

DEALING WITH TRUAMA WOMEN GO THROUGH DURING WIDOWHOOD RITES IN
GHANA – THE APPROACH OF THE PASTORAL COUNSELOR

BY

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY DEGREE

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE – JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION GRADUATE
STUDIES PROGRAM NEW YORK, NEW YORK

MARCH 2010

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RABBI ADDRESS

ABSTRACT

The issue of widowhood rites has been of great concern for many especially women. Widows, married and single women must not sit back and blame the traditional rulers of the law but accept their own responsibility regarding the acceptance of going through the rites and work together with others to ensure that the painful and unnecessary aspects of the rituals are removed from the general widowhood rite.

In order to deal appropriately with the problem of widowhood rites both men and must be well educated to understand the real significance of the widowhood rituals. The project seeks to find out, if any the trauma women go through during the performance of the rites and what to be done to deal with these traumatic effects.

The study focuses on the Akans of Ghana and the population was from the congregations of the women in the Catholic Church (Queens and Brooklyn Ghanaian Apostolate). The sample was made up of 5 widows, 5 married women who still have their husbands and 5 women who are yet to marry.

The instrument used are the questionnaire and group process using Dr. Irving Yalom's eleven therapeutic factors. The outcome of the group process revealed that the women had gone through some traumatic experiences. The three groups of women came to an agreement that it is fitting to mourn for their deceased husband but that other aspects of the rites which subjects them to inhuman treatment be removed.

From the findings it is recommended that women be allowed to mourn in their own way. It is encouraged that the Church be an advocate and be involved in the life of the women once they lose their husbands to give them all the support they may need.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

My heart is filled with Gratitude to God for the gift of life and good health especially during this period of study. I thank the holy family for their constant care and support. My heart flows with joy and gratitude to my mother who first taught me about God and gave me all the opportunity I need to know him and love him better.

My sincere appreciation goes to my superiors, who gave me the opportunity to come to America to do this program. To the members of staff: Hebrew union college and Post Graduate Mental health thank you so much for the good work done. My gratitude goes to my fellow course mates, for their love and concern for me. May God richly bless you.

To my advisors, Rabbi Richard Address of Hebrew Union College and Douglas Clark Post Graduate Centre I owe you a very big thanks. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, direction and optimistic attitude. To the members of my congregation both in Ghana and America, especially, Sisters Lucy S. Manu, Agnes Agatha Toku and Faustina Quayson for their encouragement, support, advise, and companionship that sustained me all the way. My deepest gratitude goes to Rev. Father John Edusei Poku of Konongo Mampong Diocese whose constant insistence encouraged me to do this program. My Special thank you to the administrative assistant of Hebrew Union College, Cind, for always being there for me. Thank you so much.

I also wish to thank Brother Dennis Wermert S.C. pastoral associate St. Clement Pope Church for all the technical assistance he gave me. Finally I wish to express my gratitude to Rev. Fr. Peter Addai Mensah for his untiring efforts in sending me books and useful materials. I am sincerely grateful to all who assisted me in any way towards the completion of this project. Thank you.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to members of my family who are widows: My mother, my sister and my niece. May God bless them all

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Much has been said and written about the preservation of culture since the second Vatican Council. It is particularly highlighted in *Gaudium ET Spes* (Pastoral constitution on the Church in the modern world). In his visit to Ghana Pope John Paul¹¹ (1981) emphasized this point “Preserve your culture. Let it become enriched through exchange with others but do not let your own culture die. Keep it alive.” For a Ghanaian, culture holds a very important place in one’s life. It is only through culture that one realizes his or her authentic and full humanity. “Cultures,” as the Pope (1981) puts it again “is an expression of man, a confirmation of humanity. Man creates culture and through culture creates himself”. Cultural values binds people together. With the reawakening of interest in the preservation of cultures and customs in the whole of Africa, our attention should also be directed towards the wholesome and authentic elements in our cultures.

While the importance of promoting and preserving one’s culture cannot be underestimated, there are situations where the cultural practices should be challenged, especially if they become a burden for the people themselves. According to Smith (1979), the message of the Good News should bring a change in the values”. Thus in this case, the challenge is to respect the authentic and wholesome aspects of the Akan treatment of widows and at the same time to

allow the message of the gospel to penetrate these practices and where necessary, to transform them. One of the cultural practices of the people is to perform a rite when one's husband died. These rituals are meant to separate them from their marriage, but at times the widow is married again by the other family member and so there is really no separation. From birth to death, which is termed as the rite of passage, there are rituals that are performed during each passage to usher one to the next phase of life. Oduyoye and Kanyoro (1992) confirms this fact by saying that "An individual's path through life is monitored marked and celebrated from even before birth to death and thereafter". These rituals range from thanksgiving, supplication to purification. It is, therefore, seen as important for one to go through this rite when one's husband died. Oduyoye (1992) is of the view that Africans operate with an integrated world view that assigns a major place to religious factors and beliefs. And it is only the African who practices these religious rituals who can make a judgment about their modification or their usefulness. Africans themselves have the ultimate responsibility for evaluating their use. The length of time for the rituals differs from male to female. Widowhood has been a problem and continues to be a problem. During this period the widow cannot even participate in the celebration of the church they most need at this time of their lives. The treatment of widows in this culture leaves much to be desired. Widows are often expected under customary law to go through or undergo lengthy periods of mourning , sometimes up to a year whereas the widower observe mourning for a few days and do not go through any rites at all. In some of the areas widowhood makes daughters vulnerable to very early marriage. This is because widows who are destitute find themselves looking for husbands for their young girls so as to acquire bride

wealth of cattle. According to (Baden et al 1994) Ghana is the only country in the world that has attempted to eliminate degrading and harmful widows' mourning rites by legislation. They argued that even though the code criminalizes the acts of a person who compels a widow to undergo any custom or practice that is cruel, immoral or grossly indecent no one has ever been arrested and brought to court. It will be unheard of for a rural woman who is a widow to contemplate reporting her husband's family. The topic under study sprang from bewilderment at seeing the injustice done to these women. It is appalling to see how the dignity of women was neglected during a most vulnerable period of their lives. For Akure (1992) "Women need to be restored to their rightful God-given place in society". This study was limited to Ashanti, one of the Akans because basically what prevails in Ashanti prevails in other Akan societies with little variations. Moreover personal familiarity, interviews with Ashanti people, widows and my own experience having my own nuclear family members as widows makes the study of widows in this culture most viable.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although a large number of female population in the Ashanti culture are widows, subject like widowhood practices and rites are neglected. If change is to occur in this culture regarding the practices of the rites, then family heads, religious leaders, women groups and widows themselves must have the right attitude, insight and understanding about the problems these rites cause.

In order to bring the Good News to the people of Ashanti, it is necessary to understand and respect the culture itself. Therefore, the question which this

study raises is how widows are cared for in the Akan society with particular reference to the Ashanti's. The position and care of widows can only be understood in the context of rite of passage – birth, puberty/Adulthood, marriage and death. These have great influence upon the rites and the treatment of widows. The study will focus on these questions:

1. What is the significance of widowhood rite in Ghanaian culture?
2. In view of modernity, are widow rites still relevant?
3. What are some of the traumatic experiences that women go through?
4. What can be done to deal with the traumatic effects women go through in performing these rites?

In order to respond to these questions, we need a firm biblical foundation. Thus we shall consider key passages of the Old and New Testament which challenge Christians in their care of widows. This approach can help widows by respecting yet challenging the Ghanaian and Akan custom of widowhood rite with Christian values.

PURPOSE OR SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study would give me an opportunity to have an in-depth knowledge about the ritual. It would also enlighten women who are contemplating marriage, those who are in marriage, the family heads who are the custodians of this customs and other pastoral counselors who also have widows in the congregation to know what to do when a woman loses her husband. It would provide widows and

those who will be widows a religious construct for use in time of mourning and the performance of the widowhood rites. Furthermore, it will make the men folk more aware to have a written document signed allowing or not allowing their spouses to perform these rites. Widows themselves can be empowered to choose to do or not to do the rites when they have fully understood sufficiently the how and why of these rites.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it will broaden the minds of the congregants about the problems widows go through and put in place one that will help them mourn appropriately. The men folk will understand the problems their wives go through after they are gone and help put in place proper mourning rituals if they think it is necessary. It will allow widows to continue the celebration of the Eucharist with the entire community and not after one year. Other parishes with similar characteristics may adapt the result of the study to solve their problems.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Akan

The name is used to cover several ethnic groups in Ghana whose languages may be defined as dialects of one language. The Akans about two-fifths of Ghana's population is divided into two groups – Fante's and Asante's (Ashanti's) form the majority.

