody battles come in these forms. Sometimes the brothers to the deceased straight away want to take children from the widow and take care of them and the widow resists. The other way is that the widow after the death of the husband will aim to get married to the brother of the deceased and if it does not happen, she gets angry and goes away with all the children out of anger and in-laws also fight against her decision to take all the children away with her.

Village Head (BN): They normally face property grabbing from the in-laws. That's when they come to report to us and prevent that from happening by facilitating sharing of property accordingly. Some other in-laws are inquisitive. They ask the widow how the husband died and whether treatment was sought from the hospital. The widow then has to explain how the husband succumbed to the illness. Sometimes the widow also gives some children to the in-laws and remains with the young one due to other circumstances. This is negotiated but not forced. Levirate marriages are not good anymore. Women are refusing now. The world has changed ((*referring to illnesses)).*

Village Head (BS): The most forms of abuse that I have come across are that widows are accused of killing their husbands. During cleansing, the in-laws do it grudgingly. Some in-laws grab property and domesticated animals like cows. Some will give her the cattle but they won't survive long. They just die without even getting sick until they all get finished. She them becomes a poverty stricken widow. Some widows face the challenge of in-laws not helping her with supporting the children. They just leave them to her alone and she struggles to raise them. Some widows

suffer lack of respect from people. People utter derogatory words to her because she now lack respect in the community. Even young children just speak offensive words and even threaten to beat the widow. They even struggle to get food for their children. We normally have to stand for them and ask Save the Children *((an NGO operating in the area))* to help them with food. Levirate marriages are coming to an end. People are afraid of HIV and AIDS, unless if the man himself is willing, but in ward 18, that is not common anymore.

3. Researcher: From who does most widow abuse come from?

District Development officer: Most abuse of widows come from the relatives of the deceased. There could be conflict over property, custody of the children, and where will beasts go.

District Social Welfare Officer: The pain from what I see is a traumatic experience from within the in-laws upon the demise of the spouse of the woman. Once there are always issues to say perhaps you ((*referring to the widow*)) contributed to the death of our son, especially that there is HIV and AIDS. The woman may be blamed to have brought the disease. We have also cases of woman being sent away because they tested positive. Woman are always on the receiving end and when there is death in the family and there is an issue of property, the woman will always be sent away. They say this is not your home. So it is within the family of the in-laws. The community would also be to blame because we expect the community structures such as the Village Heads and the Chiefs to lend some support to those woman. They should be a source of recourse. If those 2 systems are not supportive to the woman, then the woman has no choice but to move away. So it's the in-laws and the community.

District Magistrate: Most of the abuse experienced by widows come from the in-laws. They are the ones giving widows a difficult time upon the death of their husbands.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): So far I cannot tell since I haven't come across a case of widow abuses.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): I will know better when cases come forward.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): The in-laws are the major culprits and has a lot of issues with the widows. These are the ones who have different thoughts about the widows. Even though other community members can have something to say, they do not say it directly to the widows.

Chief Saba (BS): Most of the time, abuse comes from the in-laws of the widow. These are in the forefront of abusing the widows. This especial comes from the paternal in-laws (from the father's side of the deceased). The maternal in-laws normally are not that aggressive.

Village Head (BN): Mostly the in-laws from the husband's side are abuse the widows. People are different, others from the deceased husband's side want to inherit the woman until she refuses herself.

Village Head (BS): Most abuse of the widow comes from the in-laws. They want even to follow her wherever she goes so that she never marries again. If she re-marries they begin to complain why she did it. They begin to trouble her. Too much talk and stress begins. THIS IS THE REALITY IN THIS COMMUNITY ((*Adding emphasis)).* The man who wanted to marry her then also finds it hard to do so and then the cycle of stress and loneliness begins.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO ABUSE OF WIDOWS

4. Researcher: What are the causes of abuse of widows in your service areas?

District Development officer: The first one is property. We know we are in a district where people are poor. We know the wealth of the Tonga people is on cattle. Any man with 30 or more cattle when he dies, the wife undergoes abuse whether the inheritance issue is solved or not conflict will arise definitely…. ((Cellphone rings)). Culture has also a bearing on women abuse. Women have been taught to be submissive and have been socialised that they cannot make decisions… ((Cellphone rings)). That's where most of the abuses are emanating from.

