

Impact of Bereavement Rituals on Psychological Wellbeing of the Bereaved among the Tiv People of Benue State, Nigeria

Shiedu Grace Seember, Elijah Macharia Ndung'u

Department of Counselling Psychology, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Bereavement rituals are deeply ingrained in the cultures globally and are considered important for maintaining the psychological well-being of the bereaved. In Nigeria, they are an integral part of the cultural heritage rooted in social, cultural, and religious practices. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of bereavement rituals on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved among Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted a Descriptive Survey Design; and was conducted in Tiv in Benue State, Nigeria. Target population was Tiv in Benue State. Random sampling was used to select the 397 respondents who were bereaved Tiv People from the target population. Instrument for data collection was questionnaires. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Specifically, mean and standard deviation were used in answering research questions 1 while correlation was used in answering research question 2. The study found that Cultural Bereavement Rituals affect the Psychological Wellbeing of the Tiv People in Benue State positively. It was concluded that bereavement rituals have influence on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved among Tiv people. It was therefore recommended among others that, Traditional rulers should promote the act of cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the people such as wearing of traditional attire, participating in music and dance among others when they lost loved ones; the Church should create a Pastoral Programme to accommodate Tiv indigenous knowledge systems and Psychological Counselling to provide social counselling.

Keywords: Bereavement Rituals, Psychological Wellbeing, Bereaved, the Tiv People, Benue State, Nigeria, Tiv Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Psychological Counselling

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Bereavement is an indelible global human experience that we all have irrespective of race and class, which also needs to be psychosocially diluted to curtail trauma and depression. Bereavement rituals refer to the symbolic activities and practices that individuals and communities engage in to acknowledge, process, and cope with the loss of a loved one. These rituals can provide a sense of meaning, comfort, and connection to the deceased, as well as facilitate emotional expression and social support (Rosenblatt, 2017 & Neimeyer, 2020).

Essentially, bereavement rituals ensue after the death of a person, which may be found important in the management of bereavement. The importance of bereavement rituals may attune to the provision of better supported in grief moments thereby fostering a healthier and more meaningful psychological wellbeing. Castle and Phillips (2003:45) Moore, Jones-Eversley, Tolliver, Wilson and Harmon (2022:191) submitted that bereavement rituals are any activity – sacred, public, or private, repeated, or one-time –that includes symbolic expressions of a combination of emotions, thoughts, and beliefs, with special meaning for those practicing them

Bereavement is a common and universal human experience that involves coping with the loss of a loved one (Burrell & Selman, 2022). It is a complex and emotional process that can have a significant impact on an individual's mental health and wellbeing. In many cultures, bereavement is accompanied by a range of rituals and traditions aimed at honouring the deceased and supporting the bereaved. These bereavement rituals can take various forms, including funeral rites, mourning ceremonies, and other cultural practices; and they are important

aspect of many cultures and belief systems, studied in the context of their potential impact on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved. These rituals provide a structured framework for individuals to navigate the complex and often overwhelming emotions associated with loss (Zhang & Jia, 2022, Moore, Jones-Eversley, Tolliver, Wilson & Harmon, 2022).

Moreover, researchers such as Tang, Xie, Jiao, Xu, Zou, Qian and Wang (2021), Burrell and Selman (2022) have advanced the importance of bereavement rituals submitting that bereavement rituals are deeply ingrained in cultures globally and are considered important for maintaining the psychological well-being of the bereaved. However, the various researches that point out the importance of bereavement rituals do not clearly articulate how the bereavement rituals can be pivotal to impacting on the psychological wellbeing of the Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria.

This study addresses a critical gap in understanding the psychological impact of bereavement rituals within Nigerian and broader African societies. These rituals, deeply rooted in cultural and religious practices, play a significant role in the coping mechanisms of individuals who have experienced loss. While the emotional toll of bereavement is well-documented, there is limited research on how these rituals influence the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved. This knowledge gap is particularly relevant given the diverse cultural landscape in Nigeria, where various ethnic groups have distinct mourning traditions.