Ketubbah

The Ketubbah is a written marriage agreement given by the man to the woman in ancient Israel. This agreement granted the widow protection in the event of her husband's death.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTERS

The project is divided into five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background to the issue for discussion. Here mention is made about the different rituals that people go through during birth, puberty/adulthood, marriage, and death which leads to the widowhood rite. Again in this chapter, the statement of the problem will be emphasized because if change is to be effected then all stake holders, that is, the chiefs and the family heads – the custodians of the cultural values and who are also part of the congregation have to come to a deeper understanding of what the widow go through during this time. When both male and females come to a common understanding and agreement about the rites, an effective and less burdensome ritual can be put in place for mourning the dead husband. In this chapter too, we will look at the purpose of the this study which is, to look for means to proper understand the widow's plight and improve the rite. The study will focus on the questions above.

Chapter two is devoted to review of related literature to the topic. It takes into consideration the religious and clinical principles of the thesis statement which makes the project a valid form of ministry. The religious principles include rites of

passage, and all its different components. The clinical principles include the social and psychological aspects of the widowhood rites as well as its effects. Chapter three reveals the materials and methodology used in this project. My population is made up of widows, women who are in marriage and young ladies who are contemplating marriage. In all, there are 15 respondents, 5 in each group. The activities that helped me were group sessions, personal interview with Ghanaians and Ghanaian- American widows, who had to accompany their dead husbands' remains back home, and prayer service.

Chapter four takes into consideration the analysis of the findings as well as the discussion on the findings – the anticipated and not anticipated results.

Chapter five presents the summary and conclusions. It describes the implications of the project results and clarifies religious and clinical principles as well as contributing to the larger ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE RELIGIOUS AND CLINICAL PRINCIPALS

The review is meant to aid me to identify methods, measures and approaches used by other writers and to obtain information concerning a cultural practice which is called widowhood rite. The review takes into consideration how widows are cared for in the Scriptures and then the Ashanti culture, not forgetting the rites of passage.

RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES

These religious principles are based on the truth that God is concerned about widows. Over and over again, the prophets and other writers spoke of God's concern and compassion for the widow who is under the special care and protection of God. He watches over them (Ps 146:9). Since widows are a typical case of the poor and oppressed, God will not permit the removal of the boundary stone marking the limit of her land. Property limit in Israel were marked by piles of stones which could be removed easily. Yahweh therefore, by keeping the boundaries of the widows intact, protects the widow from losing her property. God does not ignore the widow's supplication as she pours out her complaint and sheds tears before God. (Sir 35:14ff). He will always be the defender of widows (Ps 68:5). Yahweh showed his compassion and justice to the less fortunate widow (1kgs 17:17) by raising her dead son to life.

SCRIPTURE FOUNDATION OF WIDOWS

OLD TESTAMENT

When a woman got married she left her parents and went to live with her husband. She joined his clan and her children became part of his clan. For an example, Rebecca left home, her father and mother and joined her husband Isaac (Gn24:55-59). In marriage there is an abundance of protective legislation in favor of women. According to Eisenberg Sasso (1971), The “Ketubbah” stipulates the obligation of the husband to support his wife and to grant her financial compensation in case of divorce and death.” (p.31). This marriage contract entitles the woman after the death of the husband to be maintained by the heirs of her late husband since this right arises in marriage by virtue of the marriage. From the legal point of view a widow who was married validly and whose husband has died could receive the same maintenance as she was entitled to receive during the husband’s life time since the rights of the widow arose from her marriage. Owing to the patriarchal domination, the widow’s needs to be protected and defended were in some cases neglected. Their rights were abused for they did not receive the necessary means for survival. Since she lacked the security which marriage offers, she was frequently subjected to harsh treatment which the prophets sternly condemned. (Is 1:17; Mal 3:5; Zach 7:10).

The prophets wanted justice done to widows because the lord is a God of justice (Is 30:18) and justice is God’s compassion. The lot of widows was under the best

circumstances, a very hard one, even as it has been at all times amidst all peoples. The prophet Amos saw around him among his own people social injustices of every kind. He saw the oppression of the weak and the exploitation of the poor. (Amos 4: 1). The rich live in luxury at the expense of the poor. They take part in religious ceremonies which they celebrated with great deal of pomp, (Amos 5: 21-24), but all this grandeur and solemnity are declared to be second rate, of minor importance, if not hateful to God, while deeds of kindness, worrying about material need of widows are exactly what the lord demands.(Heschel, 1955).

The prophet Jeremiah's contribution is also noteworthy. For the prophet, to know Yahweh and to love him is to practice righteousness and justice and to stand up for the poor and widows. (Jer 22: 15-17). Vogel (1973, p. 18) believes that the "attitude adopted towards the neighbor is in practice, identified with the relationship one establishes with God, since this attitude is both the sign and the proof of the authenticity of one's love for God".

Isaiah insisted on the same theme of justice as the other prophets. He lamented because the widows were in a pitiable state and their cause never reach those who oppress them. (Is 1: 23). He rebuked Judah to making laws to defraud the rights of the defenseless widows. He affirmed that "those who are disobedient to the basic requirements for God's law are unfit for worship". The prophet was dismayed not with the absence of adequate laws, but with the absence of righteousness. Judges were active in the land, but their judgments were devoid of righteousness. Heschel (1955) agrees with the prophets that justice is not an ancient custom, a human convention, a value, but a transcendent demand, freighted with divine concern. He strongly believes that "it is not only a

relationship between man and man it is an act involving God, a divine need". (p. 198). For this reason Israel was called upon to fulfill this role of being just to those in need as God is the judge of social justice. The same merciful protection bestowed on them as a nation should be extended to the widow. Israel's dynasty will prevail only if they "do not exploit the widow" (Jer 22:3). Israel was not to "infringe on the rights" nor take "widow's clothes in pledge" (DT 24:12-13). When reaping a harvest, they should overlook a sheaf in that field for the widow's use (DT 24:17-21). And "accursed be to anyone who violates the rights of the widow" (DT 27:19). The prophets were like advocates speaking for those who were too weak to plead their own cause. They did not tolerate wrongs done to others. They proclaimed their message to see that justice was done to widows and other oppressed of Israel. The God of compassion who freed the Israelites from their bondage suffered with widows and with all the oppressed who "are exploited and trampled upon" (Fuellenback, 1989, p. 73).

NEW TESTAMENT

The attitude of Christ towards widows confirms the prophets' repeated saying about the compassion which God has for these underprivileged of society. In Mark's gospel, Jesus steps forward as a strong advocate of oppressed widows. He condemns the Scribes and the Pharisees who under pretense of offering long prayers for widows enrich themselves by devouring the property of widows (MK 20:40). Jesus uses the example of the generous widow (MK 12:40-44) to make his point. His choice of a widow as a model reflects his view of how the advent of the kingdom means just recognition of the truly godly and just judgment of those who oppress the poor and disenfranchised (Witherington, 1984). He takes up the

prophetic accusation of the injustice done to widows and directs it in sharper forms against the scribes who refuse to help widows obtain their rights.

Similarly, in Luke's gospel, Jesus condemns the attitude of the scribes (LK 20:46-47). The Scribes and the Pharisees were supposed to use their leadership role in serving the people, "instead they developed a habit of sponging off the hospitality of widows and literally eating them out of house and home" (Karis, 1966, p. 234). We also see the compassion of Jesus towards a widow. He is moved with compassion to restore an only son to a widow. (LK 7:11-15). Given the insignificant role of women in the first century society, Luke has taken over something quite unique from the life of Jesus to make his point clear. Jesus' deep concern over a woman shatters both Jewish custom and all contemporary understanding of womanhood by moving towards her and performing a miracle entirely without the request marked by faith. Not only "are laws of uncleanness in dealing with the dead smashed by Jesus' authority, but also proper attitudes to the place of a woman, especially a widow, are ended by that same authority" (Moloney, 1984, p. 57). In Jesus, God was visiting his people, drawing near to them in their distress.

THE CHURCH AND WIDOWS

THE EARLY CHURCH

The example Christ portrayed was carefully observed by the early Church. (Acts 4:32-35) As the Church grew there were both Hebrew and Hellenistic widows among the disciples. The Christian community openly tried to practice the acts of Deuteronomy in favor of widows. Many of the faithful placed their possessions at the disposal of the congregation (Acts 2:45; 4:32) which were used in looking after

widows. In the letter of James the faithful are reminded of their duty to care for widows (Js 1: 27). Maly (1960) emphasizes that “the sincerely religious man ... helps to relieve the distress of widows ... for the sake of the father” (p. 11). And their services will be pleasing to God if they extend their love to widows. (Js 1:27). All are urged to treat one another equally since the Church is the family of God. Widows because of their special condition are considered at length as those who lack means of support and should be helped financially and psychologically since they are alone in the world (Siebeneck, 1960). Christ’s mission to the world was to reveal the father; a loving, caring and compassionate God. His Actions were geared towards liberating the human person. According to Gallagher (1983) “His mission was to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom by inviting people to intimacy with his father through belief in Him) (p.124). He not only preached but healed, fed and touched people. He freed the broken hearted, raised the dead and healed the sick. He came at the father’s sending (Flannery, 1982). Jesus,

States, (Fuelllenback, 1989, P.47-48) “Instead of conforming to the social stratification of his time ... Jesus broke away from such ... and sought contact with the despised and marginalized of the time”. The “truth that Jesus proclaimed had to do with how persons relate to persons and how our willingness to acknowledge others and treat them with the dignity that is their due leads ... to justice and ... to true freedom” (Roy, 1981, p. 105). This is all what justice is about. It is a right relationship with God and with each other. If justice means bringing order into our relationship then the gospel is a gospel of justice and Jesus as liberator meant us to be free, not only from sin but from all forms of oppression. According to Vanier (1983),” A poor person is one who is not able to cope, one who calls for help” (p.135) and the widow is unable to cope and calls for help.