District Social Welfare Officer: Woman in Binga generally marry at an early age which affects their level of education. So this contributes to low literacy levels. That disempowers the woman in terms of information and sexual reproduction health issues. It affects the woman greatly because they are married as young children and

they grow up much disenfranchised to an extent that when it comes to decision-making they do not know anything even on legal matters. You do not know what the constitution says and you do not know what your rights are. Lack of education disempowers are woman in rural Binga. If you have education, then you will know your rights and ways to get recourse. The police are there but women are afraid to report to the police even when the husband is beating them. What more if the husband is late and the family is now ganging up against one woman? Low education levels are quiet detrimental.

District Magistrate: Mainly the contributing factor is the culture here in Binga. Binga is different from the other districts I have worked in before because people adhere to culture and are stubborn to change. The other thing is property disputes and too much myths about witchcraft and some women give in in fear of witchcraft.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): We will be sure when such cases are brought forward to us.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): I will know when I get cases of that nature.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): Mostly the in-laws do not want the widow to get married to someone outside the family of the deceased. They want her to marry within the family. The reason for that is that bride price was already paid and she is having their children. So it's better for her not to go anyway. Inheritance of property also contributes to fights and as parents to the deceased they also want a little share of inheritance. It also happens that they suspect that the widow killed her husband even though they cannot come out clearly and openly. The problem with that is proof. Sometimes we send them to go and cast lots to find out about the truth and most of the times casting lots tells the in-laws that the widows is innocent. It's on a suspicion that she killed her husband. It also happens that after our intervention, disputes start afresh when they go back to their homes especially where there is a lot of property. So we take them back to what he agreed upon in the initial intervention.

Chief Saba (BS): The biggest problem is that whilst the husband is still alive, people (meaning in-laws and daughter in-laws) do not go along. There are pre-existing misunderstandings. Now when the husband dies, it becomes worse. In-laws take advantage of the situation to punish the widow. Some widows are even sent away

because their husband has died so they no longer have space in this community and may be suspected for killing the husband.

Village Head (BN): Sometimes the in-laws demand answers of the death of their relative from the widow. They suspect that she killed her husband or infected him with HIV and AIDS and demand answers on his death which traumatises the widow.

Village Head (BS): Some of the factors I think it's because they still love the widows and jealous about her moving on in her life and they don't want to see her in a new relationship**.** It shows that us the Black people we are jealous of the widows progressing in life. Due misunderstandings, also there may be suspicion that the widow killed the husband and then she must suffer or die as well. They don't even have evidence that she killed her husband, they are just jealous that why is she still alive. She must also die.

On property inheritance, THERE IS A BIG WAR….YES THE WAR IS VERY, VERY BIG! *((adding emphasis)).* But the law says the surviving spouse should inherit whatever is left behind. But there is a lot of NOISE there! There is also custody battles of children in that the in-laws do not want the widow to leave with children because their son had paid pride price (*lobola*). Even if the children is under the age of 18 years, they say they still need that child and they will take care of the child themselves.

LEGAL POLICIES AND LAWS PROTECTING WIDOWS

5. Researcher: What is your view of the legal policies that protect women and widows?

District Development officer: In Zimbabwe we have so many laws nationally and internationally. Some are protecting women, like the Domestic Violence Act, created in 2007. To some extent yes it's protecting though it's biased towards women. We also have the marriage Act, yes also to some extent it is protecting also but we have a problem of implementation by service providers' capacity. The women and the widows do not know their rights. They may have heard about the law. The constitution itself is very clear. But we are saying how many widows have the privilege to see the constitution to read or to see the provisions of the constitution and which gender issues are in the constitution? We have the Gender Policy which is very clear and talks about gender equality and other things. But still as service

providers we do not have the capacity to go around the 25 wards and service them and serve these women as need be. We have the Maintenance Act, the Inheritance laws, they are plenty but now there is the issue of the capacity and implementation. We have 9 members of staff. We are in only 9 wards out of 25 wards. We are short staffed. We are 2 at the district and the 7 operate from the wards. Coverage itself is not enough. We have officers covering 7 wards which is a shortfall and is affecting implementation. Other wards are covered through outreach programmes. Sometimes we get funding from the government or partner organisations who are into gender issues or women issues. We go out and camp there for a week or two days depending on availability of funds. So that's one strategy that we are using. Sometimes we have commemorations like International Women's Day. We go towards like Chunga which do not have officers. Those are platforms where we make awareness about gender and inheritance laws. That is once in a year or in two years. During 16 Days of Activism Against Women and Child abuse, we managed to cover 3 wards out of 25 wards.