This study developed data from original fieldwork to examine the relationship between bereavement rituals and psychological well-being among the Tiv people of central Nigeria. It then engaged the experiences of bereaved Tiv people to assess the effectiveness of using traditional bereavement rituals as therapeutic interventions for individuals experiencing loss, grief, and bereavement in general. While the Tiv culture has a rich history of using rituals and ceremonies to manage bereavement and promote psychological well being, there is limited empirical research exploring the efficacy of these practices in modern therapeutic interventions. This lack of empirical evidence raises questions about the effectiveness and feasibility of integrating traditional Tiv bereavement rituals into contemporary Western therapeutic approaches (Akuse, 2001; Dorgu, 2015; Terwase, 2014). Additionally, cultural and religious differences may pose barriers for non-Tiv therapists attempting to implement these practices in bereavement counselling (Akwa & Sabo, 2016; Gbenda, 2019). Therefore, this study have an in-depth exploration of the cultural and historical significance of Tiv bereavement rituals in managing grief and loss, as well as an investigation into their potential for integration into modern therapeutic interventions. Lastly, there is little to no literature on Tiv people and bereavement counselling except snapshots on the internet. This study was a premier contribution to research literature in this regard.

The objective of the study is to investigate the Impact of Bereavement Rituals on Psychological Wellbeing of the Bereaved among the Tiv People of Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to: Examine the cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria

METHODS

The study adopted a Descriptive Survey Design. This was based on the justification that the study was interested in gathering and analysing people's beliefs, behaviour, opinions and perceptions, which is in agreement with the applicability of survey method. Glasow (2005); Nworgu (2006); Agber, Ugbagir, Mngutyo and Amaakaven (2014:412) and Emaikwu (2015:55) reported that survey design is the type of design that enables the researcher to collect data from a group of people through questionnaire, interview or observation techniques for the purpose of analysis and subsequent interpretation. It is the use of survey where the interest of a study includes description of detailed facts on the beliefs (subjective opinions that indicate what people think), attitudes (subjective opinions that identify what people want), behaviours (objective facts of what people do), and attributes (objective facts that describe what people are).

The target population of the study is the Tiv people in the Benue valley, central Nigeria. The National Population Commission (2009) puts the population of Vandeikya at 234,567. A sample of 397 was therefore, drawn using a sample size table, which Krejcie and Morgan (1970:607) and (Emaikwu, 2015) justify that sample to be drawn from the size of the population. Random sampling was used to select the 397 respondents who were bereaved

Tiv People from the target population of the Tiv in Benue State.

The study used Questionnaires for data collection. The questionnaires were administered through the use of research assistants. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents in the study area and were retrieved from the respondents by the researchers and four (4) trained research assistants. During the administration of the questionnaires, the researchers with their trained research assistants read the questionnaire and interpreted them in Tiv language to respondents who cannot read and write, and the options they selected were ticked for them. The questionnaires were administered and retrieved through personal contact, which Agber, Udu, Fiase and Aniho (2015:219) believe is appropriate for avoiding extraneous effect and traits that might have distorted the independent variable effect on the dependent variables.

The face validity of the questionnaire for this study was determined by three experts comprising one senior lecturers in the Department of Counselling Psychology, from Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria, one senior lecturers in African Traditional Religion – ATR from Benue State University, Makurdi and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education, Faculty of Education from Joseph Sarwuan Tarka Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. Each copy of the instruments, objectives and research questions were submitted to the validates. The experts examined the items for clarity of statements, relevance of content, and suitability of the rating scale adopted. The experts advised that some of the statements in the questionnaire should be restructured, and the corrections to their suggestions were made accordingly.

In order to ensure that the questionnaire is internally consistent and constant, it was trial tested on thirty respondents from Obudu people of Cross River State who were not part of the study population but had similar characteristics with the target population in terms of socio-cultural background like religion and culture. The scores obtained were subjected to statistical data analysis using Cronbach Alpha coefficients. The results obtained from each cluster were as follows: B = 0.700; C = 0.808; and the overall Cronbach Alpha coefficient of all the clusters = 0.926. According to Emaikwu (2015:309) the instrument is therefore, reliable and can be used for the study.

The data for this research were collected using 5-point rating scale instrument and on each of the research questions, data were collected on related items in the instrument. Consequently, the data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation; as well as correlations. Items of the instrument with mean rating scores of 3.50 and above were deemed significant and items with less were not considered significant.