The Church in our own era has a duty not only to proclaim the message of the kingdom but also to meet the material, psychological, and spiritual needs of her people. Her duty is to liberate the human person caught up in the web of these social systems. She has a duty to proclaim the liberation millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children. (Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: Evangelization in the modern world. #30)

THE LOCAL CHURCH AND THE DIGNITY OF THE WOMAN: WIDOW

The human person in the image of God is endowed with memory intellect and will. It is this creation of humankind in the image and likeness of God that gives the person his or her dignity. This privilege of being the image of God is not restricted to any one individual or to some group; but it is common to every human person. The focus on “male and female” accounts for the basic equality between male and female. This basic idea of equality was made manifest by the first man Adam upon seeing the female, “this one at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”. (Gen 2: 23). “Man and woman, male and female, constitute the basic human community, a community of equality, reciprocity, complementarity and love” (Hill, 1984, p.200). The widow is a special case of a disadvantaged woman. As a woman, she is created in the image of God, and as a companion to man; for God had said it is not good for the man to be alone. (Gen 2: 18). If the human person has dignity because of the image of God, then he or she has a right. It means the widow has a right. Therefore, to prevent her from growing into the fullness for which she was created by giving her harsh treatment is to treat

her not as a person but as an object and this is a violation to her dignity (Higgins, 1951). She does not lose her dignity as a woman because she is widow, neither does she forfeit her rights to be a person because she is a widow.

In 1984 and 2005 the Church in Ashanti had a look and a review at its pastoral situation (First Synod of the Diocese of Kumasi, 1984). Considering when evangelization began in this part of the Ghana (1905) much has been achieved, but she also realized that other areas have not been touched. Among other things discussed at the local synod meeting were Christian life and formation, marriage and family, and pastoral response to sickness and death. Unfortunately no concrete decisions were made about the bereaved though care of the sick and dying were mentioned. It looked as if once a person died the Church finished with the individual and the persons connected with him or her. This attitude contrast with the Christian view of death since the Church remembers their dead during Mass. St Monica told her son Augustine when she was dying “lay this body anywhere ... this only I ask of you that you should remember me at the altar of the Lord wherever you may be”(Augustine, confessions, 1943, p. 191). From this perspective one would have imagined that the Church in general, as she remembers her dead at the lord’s altar would remember and minister to the widow as well. One may think that death is not a reality (Harriot, 1989).

WIDOWS IN ASHANTI CULTURE

It is not possible to understand the situation of widow in this culture with some background into whom the people are, there way of life and some of their beliefs.

The Akans of Ghana

The Akans occupy the southern part of Ghana, stretching from the coast in the south, to the Gonja State in the north and from the Volta in the east to the Ivory Coast border in the west. They number about six million or more and constitute over two-fifth of the total population of the country. The word “Okanni” ordinarily means a nice, refined, well mannered man or woman, a civilized or cultured person (Danquah, 1945). The Akans are well known in West Africa by their matrilineal kingship institutions. The tracing of matrilineal descent is important in almost every aspect of their social life, for example in establishing personal status as royals, or in determining inheritance or property. The Akans living along the coast (Fantis) are fishermen while the Akans living in the interior (Ashanti's) are farmers. This work deals with the Akans living in the interior- the Ashanti's. The cultural links shared by all Akans are too strong to justify a total neglect of the practices of other Akan people when speaking of the Ashanti's.

THE ASHANTI'S OF GHANA

“No history of Ghana can be written without the Ashanti's”, (Tuffour & Donkor, 1969, p.7). This is because throughout their history they have fought and built many fragments of tribal units into a kingdom even before the British came to West Africa with their own system of government. Ashanti's believe in the saying “unity is strength” and they fought hard to achieve it. They are famous for the wars they fought against the British throughout the nineteenth century. They emerged as a powerful national state consisting of a confederation of strong

semi-autonomous chiefdoms grouped round the kingship, whose politico-ritual symbol was the Golden Stool (Fortes, 1950).

The Ashanti's are situated in the central region of the country some one hundred and eighty miles from the coast. After their migration from Lake Bosomtwi their original home, (this is a lake in central Ashanti) Osei Tutu the chief of Kwaman (an Ashanti town) "welded with the active help of Okomfo Anokye of legendary fame, all the independent Ashanti tribal groups together to form the Ashanti nation"(Dickson, 1969 p. 25). The Ashanti's has the " Sika Dua" (Golden Stool) as their symbol.

WIDOWHOOD RITES AS PRACTICED AMONG THE AKANS (ASHANTI'S)

The Ashanti society like all other Akan society is matrilineal. By this we mean the descent is traced through the female. The woman is the vehicle through whom the direct line of the first clan mother, the materfamilies, is kept unbroken throughout the ages. An Ashanti family consist of the father, mother, (s) (in case of polygamous families) and children. In the broader sense, it includes not only the above but also the wives of his sons, his grandchildren, his unmarried brothers and sisters, His mother, sons and daughters of his married sisters. The nuclear family is always operated within the context of this elaborated or extended family. The father has a large responsibility for the maintenance and training of his family as well as the extended family under his care. As a husband, he is an uncle to his sister's children and is expected to support them if need be.

For an Akan or an Ashanti an individual has to pass through series of phases before one reaches his or her final destination. In all these stages of one's life rituals are performed. These stages are called rites of passage.

THE RITES OF PASSAGE

Birth

All children are valued in Ashanti culture but the value of girls is greater because it is in them that the matrilineage puts the hope for its future existence. The boy is incapable of providing successors for his females, but in the girl the lineage has potential males and females. Sarpong (1977) affirms that a man without a sister is haunted by a sense of frustration because in the absence of sister's sons he is hard pressed to get heirs to whom he may bequeath his property or legacy. When a child is born, on the eight day a ritual of separation from the other dimension or world is affected as the baby is introduced to this world and to the whole community and a family name is given to the baby. The name must be taken from a living or deceased family member whose life is worth emulating. When the community has assembled the older member of the family asks the father to give them the name of the child. This is said for everyone present to hear. He will give a history of why the name should be given to the child. The action of the name – giving ceremony, those of the carrying the baby and putting water, salt, and wine into the mouth the mouth are performed by the oldest member of the man's family (Oduyoye, 1992). This brings out the idea of community- a child cannot be named by the mother or anyone without the community being present.

Puberty/Adulthood

After the naming ceremony puberty rites are the next set of rituals of social status which children have to go through in the Ghanaian culture. When these are performed a young person becomes a member of the whole community. Different Akan states perform different puberty rites. The puberty rite is to

prepare the girl into adult society. This preparation happens after the menstruation of a girl. In Ghana only a small section of ethnic group do initiation for boys who reach adulthood. In the Akan culture it is believed that girls be trained properly in good morals to bring up good children. It is therefore little wonder that the initiation of women into adulthood is given more prominence in the Akan society than that of men.

Under the supervision of the queen mother of the town or village in collaboration with some female opinion leaders, young women are secluded from the community and taught the secrets of womanhood. They are also taught how to relate to men properly so that they can maintain a good marriage and their dignity in society. A durbar is held at an open space where these young women are dressed beautifully in the native dress. Amidst drumming and dancing the rituals are carried out in the name of “Oynankopong” (Almighty God) and “Asase Yaa (Mother earth). Men can choose whom they want to marry during such ceremonies.

Marriage

(Haring, 1967, p.313) states that “marriage is an institution and design of God, the creator, in which two human beings indissolubly bound together, are His living instruments and highly honored helpers in the mysterious fashioning of new sharers of His love”. According, to the definition of the Confucian classics, Shu-Ching (1953) stated that “marriage is to make a union between two persons of different families, the object of which is to serve ... and on the other hand the

coming of generation” (p. 270-272). The last part of the definition falls within the Akan/Ashanti ideas about marriage. After a girls ‘public puberty rites ceremony are performed she is ready to marry. Since marriage plays an important part in the communal life of the Ashanti nation, the parents of a daughter must hand over the life of their daughter to a really responsible custodian. Because “marriage is not simply an affair between two individuals who have fallen in love” (Sarpong, 1974, p. 77) but between families daughters do not accept offers of marriage without the consent of their parents. This does not imply that “people were simply dragooned, against their will into marital arrangements which they did not want” (Assimeng, 1981, p.62).