District Social Welfare Officer: The policies are there, for example the Wills and Inheritance Act is there, but that is a piece of legislation. Are the people aware of the Act is another thing? On implementations, I feel that there is still a gap that needs to be holistically addressed in order to protect the women. Women are still vulnerable in terms of wealth-building and accumulation. They can play a greater part. About 80% of the woman can play a greater role. Women are there but in rural set ups they are responsible for looking after the homestead, provide food for the family and they are the source of labour. The management of the household is done by the woman.

Whilst pieces of legislation are there that is Wills and Inheritance Act, Guardianship of Minors Act, it's clear on what it says, and the Maintenance Act …but implementation! Whilst we have these guys from Women Affairs whom we think they should be in the forefront, we haven't seen their vibrant programmes in the district. We haven't seen them coming up to defend a certain woman who has been disenfranchised. There are there mainly maybe to spearhead projects such as income generating projects that is for the married women. But now we are saying pieces of legislation are there but implementation is lacking. It could be issues of resources and capacity.

District Magistrate: Protection of the widows from the law is adequate, but there is lack of personnel to enforce the law. For example I am the only magistrate in the entire district. Also resources are not adequate enough to implement the laws.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): The legal practitioners can know better on that one.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): The law is adequately protecting the widows. I think there is enough protection.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): The law protects the widows fully. If there wasn't any law that protects women, widows would lose a lot of property like the houses. This law is also enforced us the Chiefs and we educate our Village Heads when we do ward assembles where all Village Heads attend. The law is very helpful to them even if we both parents of the children die. We re-look at the situation to determine custody of the children which usually goes to the maternal grandmother.

Chief Saba (BS): The law protects the widows very well, but what is there is that the widows themselves make the law look weak and not effective. When the husband dies, widows sometimes suspect that the in-laws come to take my property and then there is no proper talking which fuels the disputes. Inheriting property in now different from the olden days. Nowadays people are not allowed to grab property. The widow herself decides to share the property with in-laws. The law gives her all the powers to make that decision.

Village Head (BN): Law must be strengthened and enforced so that the widows are not subjected to suffering. Yes, the law is there to be enforced and we are doing that, but the government does not pay us for enforcing the law. How do we happily enforce it without getting anything as a reward for the work we are doing? *((Ringing cellphone interrupts)).* The law in terms of protecting the widows, it is good and we use it to intervene where a woman has been widowed and is subjected to abuse.

Village Head (BS): There is need for the law to be specific on care of the widows in the country. That law must be in place. We have for example widows that re-marry and the new husband sometimes maltreats the children she has. He can even tell her that he cannot take care of that child because the child does not belong to him. The law must be in place to prevent that. We can vote for that law. We see that

happening a lot and widows normally re-marry and leaves behind very young children.

6. **Researcher: What can be improved on the laws protecting women and the widows?**

District Development Officer: I think with what is happening now in the country, there is a need for amalgamation or alignment of laws. We have so many laws that we inherited from the old constitution and now we have these new laws. You see one laws says a girl can consent to sex at 16 years and the other law says a girl can get married at 12 years. The constitution says the age of majority is 18 years. So when we get into the field with so many partners and so service providers. This one says 12 years, the other ones says 16 year that one says 17 years (talking of age of consent to sex and marriage), so at the end we are seeing a lot of loopholes in the laws that protect women.

Even on the issue of service providers and the way we interpret and understand the law. Some will call it child abuse when it is the responsibility of that girl to do A, B, C and D and some will call it child labour.

District Social Welfare Officer: For me it will be starting with community sensitisation. We need to deliberately target the community and challenge the stereotypes beliefs that oppress women. We need to empower the woman from the girl child. Let's give education to the girl child and let's prevent as a starting point. If the woman is able to stand on her own, then she is able to appreciate the laws that protect her. As long as the woman is not empowered, she won't appreciate her rights and the laws that protect her. There is need to educate the girls child and also the community leaders to fight these cultural systems that oppress the women. From there now we need to strengthen the policy framework but the policy framework can only work when the woman and the girl child is empowered. If our girls are empowered they become strong women and strong widows and then they are protected by the policy framework. As long as the policy framework are there at the top and the girls are not educated, they remain second class citizens who get primary education and getting married at 13, 14, and 15 years. This creates room for a lot of manipulation.