RESULTS

Demographically, data were collected from 397 respondents out of which, 126 representing 31.7% were males while 271 representing 68.3% were females. On the educational qualification of respondents, 42 representing 10.6% had none, 83 representing 20.9% had Primary School, 90 representing 22.7% had Secondary School, 88 representing 22.2% had Diploma, 52 representing 13.1% had Bachelor Degree and 42 representing 10.6% had Postgraduate Degrees. On the age bracket of the respondents, 66 representing 16.6 were between 18 and 25 years, 96 representing 24.2% were between 26 and 35 years, 162 representing 40.6% were between 36 and 65 years and 74 representing 18.6% were 66 years above. Moreover, on the religion of the respondents, 200 representing 50.4% were Christians, 24 representing 6.0% were Muslims, 165 representing 41.6% were Traditionalists and 8 representing 2.0% had other religions. Finally, on the Local Government Area of the respondents, 24 representing 6.0% were from Buruku, 49 representing 12.3% were from Gboko, 34 representing 8.6% were from Guma, 31 representing 7.8% were from Gwer, 14 representing 3.5% were from Gwer West, 25 representing 6.3% were from Katsina Ala, 22 representing 5.5% were from Konshisha, 35 representing 8.8% were from Kwande, 18 representing 4.5% were from Logo, 37 representing 9.3% were from Makurdi, 16 representing 4.0% were from Tarka, 30 representing 7.6% were from Ukum, 17 representing 4.3% were from Ushongo and 45 representing 11.3% were from Vandeikya Local Government Areas of Benue State, Nigeria.

In order to answer the research question 1, *What are the Cultural Bereavement Rituals Practiced by the Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria?* Data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively relating to the cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria. The quantitatively collected data were

analysed and presented in Table 4.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Responses on Cultural Bereavement Rituals Practiced by the Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Wearing or tying of Nyagba Traditional attire during bereavements	397	3.7380	.95974
Nenia Music and dance during bereavement among the Tiv People.	397	3.6826	.96401
Sounding of the Indyer Slit Wooden Drum to herald the death of the diseased	397	3.5743	.82428
Dissemination of obituary or death notice to the Council of Elders, the Traditional Priests and the Clergy	397	3.6247	.95224
Bawling immediately after absolution of the dead rites is performed.	397	3.8917	.99283
Lamentations and wailings during bereavements of loved ones or community members	397	3.6474	.96220
Grand Mean	397	3.6931	.23286
Valid N (listwise)	397		

Table 1 shows the mean rating scores of all the items are above 3.50. Essentially, this means that all the items are the cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the Tiv people in Benue State. The implication is that wearing or tying of *Nyagba* Traditional attire during bereavements, *nenia* Music and dance during bereavement among the Tiv People, sounding of the Indyer Slit Wooden Drum to herald the death of the diseased, dissemination of obituary or death notice to the Council of Elders, the Traditional Priests and the Clergy, bawling immediately after absolution of the dead rites is performed and lamentations and wailings during bereavements of loved ones or community members are the Cultural Bereavement Rituals Practiced by the Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria.

In order to answer the research question 2, *What is the Relationship between Participation in Tiv Bereavement Rituals and the Psychological Wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria?* Data were collected quantitatively and qualitatively relating to the Relationship between Participation in Tiv Bereavement Rituals and the Psychological Wellbeing of the bereaved people in Benue State, Nigeria. The quantitatively collected data were analysed and presented in Table 2; quite as much, the qualitatively collected interviews were also analysed following the quantitative results.

Table 2: Correlations of Responses on Relationship between Participation in Tiv Bereavement Rituals and Psychological Wellbeing of the Bereaved Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria

Correlations					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)
Participation in Tiv Bereavement Rituals	4.6150	.36465	397	.922**	.000
Psychological Wellbeing of the Bereaved Tiv People	4.7636	.31184	397		

From Table 2, it can be seen that the mean of participation in Tiv bereavement rituals is 4.6150 with the Standard Deviation of 0.36465 and that of the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people as 4.7636 with the Standard Deviation of 0.31184. The Pearson correlation is $=.922^{**}$ with sig. (2-tailed) $=.000$ denoted as P. Since P is less than 0.05 significance level, the relationship is statistically significant. This means that the relationship between participation in the Tiv bereavement rituals and the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria is positive; and the implication is that those bereaved Tiv people who have experienced or participated in the bereavement rituals enjoy a good psychological wellbeing than those who do not.

DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of the analysis of the two research questions of the study, the discussion of the finding is as presented below.

Based on the results in Table 1, the study revealed that wearing or tying of *Nyagba* Traditional attire during bereavements, *nenia* Music and dance during bereavement among the Tiv People, sounding of the Indyer Slit Wooden Drum to herald the death of the diseased, dissemination of obituary or death notice to the Council of Elders, the Traditional Priests and the Clergy, bawling immediately after absolution of the dead rites is performed and lamentations and wailings during bereavements of loved ones or community members are the Cultural Bereavement Rituals Practiced by the Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria. This finding is in line with Ushe (2010:126), Ugbagir and Agber (2015:303) who identified some of the bereavement rituals as *nenia* music made from the Ajo Drums, horn and trumpet as well as Indyer drumming or beating; explaining that Indyer was used for announcing the death of a prominent or illustrious son (Shagba Or or Shagba Wan). This is also in line with Adega (2018:118) who also on his part identified other cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the Tiv people as bawling and mourning, announcing of the death, sounding of the Indyer or Ilyu and erecting palm fronds known as Ule and prayers among others.