The Akans’ main interest in marrying off a daughter is in the daughter’s duty and capacity to become the channel for ancestors to return to the world through off spring. Akan traditional marriages (marriage before the church blessing) are political alliance between groups instead of between to individuals (Oduyoye, 1992). According to Oduyoye ((1992), “Marriage is simply a transfer of an Akan woman from one suzerain (her maternal uncle, to another, her husband) in order that she might serve the interest of both kin groups” (p. 136). The performance of the marriage ritual lays emphasis on the transfer of the woman from the spiritual power of the father to that of the husband. For the woman who is to be married this will be an important occasion in her life because in the African culture:

Marriage is the one experience without which a person is not considered to be complete, “perfect” and truly a man or woman .It makes a person really “somebody”. It is part of the definition of who a person is according to African view about man. Without marriage a person is only a human being minus (Mbiti, 1975).

This is why in her married life the woman does all she can to keep her marriage going. Marriage for an Ashanti is an intrinsic part of their existence. It is not only for those who can. It is a normal obligation to oneself, the society and the ancestors. Owing to the high value and regard of women in Ashanti culture, time and care is taken before women or daughters are given in marriage.

During the marriage ceremony the family of the man bringing the “Aseda” (thanksgiving offering) drinks. These are used to pour libation for the ancestors and to wish the woman well in the marriage. This “aseda” serves as a seal, a record for all involved that a deed of gift has been made and has been accepted, so that in the future there can be no argument as to whether a transaction has taken place (Oduyoye, 1992). This “aseda” is distributed among the witnesses present at the marriage ceremony. If the married woman incur a debt arising from or in connection with her marriage the husband is liable to pay half of such debt. She has a right to maintenance, accommodation and medical care. “These rights are not extinguished by the death of a husband” (Oppong, 1974).

Death and Burial

The ritual of traditional marriage knows no death. In order to put the relationship established in marriage the two groups involved in the marriage must undertake appropriate rituals. After the process of life, comes, the phenomena that no group of people has an answer for death. Kubler –Ross (1975) asserts that:

Death is not an end but a transition from one state of human existence to another. Yet while we may be willing to accept the ultimate effects of this

transition with equanimity, the process of dying is fraught with many anxieties that cannot be easily resolved.

The Ashanti or Akan knows that death is a transition from one world to the other, to another state of life. It is a separation from things and persons of this world to the world of their ancestors. For this reason care is taken to prepare for their dead. They honor their dead and this can be seen in the way burials are performed. At the death of a member of the family the one whose duty to bury the person is informed. It is usually from the lineage of the deceased. The burial goes with different rites. These rites are intended to assist the deceased in his “after life” and to speed him or her on his/her way to the land of the dead (his destination) (Sarpong, 1974).

The corpse is usually washed and dressed and put on a well decorated bed. Neighbors and well wishers come to keep vigil. As the sign of mourning, the close relatives, particularly widows and children shave their hair (money can be paid to substitute for the shaving) and stripe themselves of ornaments. Relatives wear “kobene” (red cloth) and sympathizers wear “brisie” (black cloth). Before the body is put in the coffin, gifts of money and clothing are given to the deceased person for the journey. (I was an eye witness of this ritual) Libation is poured on the spot the grave is to be dug to invoke the earth goddess, “Aassase Yaa” (her child is coming back home).

The Position of the Widow

The wife who is now a widow has no share in the payment of the funeral expenses of her husband but her relatives must sympathize with the bereaved

family in their loss. The widow is to provide toilette articles and the shroud for the dressing of the husband. Her inability to provide this will cause shame. It is the duty of the children to provide a coffin for their father. The idea behind this is that the father during his life time provided shelter, food and clothing for the children. Now that he is dead, it is their duty to show their appreciation by giving him a shelter which is the coffin. (Most often if the children are grown they take up all the expenses of the deceased father's funeral). It is considered a most disgraceful act on the part of the deceased if his children do not provide the coffin (Chukwukere, 1981). (The Children always provide the coffin and other materials). The widow is not free even after the funeral since the successor of the late husband has a legal right to regard her as his own wife. She has a right to refuse or to accept. If she refuses to marry then her family must return the "aseda" (thanksgiving that was given when she was married) to the husband's family. If there are children born in the marriage the "aseda" is given to them. (Oduyoye, 1992) has this to say "She is indebted for life to the husband's clan and the marriage still endures even after the death of the husband" (p.136). This is because as a widow she continues to render services and be cared for by the husband's relatives.

The widowhood Rite

Widowhood rite is one of the rites of passage because it is to initiate the widow from her married life into the new stage of life she is about to lead. For (Johnson, 1960, p. 116) "widowhood rites are intended to separate the spirit of the deceased husband from the surviving wife in preparation for transfer of the wife

to another member in the affinal family". It is also assumed that a husband's soul will not rest until the widow has completed the elaborate mourning rituals and has been purified. Only then can she re-marry (Oduyoye, 1992). She continued by saying that "these rights are performed to terminate the coital rights of the deceased partner" (p.15). The people believe that the husband's spirit will continue to visit the widow because of the marital bond between them. (Personal interview of some widows in Ashanti culture, done for the purpose of this study) Therefore, a woman who wants the husband's soul to rest and separate from him will go through the rituals.

The ritual observance of a widower after the death of his wife is different from that of a widow after the death of her husband. He is expected to abstain from sexual relations with any woman for fifteen days, but a widow is expected to abstain for one year. In this culture men are thought of as people who can resist evil forces, as such less is required of them as regards the rites when their wife dies. Women on the other hand are considered weak in resisting evil forces therefore they are led through the rites in order to be strengthened.

The Rite Before and During Burial

As soon as the husband dies, the parents of the woman request somebody from the husband's relatives or any older woman to take their daughter through the rites. Libation is then poured by the old woman to invoke the spirit of the deceased to help the wife follow all the rules regarding the rites (Sarpong, 1974). When the body is laid in state the widow sits beside the body until he is buried (Rattery, 1979). There is an intermittent leaving of the body. She smears her face, arms, and legs with "odame" (red clay). Beads are fastened on her right wrist and

ankles. A waist –belt with a key attached is fastened upon her. The key symbolizes that her vagina is locked for a year from the day the husband died. It is believed that if she marries or has sexual relations within that interval the dead husband will come and sleep with her and this will cause her barren. (Eye witness of the writer as she witness the rite of family member)

Wreaths of plants the Ashanti's call "asuani" (*cardio spermum graniflore*), are passed over her shoulder, crossing under the arm. The wreaths she wears signify that her partner in marriage is dead. She is as light as the wreath. It also connotes the idea that the widow has nothing to eat since her male partner is no more. The wreath is removed on the day of burial. The widow does not accompany the body to the cemetery. During this period she is considered unclean and whatever clothes she uses before the burial have to be discarded.

Rite after the burial

One week after the burial, the widow must wash or bath in very cold water early in the morning (if they are not near the river) or must be accompanied by her guardian into the river to wash, and she must wash three times a day. The woman must shave her hair but if for some reason she cannot, it is permitted that she pays certain amount of money in place of the shaving. The money is paid to the relatives of the deceased who would normally be the person doing the shaving. This is termed as "buying one's hair". She is supposed to eat once a day mostly porridge meal, egg and soup in the evening (Sarpong, 1974). At night she sleeps face downwards between two old women. On the last day of the three weeks in which she follows this ritual, she is given a sheep and firewood to prepare food for the deceased husband. She prepares it and is accompanied by some friends to

the cemetery where she leaves the food for the dead husband. (Personal interview with some widows done for the purpose of this study) During this period to the widowhood rites the widow does not attend church until sometimes after six months, when she had discarded the used clothing used before the burial.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RITES

Moral Significance

It is believed that the rite of widowhood is meant to make the widow feel that someone important is missing from her life. It is also believed that any woman who is able to undergo the rite thoroughly without any hindrance is considered the genuine wife who loved the husband during his life time. This is why women continue to go through the tedious rites. During this time she expresses sorrowful feelings and this consists in the rites of shaving her hair, wearing special mourning clothes, fasting and washing with very cold water.

Again there is a belief that the spirit of the man might continue his relationship with her. This is why precaution is taken to see that the widow goes through the rites. The widow breaks a clay pot as a symbol of her separation with her husband and also to bid him farewell and a safe entry into the ancestral world. She feels morally strengthened after a proper widowhood rite is done in honor of her dead husband. Some women even say “I properly buried my husband”

CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

The clinical principles deals with a variety of issues that faces the woman the moment she realizes that she is losing her husband. Widowhood rites are a complex issue. In dealing with this issue I will apply principles that will help me understand the mental agony and pain the grips a woman during this time and what motivates them go through these rights. This may remove their level of attachment, detachment, resistance and defenses.

IMPLICATIONS AND EFFECTS OF THE WIDOWHOOD RITES

Concept of Perception

Perception as a psychological concept does not easily lend itself to a definition. The Oxford learner's dictionary defines perception as the way you notice things especially with the senses or the ability to understand the true nature of something. To buttress this point, (Bartley, 1969) adds that perception is the immediate discriminatory response of the organism to energy – activating sense of organs. The concept of perception is seen by early psychologists, according to Tagiuri and Petrullo, 1958), as an act of perceiving in terms of basic data and sensory experience. The person perceives colors, objects of varying sizes and shapes.