The other thing is that we need a lot of coordination of services of stakeholders as to who is doing what. Let talk of the police, the victim friendly unit and their community relations system, we have social workers in the department and we have the Ministry of Women Affairs, we have justice. We have this Domestic Violence Act which is trying to safeguard women, but there is no proper coordination of all these activities. This one is doing their own thing, Musasa Project is doing their own thing, and Women and Law in Southern Africa (WILSA) are doing their own thing. There is no coming together of the stakeholder together with the traditional leaders and the women themselves to say how best can we do it and we also sit down with the men….they should come on board so that they understand that once the widow is disempowered, you are affecting the child, you are affecting the whole generation that is to come.

District Magistrate: There is need to improve staffing and resource allocation. For example if there could be introduction of paralegal services more could be done. Community sensitisation and education on legal services and rights is very important and that can improve situations in the community.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): Law makers can know better in terms of what is lacking. Also the community itself can know better as receivers of services.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): Maybe I can't say there need for more awareness campaigns. That's all I can say for now.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): The law that is in place is enough. It just needs people to understand it. If members of parliament as legislatures can also hold meeting to educate people to supplement what Chiefs do it will be very helpful.

Chief Saba (BS): If someone dies, all the people are bereaved. Someone loses the son, another one loses the husband while the other loses the brother. So in that way there is loss to all. Some young widows can get re-married and have other children elsewhere but those who lost the brother or son will never have him back. So talking in such matters becomes difficult. Thinking of how to take care of children and property is an issue. The law itself is very good because it getting hard for people to grab property the way they used to do in the olden days.

Village Head (BN): The law is adequate and protects women and widows except that the government needs to consider paying us.

Village Head (BS): Widows need to be protected in re-marriages to prevent new husbands from further stressing them by separating them from their children. Separating widows from their children is stressful.

HELP OFFERED TO WIDOWS WHO FALL VICTIMS OF ABUSE

7. Researcher: Share with me on the help offered to victims of abuse.

District Development officer: What we do is to provide counseling to them**.** We have been trained to do counseling of widows and victims of abuse. We also refer widows to get assistance from social services offices, from the churches and from the police especially those that have been physically and sexually abused. In other districts in the country, the Ministry has what we call safe shelters where the widows are kept while their cases are being processed and they are away from the perpetrators. Of course in Binga we have gone that far as a district. We help them by sourcing food and even accompany them to get medical especially the physically and sexually abused. We liaise with front officers. Safe shelters are a capital project and a lot of money is needed and a needs a very good budget but if we can get that, I think it will be VERY…VERY, ((*adds emphasis*)), good for the district. As for now, they are kept at the ZRP (Zimbabwe Republic Police) and the accommodation is not very good. They are subjected to a lot of issues. So the issue of resources is very important.

District Social Welfare Officer: We have a wide range of services that we offer to the widows. We help widows process the pensions, if the spouse was employed. Recently we had a case of a woman who had given up on processing the pension funds. The husband had passed on around 2001-2002. I just bumped into this woman in Tinde when I was doing some survey. We were just discussing when she told me that my husband was a civil servant and I could not get the pension. She came here and we made a phone call to the pension office. That pension came out and she is getting it. We do that for civil servants, ex-detainees and war veterans. We also provide them with counseling and psycho-social support. We also link them with various stakeholders be it the police or the courts. We also write probation officer's reports in terms of custody. We help courts come up with better decisions

where custody is contested. We also talk about the children's rights, especially the girl child. An empowered girl child is an empowered widow and is much more resilient in the face of problems these women face.

District Magistrate: We mainly offer mediation and punish perpetrators accordingly. Sometimes the cases come back to us after we had offered mediation with perpetrators defying the law and we punish them accordingly again for undermining the law. We unfortunately not allowed offer advice or educate but we just mediate and also offer security.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): We normally do awareness campaigns to sensitise the community. Should any case come by, we will make referral to the civil courts for intervention. We also have women's network where police women are empowered to help other women in the community who are in need of food and clothes. This is a national network for police women lo lead by example in assisting other women in the community. It is a support network for women in the whole country.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): If any abuse abuses, then the law will take its course.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): Firstly we explain the law to them that the property belongs to the surviving spouse. Even if its land we explain to them that it belongs to the widow.