Indyer is a significant cultural practice among the Tiv people of Nigeria, particularly during burials. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. This is why Ugbagir and Agber (2015), Egwu (2015), Abraham (2017) and Iorzua (2018) noted that Indyer is believed to purify the deceased's spirit and protect it from evil spirits; it is also believed to protect the living from the deceased's spirit, preventing harm or misfortune. Moreover, Indyer is a sign of respect and honor for the deceased, ensuring a safe passage to the afterlife and that the practice of Indyer helps preserve Tiv cultural heritage and traditions.

Nenia music and dance are traditional forms of expression among the Tiv people of Nigeria. It is a type of dirge or lamentation music played during funeral rites and ceremonies to honor the deceased. *Nenia* is performed during funeral rites, characterized by slow and mournful movements, symbolizing grief and respect for the deceased. It pays respects and honor to the deceased; and provide an outlet for mourners to express their grief and emotions (Egwu, 2015 & Iorzua, 2018).

Iorzua (2018) and Agber (2019) reported that disseminating obituary information to the council of elders is crucial in Tiv culture, as informing the council of elders is a traditional practice that shows respect for the deceased and the community; more so, the council of elders plays a significant role in ensuring that proper burial rites are performed, and disseminating obituary information helps facilitate this process and helps promote community involvement in the burial process and fosters a sense of unity.

Based on the results in Table 2, the findings of the study showed that the relationship between participation in the Tiv bereavement rituals and the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria is positive; and the implication is that those bereaved Tiv people who have experienced or participated in the bereavement rituals enjoy a good psychological wellbeing than those who do not. However, based on the information gathered from interviews, the result shows that there is no positive or good Relationship between Participation in Tiv Bereavement Rituals and the Psychological Wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria. This agrees with Tang, Xie, Jiao, Xu, Zou, Qian, and Wang (2021) who asserted that older Chinese immigrants often employed traditional rituals alongside community support to navigate the grieving process. Moreover, their study established that there is a good relationship between the spousal bereavement rituals and the psychological wellbeing of the people.

CONCLUSIONS

The study was carried out to investigate the Impact of Bereavement Rituals on Psychological Wellbeing of the Bereaved among the Tiv People of Benue State, Nigeria; and it was found that Cultural and Religious Bereavement Rituals affect the Psychological Wellbeing of the Tiv People in Benue State, Nigeria positively. More so, based on the results of the analysis, religious bereavement rituals play a vital role in the Tiv people's bereavement process, offering comfort, support, and a sense of community during a difficult time. It was therefore, concluded that bereavement rituals affect the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved Tiv people positively.

Therefore, it was concluded that bereavement rituals have influence on the psychological wellbeing of the bereaved among Tiv people of Benue State, Nigeria by making them feel confident in making choices that are right for them, not letting others dictating how they should feel or behave, have a sense of independence and freedom, feel they can manage the demands of their daily life among others.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Traditional rulers should promote the act of cultural bereavement rituals practiced by the people in Benue State, Nigeria such as wearing of traditional attire, participating in music and dance among others when they lost loved ones.
2. The Church should create a Pastoral Programme to accommodate the Tiv indigenous knowledge systems such as cultural and religious bereavement rituals.
3. Religious leaders should continuously encourage the subordinates in the aspect of religious rituals practiced by the Tiv people in Benue State, Nigeria when they lost the loved ones given that ceremonial objects connected them to the spiritual world in Tiv bereavement rituals among others.
4. Seminars and workshops should be regularly organized by different stakeholders that are interested sympathizing with the bereaved people especially churches, traditional rulers given that active participation in Tiv bereavement rituals make bereaved people feel confident in making choices that are right for them and they have a sense of independence and freedom among others.
5. The Traditional and Religious Sectors should institute Guidance and Psychological Counselling to provide social counselling to the bereaved persons in communities that they are living.
6. Counselling Psychologists should leverage on knowledge scooped from this study to proffer quality counselling to the bereaved persons during their trying moments of grief and their post bereavement experiences.

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