(Wundt, 1909) an early psychologist considers perception as the immediate response of organism to the impingement of energy upon one of its specialized

sense organs e.g. the eyes, ears, tongue, receptors in the nose and the variety of receptors in the skin. He is of the view that one cannot condemn the faith that every perceptual experience however complex can finally be reduced to terms of elementary sensation combined in a particular way. In the same way, (Allport, 1955) in his attempt to define the concept of perception states that perception can be defined as having something to do with awareness of the objects of conditions about us. He goes on to explain that perception is dependent to a larger extent, on the impression these objects make on our senses. It is the way things look to us, or the way they sound, feel, taste or smell.

(Yinger, 1965) also in an attempt to define the concept of perception indicates that perception in its general sense is an experience produced by an outside stimulation of senses. But (Brunner, Goodnow and Austin (1956) give a new dimension to the study of perception. For them perception involves a decision, process, a placement of incoming information into a network of meaningful categories developed largely from prior learning.

Brunner et.al (1956) conclude by saying that perception refers to the way that we understand our environment, an individual's environment and past experiences are important in his understanding and acceptance of a particular concept or event. The success or failure of certain events in the past can affect the individual's perception.

Perceptual Factors that Influence Behavior

Perception being more or less a cognitive process can be influenced by many factors which can in turn affect behavior. (Houston et al (1989) indicate that an individual's past experience can influence his perception and hence his behavior. They contended that limited knowledge can affect one's perception and cause the individual to behave in a particular manner. It can be inferred from the above that if one has, a limited or inadequate information about an event, object or person his perception will be the same trend. A well informed person about the purpose and true significance of the rite will perceive it as appropriate or inappropriate and look for ways of amending it and at the same time keep what is good. Therefore, widows, past, present and sister-in-laws (who may or may not be widows) who have limited knowledge about the rituals accept and force others to accept no matter the consequences. Sister-in-laws who have no "good marriage" (well to do husbands) may add to the sufferings of the widow at the death of their brother, probably out of jealousy.

Social Problems

According to oral tradition, burial ceremony and rituals that go with it have no specific origin; however, our ancestors recognized that the birth of a new born child marked his entry and beginning of life in this world. As a result, a naming ceremony is performed to accept the newly born into his environment (Sarpong, 1974). Similarly upon his death which marks the end of his life on this earth, rites are performed to give him farewell (Opoku Asare, 1982). From this background one understands that the widowhood rite is a means where the widow says her

farewell to her dead husband. If this is true then the rite should be a means of consolation not punishment.

Funerals are normally attended by relatives, friends and well wishers. The presence of many relatives gives the widow the support and encouragement to face the first part of her problems, that is, when the body is laid in state and before the burial. After burial all relatives and friends leave leaving the widow alone to face the loss of the husband as well as the widowhood rituals.

It is difficult to see the real importance of some of the rites the woman goes through: for example the waist belt and the key attached on the widow's waist which is left till it tears by itself; bathing with very cold water in the morning; going to the river three times a day to wash without taken into consideration the distance from the widow's house, health and so on; not doing anything for a year (trading or working). She has no right at this time to touch anything of the husband. She is deprived of privacy as she sleeps between two old women and she sleeps with face downwards. Even without the cumbersome rites, the widow is already filled with agony at the loss of the husband. According to Mbiti (1973), "the death of a partner is not so easily repaired, particularly where the couple shared high marriage ideals". Therefore making widows go through these rites as a means of feeling the loss of their husbands is adding to her already burdened heart. Many widows accept going through this rites because of fear. Fear has been put into them that when these rites are not done the spirit of the dead husband will haunt them and also they are not faithful wives. (Personal interview) To show their loyalty to everyone present they go through the rites. The widow

can perform what custom demands as regards the preparation of the corpse, but certainly other rituals needs to be modified.

Psychological problems

In losing the companionship and security of being a couple, the widow suddenly loses all her confidence. Torrie (no date) states that widowhood bears little relationship to marriage. Even when one has a home to maintain with children who need it, still the life is different. It is not like a single woman's life except in certain practical details. The widow feels empty lonely and lack of consolation. She feels trapped and incapable of anything. Purcell, (1987) asserts that the pain of grief at the death of a loved one is just as much a part of life as the joy of love. It is the price we pay for love, the cost of commitment to someone whom we have loved and lost awhile. The loneliness causes her to have to have a sense of emptiness and even greater loss. For her the future looks like a great useless void, full of pain and senseless living. Spousal bereavement is a very disruptive and painful experience which may affect all aspect of the widowed person's life and is generally considered to be among the most stressful of life events (Zisook et al, 1987). Many a time when the loss that death represents overwhelms us, we wish to die also. We do not only identify with the dead, but we also see death as an escape from the pain of grief and the reality of life without the loved one. (Stott, 1986) gave her own lonely experience in the following passage:

We widows have an inner loneliness which nothing can remove completely.

I don't believe there is any substitute for the pair bond and when death

Severs it the survivor must always be aware of being alone in a way those

Who have remained partner less are not (p. 20).

After all this loneliness, uncertainties, helplessness and emptiness comes another distressing aspect of the widows problems, that of inheritance and succession. An Ashanti or Akan woman who is honored highly because of being able to give birth to children suddenly losses this privilege when she becomes a widow. Under all systems of customary law in Ghana a widow is not a member of her husband's family. And a man according to (Danquah, 1985) "was under no legal obligation to give anything to his wife under his samasiw (will)" (p. 2). He the husband may decide to will his property to other persons other than the widow. Among the matrilineal communities, for which the Akans are a part, the self acquired property of an intestate becomes family property. Family is defined: as the wife does not belong to her husband's family neither does the husband belongs to the wife's family. The result of this fact is that when a man dies the family take the property leaving the widow with nothing. If the deceased husband in his life time desired to make someone else or his wife a beneficiary of his estate and did not do so, that is allow the wife or the person to posses the property while he lived, his death ends his interest in his property not disposed of and goes to his family. If the man dies testate and wills some of his property to his wife the widow does not face any problem of inheritance. Oftentimes there is a constant struggle between the woman and the husband's family over property. It is the widow who suffers. It is only a minority of men who take care to provide for their wives and children in the customary lawful way by making gifts of property to them during their life time or by wills. Now women prefer to work for themselves as an insurance against the future rather than assist their husband to acquire the property.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design of the study, the population, the sample and sampling procedure used in the study, the instrument used in the data collection and the method of collecting data.

Research Design

The researcher tried to describe and analyze the trauma widows go through when undergoing the widowhood rites. The researcher used the descriptive sample survey method. As Gay (1987) puts it, “the descriptive sample survey involve collecting data in order to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the correct status of the subject under study” (p. 187). This descriptive sample survey has been recommended by Babbie (1990) for the purposes of generalizing from a sample to a population so that the inferences can be made about same characteristics, attributes, or behavior of the population.

The Population

The population is made up of 5 widows, 5 married women who are not yet widow but potential widows and 5 women who are not yet married. This number was chosen so the researcher could have a very effective interaction with the participants.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study was made up of 15 participants. Permission was obtained by the researcher (me) from the Pastor to use the gathering area of his Church for the meeting of the group process. A letter was sent to the Ghanaian community about the researcher's study and interested widows, married women and single women were asked to send in their names. Before then the researcher had visited various Ghanaian communities and shared a little bit about the project. Those who met the researcher's qualification were selected and were invited to attend the three sessions of the meeting. The researcher made personal phone calls thanking all those who accepted to be part of the survey. Participants were very eager and some of them were grateful for the researcher's concern about the care of widows in the Ghanaian culture.

Instrument

After reviewing the literature on widows and some of the trauma they go through at the death and after the death of their husbands some major issues were identified. A questionnaire was designed addressing the research question stated in chapter one. The first part of the questionnaire was made up of biological data e.g. age, gender, marital status education, profession, and religious denomination. The second part of the questionnaire was designed to answer questions on the rites and how participants perceive the meaning of the rites. The rest of the questions were to measure participants' perception on remedies for dealing with these traumatic effects – would these rites need to be abolished or modernized. Each session lasted for two hours. Since the three groups of people

are different in their perception each group came for their own session. The researcher wanted each group to be very independent and be able to discuss the issue of the project objectively without being intimidated by another group, and also because their experiences would be different. The first session was devoted to the single women. The ages of the single women were between 25 to 30 years. These are women who have never married but hope to. Their session was done on Sunday August 9th 2009 after the evening service. The second session was for the married women who still have their husbands. The session took place on Sunday September 13th 2009. The third session was for the widows. Their session was on Sunday 4th October 2009. The discussions and the interactions made it possible for us to have a fourth session on Sunday October 18th bringing together the different groups. All sessions were done after the evening service. The first thirty minutes of each session were used for introduction with coffee and doughnuts. Ten minutes was used to explain the questions and the importance of the project. Ten minutes for cool Mozart music. This was to put the participants in a prayerful frame of mind for the session after the coffee and doughnuts. The last session was two and half hours because there was some introduction of the participants since the group was mixed. The procedure was the same. The whole encounter lasted for 4 months. We had rules for the group which each participant tried to obey. The rules are