Chief Saba (BS): We help the widows in everything, depending on the problem they bring forward to us. There are times when we advise the in-laws and the widows to unite and stay united. We look at the welfare of the children so that they should not face difficulties. If there is misunderstanding, children face difficulties. So we try to prevent that from happening. We want them to have freedom to visit either side of the parent: the father's side and the mother's side. We don't want children to get stressed about the loss of their father.

Village Head (BN): During the funeral, we help with food to feed those who attend the funeral service. We call all the people together and ask for contributions in terms of mealie-meal for cooking meals for funeral attendants. We also ask those that are

troubling the widow to stop doing that so that the widow can have peace and forget her stress that she is undergoing. We tell them that it's not proper to do that.

Village Head (BS): We normally welcome with their problems. We sit down as a committee and listen to their problems. We then bring them together for mediation so that they can live harmoniously.

8. **Researcher: In your opinion, what else need to be done to assist widows cope with their situations?**

District Development Officer: I think there has to be a lot of education. When their partners are gone, widows become weak and vulnerable. They need a lot of confidence building and need if there was a lot of income, they need to be trained in income generating projects for themselves and their children. They need education and have to be exposed to the laws that protect women.

District Social Welfare Officer: Yes, if there can be some support groups where other widows can get some information or some women lobby groups in the district. Right now we have Musasa Project based in Harare and we are talking of widows in Binga… we have WILSA is also based in Harare and we don't have community based women support groups. We do not have the community driven support systems for the widows. We need locally based community support systems that can support those widows. The Ministry of Women Affairs should be capacitated to tackle the issues of widows and they should be at the forefront rallying with other ministries behind. The community-based approach to the protection widows is needed. For social work services, I feel that widows are generally under targeted and are deliberately left out in the whole system of the vulnerable groups and yet there are vulnerable groups from social welfare point of view. When we look at programming, it mainly deals with the elderly, the disabled, the children, the orphans and we hardly have a programme that is targeting the widows. We can talk of an orphan whose father has passed away.

We target the orphan and hardly think about the widow. At the back of my mind I will say but this one is a widow but my primary target was an orphan and not the widow. There has never been an effort to look at the widow. They have always been an afterthought. They have never been really put on the spot light to really understand

their issues, their challenges and their plight. It's something that comes out when you are doing other activities.

District Magistrate: There is need for community education and women empowerment. The women are a subordinate population in the district.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BN): This is my opinion because I haven't come across any case. I think there is need for community sensitisation through awareness campaigns.

Community Relations Liaison Officer (BS): There is need for income generating projects for the widows. There is also need to prevent early marriages through awareness campaigns.

Chief Sikalenge (BN): If a woman dies, for example, many of the property is taken by the widower but things like clothes, the in-laws from the deceased wife take them. It's hard to take a deceased woman's clothes for a widower. Where will take the clothes to? It's hard. As for children, a widower find it hard to care for them unless negotiations are done from the maternal side to chip in. widowers find it hard to care for the children, like for example bathing them. Usually from the woman's side no one demands property like in-laws of the woman from the man's side upon his death. Usually they have a rights to get a share of the property of the deceased.

Chief Saba (BS): I just want to add a few things that if someone dies, people should follow their culture. Most widows follow Christianity and they do not cooperative with the in-laws in following the culture. The Pastors are now controlling deaths and funerals. This has become a very strong source of controversy if the in-laws do not believe in that. People should take care on that one. So when things go wrong the in-laws demand payment from the widow because they will say they were undermined before and the Pastor took charge of all the processes. They cannot be gathered for nothing now. What I am saying happened this year (2015) to another widow. The in-laws chased her away after the death of her husband saying that she was not cooperating so she must go now since her husband is dead. They even think that she is the one who killed the husband.

Village Head (BN): I wish to say to people that as neighbours living in the same locality we need to help one another especially the widows so that they can have ways of getting food for their families.

Village Head (BS): I think we have covered everything. I can only emphasis that widows who re-marry and the new husband does not want the children to stay with their mother, should come to us the Village Heads for intervention.

Researcher: *We have now come to the end of the interviews. Thank you very much for the information shared. You are doing wonderful work for our widows in the communities.*