1. Anything heard in the group stays in the group.
2. Respect what other person say
3. We want to respect everyone's need to be heard
4. We listen to each other when one is speaking
5. We want to explore new ideas and explain our feelings

6. We are willing to let others know us
7. We will not be judgmental, and we will be punctual in the last session.

There were no feelings of uneasiness during the three sessions. All groups were willing and eager to answer the questions. They were very open and answered the questions with sincerity. After the music and the explanation of the purpose of the project, the group was given the questionnaire. There was an open discussion after the collection of the questionnaires. Some of the issues discussed were the relevance of the widowhood rites, the duration of widowhood and treatment of widows during the widowhood period. During the session with the widows most of them recounted their stories in tears. It was during the meeting of the three groups that I felt some tension within the group. All the other groups followed the same procedure. After the discussion a simple healing service was done. Participants were asked to speak to their spouses in the silence of their hearts. Papers were given for participants to write names of those who really hurt them during the widowhood period. They were to liberate those who caused them this pain and then free themselves too. Even though it was a very simple prayer session it turned out to be very powerful and most experiential. Those who were not widows got papers to write names of those who have made their married lives bitter. It was a very powerful moment. This exercise was done in a scanty lit room while this music “yesterday day is gone another day has come do something new in my life” was playing. There was complete silence in which the women became one with the music playing. The used papers were burnt in an atmosphere of prayer. When all was over participants felt that even though the session was over we could meet sometime in the year and do something for widows.

Group Process

I found the group process relevant to this project because it is an interaction of people appreciating each other in the gradual conversation with a facilitator. The use of group process in the project was to allow widows to be aware and reevaluate the decision they made about accepting to perform the rites of widowhood after the death of their husbands, to revisit the emotions bottled up and talk about it. In this group process the widows worked on some of their unfinished issues of the experiences they went through during the death and burial of their husbands. The group process helped and offered the widows, married and single women the opportunity to reconsider their cultural beliefs and practices.

My role in the group process was to help improve the widows' ability to express their feelings, improve their coping, communication, and their decision making skills. With increased self acceptance and self affirmation in the group, the participants had a basis for going beyond their feelings and moving on with their lives.

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR INTERVIEW ON WIDOWHOOD RITES IN GHANA – AKAN

A study is being carried out to investigate on widowhood rites among the Akans of Ghana. This study is to find out your own views about the rites and see what can be done to enrich it and where support can be given to those who go through them. This is for academic purposes only and strict confidentiality is assured. The information you give will help other women to fully understand the meaning and religious significance of these rites.

Please complete the questionnaire by circling the right option or writing a brief statement where necessary.

Thank you for your anticipated co-operation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Name(optional)
2. Marital Status: (a) Single (b) Married (c) widow
3. Age: 20 – 30yrs;

31 -40yrs

41-50yrs

51 – 60yrs

61 – 70yrs

71 and above yrs
4. Education:
(a) Never been to school
(b) Elementary/middle/Junior and Senior high
(c) Training College/University
5. Have you seen/participated in widowhood rites before? Yes () No ()
6. What do you think of them?

(a) Very good (b) Good (c) Not so good
7. Do they mean anything to you?

(a) A lot (b) Not Much (c) Nothing

8. How would you rate them?

(a) Very Good (b) Good (c) Not so good

9. Can you give 3 reasons for your answer to question 8?

(a).....

(b).....

(c).....

10. Do you agree with people who say that widowhood rites have some traumatic effects?

(a) Strongly Agree (b) Agree (c) Disagree (d) Strongly Disagree

11. Would you describe some of the traumatic effects as Psychological, Emotional, Social or Economic?

(a) All of the above (b) Some of the above (c) None of the above

12. Can these effects be so traumatic that there would be the need for referral to a professional Pastoral Counselor or Psychologists? Yes () No ()

13. In view of Modernity are widowhood rites still relevant? Yes () No ()

14. Can you give 2 reasons to your answer in Question 13?

(a)

(b).....

15. Must something be done with the 'perceived' traumatic effects of widowhood rites? Yes () No ()

16. What will you suggest?

- (a) Abolish the cultural practice all together
- (b) Review/modernize the practice
- (c) Offer counseling/education before one goes through it?
- (d) Evangelize the cultural practice with Christianity/gospel values?

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS OR RESULTS

The first part of the questionnaire that is, items 6-13 was to find out the overall ideas participants have about the widowhood rites to give me an idea about how to go about the group discussion and activities. Participants were asked to rate their agreement or disagreement of the question given. They were to determine in some cases whether the rites had some traumatic effects.

Description of Outcome

Group process exist to help people grow emotionally and to solve personal problems. The outcome of every group negative or positive could be measured according to the level of participation and interactions among the members. Often the positive aspect of the group is greater than the negative. In writing chapter four I used Irvin D Yalom's eleven curative factors that he identified as the primary agents of change in his book 'The theory and practice of group psychotherapy' (1995). I noticed that in my interaction with the participants these eleven 'curative factors' manifested itself in the group processes. For more clarity in the project I have explained briefly using the eleven curative factors of the group process which are the primary agent of change. The eleven therapeutic factors stated are:

1. Installation of Hope

2. Universality
3. Imparting Information
4. Altruism
5. The corrective recapitulation of the primary family group
6. Development of the socializing Technique
7. Imitative Behavior
8. Interpersonal Learning
9. Group Cohesiveness
10. Catharsis
11. Existential factors

Installation of Hope

Most of the widows came to this group encounter hoping to share, learn and decrease the pain, shame, isolation the death and the widowhood rites, and death of a husband brings. As a counselor my role was to see that each participant was listening attentively as others expressed how they faced their problems, and then overcame it. The expressions of others instilled hope in others. Two widows expressed their surprised that they did not believe that others had the same problem. One in particular said “I thought I was the only one who had to eat only boiled egg for the whole day, and was made fun of because they felt I had killed my husband spiritually”. Testimonies of this sort helped to motivate others to talk about their pain. A single woman said, “Now I understand the reason some families desire not to marry outside their environment”.

Universality

My experience of running this group showed me that factors affecting widows are universal, despite others not being Akans. The condition of widows from the death of their husband till one year after the death and burial is the same in the entire country. Some women thought that their cases were unique but on hearing other unique cases, they felt a common bond. After the session, there was an enormous relief that came from the recognition that from the women that they have come together, married, single and widows to share common problems with one another.

Providing Information

Based on the premises that factual knowledge changes attitudes, relieves uncertainty and confusion, I provided information and suggestions that will help the widows deal with their bottled up pain and unfinished death issues. The capacity of some of the women to welcome and advice on how to handle some of their problems increased the interest and caring in the group. I discovered that the level of taking advice and information among the group varied. A married woman said her experience with her husband of more than fifteen years of marriage showed that her husband is worst when he is given advice. "What advise can I give to BB, I have accepted him as he is". To provide information to the women the first thing I did was to let them know that confidentiality is very important even as we gather to share our stories of pain and shame. This gave them the confidence and security to share freely among themselves.

Altruism

This is a selfless concern for the welfare of others. In the Akan culture, everyone looks out for the other person. We are all brothers and sisters. I observed that the

women offering each other support, reassurance, suggestions and insights were received more easily than the ones I offered them. B told me "Sister you have spoken well about marriage and the widowhood rite, but you do not marry and have no experience of the death of a husband". I learned that they understood that even though I seem to know about their problem I really do not understand as they would. They were very empathetic and very supportive of each other.

The Corrective Recapitulation of the Primary Family Group

The family of origin's experiences influence married couples or family members' interpersonal relationships. With this in mind I discovered authority/parental figures, deep personal revelation of emotions, hostility among the group members. I tried to work out the old unresolved family issues among the women groups. Some of them have relatives or parents who went through this experience of the rites without asking questions and therefore are bitter. I asked the women to write names of the family members of their husbands. I realized that sister-in-laws' names were either not included or were written and cancelled. When I asked one woman said "they are our sorrows".

Development of Socializing Technique

Yalom asserted that social learning or the development of basic social skills, is a therapeutic factor that occurs in all therapy groups. The women offered feedback to one another about the appropriateness of how they handle their pain. I discovered that this feedback when it came from a single woman was painful for some of the widows to accept. A told B "you do not know anything about death of a loved one or culture" Through the development of social skills, the women

learned to be less judgmental. They also learned the skill to resolve their own conflict.

Imitative Behavior

Yalom believes that groups allow one to try behaviors they witnessed in others. For example children learn by imitation. I discovered from the women an increasing positive feedback especially from the single and married group to the widows. These feedbacks enhanced self esteem and emotional growth. I found out that on the second session all the women dressed elegantly as if they were competing with each other.

Interpersonal Learning

Human beings are interrelated. Interpersonal learning leads to transformation of unwanted pattern and behaviors. After the group some of the women said they were grateful for the empowerment they have learned, the ability to open up and let others in their problems. Some said they have learned that their emotions are real and legitimate. It is up to them to learn how to use them. There were so many emotional situations that the widow could not handle. For example one woman said ever since her husband died she had not been able to relate well with the husband's family. The supportive environment created during the encounter encouraged the women to share more of their feelings. Sharing more openly motivated other widows to offer their own perspective and honest feedback. Finally the outcome was to interact and share more deeply and honestly.

Group Cohesiveness

Every human being wants to be accepted and they need to feel belonged. The first thing I did was to connect myself to the group. Group encounter can be a powerful healing factor as individuals or group of widows replace their feelings of isolation, pain, loneliness and anger with a sense of belonging and acceptance. Cohesive groups allow greater expression of all emotions including hostility towards fellow group members as well as towards the facilitator. I learned in the group that unexpressed hostility leads to resentment and decreased cohesiveness reduces chances of conflict resolution and personal growth. There was a time when an unmarried woman dominated the whole discussion and when this was brought to her attention, she stopped speaking at random. I did my best to contain the conflicts in the group by keeping open the communication within the group. Some good results were:

1. The widows became less afraid to open up
2. They learned they could stand a feedback
3. They realized that everyone's perspective is valid, theirs, married and single women.

Catharsis

Catharsis is a type of learning as opposed to intellectual understanding that can lead to immediate opportunity for members of the group to have a powerful experience. It is emotional ventilation. It helped the women to let out bottled up feelings by crying, shouting and talking about their hurts. A woman who cried out "my family provided everything for my marriage why did death make my husband's family treat me the way they did?" She learned that the group accepted her even with her outburst. Catharsis cannot be imposed on a group.

My group environment provided ample opportunity for members to have these powerful experiences.

Existential Factors

There are certain realities of life which affects the human person. This includes isolation, freedom, meaninglessness and death. Awareness of these facts sometimes causes anxiety which is very natural. Trust and openness that developed among the widows or the participants permitted the exploration of these fundamental issues. The end result was that the widows developed an acceptance of these realities. After our last encounter the women came up with these themes or ideas:

1. How do address or deal with injustice?
2. How do you learn to take more responsibility for ourselves and for the choices we make?
3. How do we handle the issue of loss of our husbands?

These themes have prompted me to reflect about my future ministry. My presence with the women was a key factor in creating this important and useful encounter. During the encounter I discovered that my emotional presence was valued more than my skills and knowledge. Some told me that they will be “support “to others who become widows.

The women I observed concentrated on how they were treated during the rites but not the observance of the rites itself. It seemed to me that, their concern was

to be treated well and allowed to mourn in their own way. No one alluded to the fact that the rites should be abolished.

SURPRISED OUTCOMES NOT ANTICIPATED

Dealing with openness, denial and resistance in the participants really surprised me greatly. The women were able to talk more deeply than answering the questionnaire. I was also surprised by the readiness of the group to discuss with me some of the painful situations they had undergone in their lives. Participant K told me this: I was asked to build a four room house before the burial of husband. My husband's family claimed that my husband stayed in America for a long times and never bothered to put up a home for any member of the family". The women I had interviewed, about this project were very receptive to my proposal.

I did not anticipate a high level of denial on the part of some of the widows regarding the situation they found themselves in. These were especially in areas concerning relationships with the extended family and other men since the period of their widowhood. One was afraid that some of the information may be passed on to other people in and outside their village. It was interesting to note that, some of the other married women did not want to talk too freely about widowhood for fear of becoming widow. Some of the widows are anxious not to give an image of them that could expose self pity. Widowhood experiences are traumatic and are easy to remember, but the widow may be distorted in memory in order to avoid reliving the trauma. One of the widows put this as follows "this is

something I do not want to relieve again. I do not want to talk about it” According to APA dictionary of psychology, denial is a defense mechanism in which unpleasant thoughts, feelings and events are ignored or excluded from conscious awareness. It may take such form as refusal to acknowledge the reality of terminal illness, financial problem, an addiction, or a partner’s infidelity. Denial is an unconscious process that functions to resolve emotional conflicts or reduce anxiety (p. 268). As I discovered from my study of family dynamics, these women were denying the fact that they had gone through such problems. This position freed them from seeing themselves as having any part in their present predicament. My task was to share with them the insight I gained from my research. In the last session of the group process I made them aware that accepting responsibility and facing the crises and working through brings the needed healing.

Resistance was also noticed. Resistance, whether in one person or group refers to the fears that clients or group members feel when they reveal some information about each other. When a client is resistant, I see him or her maybe as fearful and anxious, angry, embarrassed, shameful and helpless. This person may fear that the counselor or the group as a whole will treat him or her in a hurtful manner. One widow left the group when a married woman was sharing her view about widows’ rite and how her own friend has experienced hers. This incident opened my insight on what it means to resist. I asked some of the group why they were afraid of the sharing of others. They told me that

1. They fear they will be let down for feeling a certain way after sharing their feelings.

2. They fear that they will not really be listened to and take their feelings seriously.
3. They fear they will be shamed.

Michael P. Nichols (2004) says Minuchin's solution to the problem of resistance is straight forward. He wins families over by joining and accommodating them. This gives him the leverage to utilize powerful confrontations designed to restructure family interaction. Resistance is seen as a product of the interactions between therapist and family. Change is accomplished by alternatively challenging the family and then rejoining them to repair breaches in the therapeutic relationship (p.384). I practiced Minuchin's solution by being empathetic to the widows in their resistance having heard all that they had to go through from the moment they lose their husbands. I achieved this by non reactions, coercion, getting angry, or feeling intolerant to their resistance during the sharing. These basic skills helped me to interpret the widows' resistance by identifying and discussing unspoken issues or feelings. One most important thing that struck me was that non participant said openly that the rites be abolished completely. It was as if culture was okay but its implementation. I was really surprised by that.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In this chapter I will show the implication of the results of my project, both anticipated and not anticipated, the contribution of this project to its theological and psychological bases, the contribution to ministry in a wider context and the implication of the project to ministry.

Implications of Results Anticipated

My goal was to enumerate some important elements of the Akan culture that help women to live a good married life and also propels them to undergo rituals when their husbands die. I tried to bring in some of the teachings of the church on culture and Sacred Scripture on marriage, family and how Jesus treated widows. I wish to express with Pope Paul VI, in his address to the hierarchy and all people of Africa 1967 that “The African woman is asked today to become ever more vividly aware of her dignity as a woman, of her mission as a mother, of her rights to participate in the social life and the progress of the Africa”. This is what the work has tried to express with particular emphasis to widows. All women, created in the image and likeness of God have dignity and rights to grow into the fullness for which they were created.

For the ordinary Akan of Ghana, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of different families for the purpose of procreation after the necessary rites have been performed. Marriage is deemed as an indispensable factor for the continuation of the family line as such parents fathers and mothers all long for

this for their children. Thus the woman who bears this responsibility is treasured until death when the next rite of passage sets in. In the brief scripture survey we saw that once a woman's husband died she became poor and was mistreated. It was this attitude of the society that provoked the prophets to speak on behalf of widows. The Old Testament affirms that it was not the intention of God to create women as subordinate of man. She was rather to be man's helpmate. The fullness of humanity therefore, was to be found in both sexes (Gen 1:26; 2:18-23) In the New Testament we saw that Jesus was a strong advocate of widows (Luke 20:46-47; Mk 20:40). His openness to widows gave the early Christian the opportunity to accept them in their midst, thus breaking all forms of hostile attitude towards them.

Having examined the care of widow in the Ashanti culture, we saw many areas where sacred scripture offered challenge to their attitude towards widows. The acceptance of the Christian faith by the Ashanti Christians means that they have accepted to follow and live the option of Christ. The Church's teaching on death can encourage widows to have a different attitude towards the death of their spouses if understood properly. This is particularly important for Ashanti widows because of the custom of having a widowhood rite. According to Gordon (1986), "proper mourning is therapeutic. Therefore widows are to be allowed to mourn in the manner that suits their capability as improper mourning leaves a lasting sense of guilt"(p.176). Thus the positive aspect of the Ashanti widowhood rite must be preserved especially those elements which have religious significance. These good elements help the widow in her grieving process. This does not take away the pain of loneliness and emptiness, but it does give her a sense of inner peace which is part of the healing process.

Implications of Results Not Anticipated

I was surprised to see how active the participants responded to the invitation and personal phone calls, calling me back when I left messages, and many others that went on in the process. Their faithfulness and their enthusiasm to come for the sessions surprised me since everyone is very busy. I never thought that my presence alone would afford them a structural forum to share their experiences. I really did not know how the women were going to respond to questions regarding the nature of the rites they go through. Women normally do not talk about it or when they do, they leave other aspect out of it out of shame. Some were very receptive, others resistant especially some widows and some women who still have their husband intact or alive. They felt reluctant or unhealthy to talk about what was going to happen to them when their husbands is not dead yet. I discovered that some of the women because of the difficulties and implication arise from the performance of the rites after the death and the trauma; were not ready to talk about certain issues. I discovered also that for the sake of privacy some could not open up to “anybody” easily even though all these women are from my own faith tradition. One woman K. “sister this is the opportunity I have always wanted. I needed someone to open up to. Someone to talk to about all the inhuman acts I went through in the hands of my husband’s family. They did not like me that much”. Another woman P. also said “No one asks you about these things. All women think it will happen and that is it. K. suddenly exclaimed “I have been angry all these years that I have been cheated because my husband’s family did not give me the opportunity to grieve in my own way”.

An unmarried woman (single lady) said “this has given me an insight of what to anticipate in case I marry and my husband dies”. Another said “maybe I will die before my husband or he has to leave a written statement, signed that I do not go through the rites” With this all the participants burst out laughing. Another elderly widow said “the rites when done as it is, is very beneficial but when family members out of anger and ignorance add unacceptable things to it then it destroys the significance”. Many nodded to what she said. The last thing I never anticipated was the impression these encounters made on the women. They organized themselves and we celebrated communion service. They wanted us to celebrate the Eucharist but since there was no priest and I did not anticipate that this would happen I discussed with them that we do the communion service. It was very much welcomed. During the intercessory prayers, I did something different. Feelings of anger, pain, shame, frustration and worthlessness were voiced out in an atmosphere of prayer and thanksgiving. There were so much crying. Those who have husbands living prayed for long life. Names to be forgiven were written down on papers and put in clay pot with fire to burn. As the smoke of the fire rose to heaven or upwards, there was so much quietness and soft sobbing in the room. After this experience one woman B. said “the smoke that came out and rose to heaven was like my cry reaching God. It was a life giving encounter.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO CLARIFYING AND EXPANDING RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO

In chapter two of this project I used catholic teachings, scriptures and other books written about the subject of widows to expatiate the meaning of the rites of

passage which included birth, puberty rites, marriage, death, burial and the widowhood rituals. I also quoted Pope John Paul 11's message about adhering to good cultural practices and leaving out those that are a burden to the people. The scriptural evidence and the churches' social teaching explained in the project challenges Ashanti Christians and all Akans. The understanding of both the scriptural messages and the message of the Pope is an inescapable requirement of the work of evangelization for the people of Ashanti culture and all Akans living outside their own environment. Death is a necessary end no matter where one lives. Rites which will make a woman feel that she had had the opportunity of mourning her husband adequately be put in place. The church has the responsibility to teach her members to understand the meaning of the ritual and choose which of them will be beneficial to them. Marriage is the completion of both man and woman. In marriage, the personalities of man and woman are merged together. Death which takes away the husband does not change anything. The woman is still part of the extended family.

CLINICAL PRINCIPLES DISCUSSED IN CHAPTER TWO

As I discovered with the participants in the group encounters many factors contribute to the problems women face when their husbands die. People normally do not talk about the trauma. Feelings of shock, numbness, sadness, anger guilt, anxiety or fear may not be considered by those administering these rites. It is forgotten that the stress of grief and grieving can even take a physical toll on the body of the widow. They assume it is not even there. Woman themselves do not talk about how they feel during these period. I talked about people's perception about this widowhood ritual – women feel maybe something

might happen to them if they do not go through them or that society might think they were not truthful to their husbands during their life time. As a result they submit themselves to other things not even included in the rites. The struggle for the deceased man's property if he had some was also one of the things talked about which the widow had to face unless her husband's family did appreciate her and so they would ask her to use the property of the husband. If he the man left a written statement of how his estate should be shared, then the woman will also be covered. Sometimes men make written statement and leave out their wife. When this happens people conclude that the relationship was not very cordial.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PROJECT TO MINISTRY IN A WIDER CONTEXT

According to Oduyeye, (1992), "African rituals have an import that is at once psychological, spiritual, political and social"(p. 9). Every effort should be made to educate the women folk about the meaning of these rituals so that they may not be burdened with them. This project will help to catechize couples about these rituals. For an Akan or Ashanti embracing the Christian religion does not mean breaking with one's family. One always belonged to one's family. The family therefore has great influence on the couples, who are about to marriage and bless the marriage already sealed in the customary way. Before these marriages are blessed the couple young or old undergo preparation in the form of instructions. Through this project my congregation will take this opportunity to exhort the couples about the values of marriage and make them aware of their duties and responsibility as parents and advise and educate them on the important of making wills to ensure the security of the wife and children in the

case of sudden death. This project will educate the Christian husband that he is called upon to develop a new attitude of love, manifesting towards his wife a charity that is both gentle and strong like that which Christ has for the Church. It will also educate chiefs, family members – the custodians of the cultural values who are part of the congregation to have a deeper understanding of what widows go through during this time. When both women and men come to a common understanding and agreement about the rites an effective and less burdensome approach will be taken as regards its implementation. This study will broaden the minds of the congregation so that they will give widows all the support they need. It will also allow the widow to celebrate the Eucharist with the entire Christian community. By the virtue of her baptism the widow shares Christ's life. It Christ is the basis of the life of this widow, the Eucharist which is Christ should be able to give her strength and hope during this period of pain. Bernard Haring (1978) affirms that only the Eucharist in its deepest meaning can give us the answer to our sorrows because our sorrows too can praise the lord who has borne our suffering and has thus given to suffering a new meaning. Other parishes can benefit by adopting or method of dealing with our widows.

I commend and praise the Ghanaian apostolate in the Brooklyn and Queens Diocese for the effort they have made to provide faith formation for these widows and women in general. This work of formation is a sacred responsibility that we must always fulfill with utmost care and dedication. I wish we continue to teach as Jesus did. Elias (2002), said "What Jesus taught was not fully understood until the learners saw him involved in an action, the breaking of the bread. Thus the effectiveness of the teaching of Jesus cannot be disconnected from the deeds of his life. This simplicity and beauty of his life drew many persons to him (p. 15).

To teach as Jesus did means calling widows, men and woman to the state of life in which they can fulfill their baptismal call to holiness.

IMPLICATION FOR FUTURE MINISTRY

The implication of this project for my future ministry is to look for a way to care and support widows in their daily life and to make their lives a happy one both in the American culture and at home in Ghana. As I write this project, I am very happy and grateful that some form of awareness has been made among women who still have their husbands and those who wish to marry. Now widows are aware that they have the power to change what they do not need. They also have a tool of being able to talk about their trauma among themselves. It is my desire to assemble another group after a year, though this time not for project writing, and bring widows together from Brooklyn and Queens's three Ghana apostolate to share thoughts and ideas and bring some closure to the trauma these rites might have caused.

As a religious woman I promised the church to live my baptismal consecration in a more radical way. The consecration gives me a greater commitment to a mission in the world. "Religious by their particular consecration, are necessarily and deeply committed to the mission of Christ. Like, Him they are called for others" (Pope John Paul II, 1983, p. 24). I am therefore, called to stand with and speak for widows in their quest for dignity. As a missionary there may be a time I will leave the United States of America, but like Paul and Barnabas who after their first missionary journey returned to 'Lystra, Iconium and Antioch' (Acts: 14:21-22) wherever I am there will be widows whom I could minister to. There is hope for

the Akans who are widows that they are going to transcend their present difficulties. Wherever I am I will be committed to this plan of support and care for widows until the time comes for to move on. For my future ministry I move ahead full of hope knowing that the vision of the widow's faith can grow and become a reality. The most important ministry towards the widow in their pain, grief and loneliness is that of prayer and presence. The presence I bring them will sustain them, therefore, visits, prayer sessions and safe environment to share will be created for them. The prayer will encourage her to trust in God. It is in prayer that the widow listens to God who speaks to her in the silence of her soul under the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is in prayer that the widow is able to perceive and understand that God can save her from her situation. The grace of prayer will help to erase the natural reaction of anger which death brings on the bereaved. One important thing will be to get in touch with widows in the area which I am stationed and being from the same culture will be able to help them make the right choices during these times. To share the gift of this project with widowed people, means sharing Christ with them. The Black Catholic Bishops of America said this beautifully, "When we share our talents and our possessions with the forgotten ones of this world, we share Christ. This is not the prelude to evangelization it is the essence of evangelization.

Jesus the risen Christ is still with widows meeting them on the pathways of their lives, sharing, strengthening, and nourishing them. In the providence of God the father, the action of the Holy Spirit will rekindle the fire of love in their hearts.

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APPENDIX

LETTER TO SAINT MARGARET MARY CHURCH BRONX

July 29th, 2009

Dear Congregant,

I am doing a Doctor of Ministry Program at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion. My project deals with widowhood rites and its traumatic experiences if any, and I am looking for five married women, five widows and 5 women who are not yet married to meet with me. I will very much appreciate that those who meet the above qualification and are willing to attend two evening sessions (– one session for each group and then all three groups – one session) at the Church gathering area in New York, could give me a call. My phone number is (347) 845-5302. All meetings will be on Sundays after the evening service. There will be coffee and dough nuts.

Single woman August 9th 2009

Married woman September 13th 2009

Widows October 4th 2009

All three groups October 18th 2009

Thank you so much for all your efforts. God bless you.

Sister Patience Quayson (H.H.C.J)

