



## Article

# When the Challenges of Widowhood Extend to Childcare: Essential Considerations for Social Work Practice

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**Abstract:** Unless widows recount their painful experiences of caring for their children, their day-to-day lived challenges of childcare may be misunderstood if not totally missed by social workers in practice. This article discusses the widow's painful experiences of caring for their children in Binga District in Zimbabwe and the critical aspects needed for consideration by social workers in practice. A qualitative research approach using a phenomenological research design was adopted to capture the lived struggles of the widows in caring for their children. Using purposive sampling, twenty-four widows participated in the in-depth interviews, with ten widows participating in individual interviews whilst fourteen widows participated in two separate focus group interviews with seven widows in each group. Data were analysed thematically with predetermined and emerging themes critically discussed and compared with existing literature. The findings showed that due to dwindling resource bases, widows are bound to fail to meet the physiological, psychosocial, economic and educational needs of their children. The article recommends deliberate and systematic social work considerations in efforts to intervene and avert the circumstances of the widows that have a negative impact on childcare.

**Keywords:** widows; childcare; challenges; social work practice; Binga District



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## 1. Introduction

The widespread and global phenomenon of widowhood warrants international recognition and aggressive scholarship to create resounding comprehension for proper and deliberate practical interventions. The phenomenon of widowhood cannot be localised to certain geographical settings or racial, ethnic or religious groups as widowhood cuts across all social groupings and stratifications and, as such, has been described as one of the epidemics in the world (Dube 2019).

Statistically, the number of widowed people worldwide is estimated to be over 350 million (Chamie 2021). According to research, roughly 248 million of the 350 million widowed people are women, indicating that there are more widows than widowers in the world (United Nations (UN) Women (2021)). The global number of children of widows stood at 584 million in 2015 (The Loomba Foundation 2015). In Africa, one out of every ten women aged 15 years and up is considered to be widowed (Djuikom and Walle 2018). In Zimbabwe, 9.06% of the widows were between 15 and 49 years of age (Dube 2016). There is a need to understand that the existence of teenage widows in the African context has implications for developmental issues as they themselves still need parental care, adding to the intense strain they experience (Watson 2019).

Research has established that there are many challenges of widowhood that need professional social work intervention in preserving the widow's individual dignity and self-respect as a human being as well as meeting personal needs and the needs for raising children (Cummins et al. 2012; Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2013). Professional social workers have a responsibility and obligation to guarantee that social justice is distributed to marginalised and underprivileged widows and their children (DuBois and Miley 2014).

This paper argues that the pain experienced by widows after failing to meet various pressing needs of their orphaned children deserves more attention and results in dire psychosocial implications for the widows and their children. This is a social problem that social workers, in practice, aim to prevent (Mohinuddin 2017). As a result, there is a need to confront and reform the system so that widows can experience desirable and optimal social functioning. Social work should move away from a status quo service-oriented strategy and toward a change-oriented development approach.

This paper discusses the experiences and struggles of widows in caring for their children after losing their husbands who are generally providers for their families. The growing body of knowledge and research studies have, however, articulated the bereavement, grief and loss experiences of the widows upon the death of their husbands, (Bennett and Soulsby 2012; Dunn 2015; Mburugu 2020; Ndabarushimana and Dushime 2018) and have paid little attention to the lonely experience of caring for their children. This has also been overlooked by social workers in practice and yet a very significant focus area and a practice mandate (DuBois and Miley 2014). Widows from low-resourced communities of the developing world experience worse-off circumstances in caring for their children as they are prone to poverty and oppressive cultural practices and are less likely to solicit deserved professional interventions (Dube 2021). This is a critical condition that this paper views as a gap that should be closed by discussing considerations for social workers in practice in order to ameliorate the struggles experienced by widows in their single-handedly efforts of caring for their children.

The research questions that propelled the study were, firstly, what challenges do widows experience when raising their children in the Binga District? Secondly, what do social workers need to consider during intervention efforts with challenges experienced by widows when caring for their children? These questions emanate from the view that widows in low-resourced communities such as the Binga District are burdened and disregarded in many ways and that professional social workers are obligated and compelled to ensure that social justice is distributed to the marginalised and disenfranchised communities, as well as their orphaned children (DuBois and Miley 2014).

This paper aims to examine the challenges experienced by widows in raising their children and discussing significant considerations for social work practice in low-resourced communities. The specific objectives were to analyse the challenges experienced by widows in raising their children in the Binga District and determine significant considerations for social work practice. From the findings of the study, it was confirmed that widows struggle to raise their children single-handedly since the deaths of their husbands reduce their resource-based drastically. This is coupled with traditional, greedy and oppressive practices such as property and land grabbing. This indicates that there is need for social workers to have deliberate programmes for assisting widows meet the needs of their children as opposed to the current state of affairs in which interventions for the widows' plights are an afterthought.

#### *Conceptual Clarity and Discourses on Widowhood*

This paper discusses the challenging experiences of widows with childcare and what social workers need to consider during the execution of professional interventions. It is critical to explain the salient concepts used in this paper. A widow in this paper refers to "woman whose husband died and who has not married again" (Idialu 2012, p. 6). This paper further elaborates that a widow is a woman who has not married again after her spouse died in a customary or civil marriage.

Many social problems have sufficient literature in social work; yet, widowhood has received little attention. The discourses on widowhood take two central viewpoints. One viewpoint discusses widowhood from the standpoint of human development. To this end, Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2013) note that widowhood frequently occurs in old age, with loneliness and melancholy being prevalent obstacles. The human developmental discourses on widowhood have considered widowhood as a normal human development curve in

which a partner dies at some time in a woman's old age, leaving her widowed as part of the human development path. This contrasts with the occurrence of widowhood in Africa, where many widows are young and face a variety of social issues, including childcare, their personal developmental issues as young people, discrimination and oppression (Dube 2019). This paper argues that the developmental path to understanding widowhood should be further advanced to sufficiently contextualise and understand widowhood occurring at younger ages. This is because the individual problems of young widows are most likely to take different dimensions as opposed to those of older widows.

Another discourse on widowhood stems from a social justice perspective in which widowhood is seen as an injustice, which bemoans viewing widows as second-class citizens after the death of their husbands. This perspective questions why widows are treated differently, especially in oppressive communities, as they are treated as dirty, in need of cleansing and generally excluded from many community and religious engagements. These biases exclude widows from many socioeconomic amenities detrimental to their own personal care and caring and meeting the needs of their children. The argument posits that communities where widows reside are advancing a new social injustice called "widowism", which is a direct offshoot of "sexism". This is because widowers receive better treatment as opposed to widows. Therefore "widowism" is a new social injustice denoting ill-treatment and exclusion of widows from mainstream socioeconomic and community activities. In Nepal, for example, Dube (2016, p. 9) described widows as "physically alive and socially dead" in that they are secluded from many social and economic circles and are barely visible in claiming their rights, including custody of their children.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Using a qualitative research approach and phenomenological research design, the widows' experiences were documented in in-depth accounts of the challenges they experience in caring for their children and what social workers in practice need to consider in assisting the widows to cope (Padgett 2017). This was the strategy and design used to allow widows to express themselves introspectively and provide detailed information about their lived experiences of the challenges surmounting their proper social functioning. In the views of Braun and Clarke (2013), when used effectively, the qualitative technique can provide rich descriptions and intricacies that reflect the widows' real-life experiences, which is in line with the study's goals.

### 2.1. Procedure for Sampling

From the population of widows in the Binga District, the study used a non-probability homogenous purposive sampling technique, in which participants were chosen based on the fact that they experienced challenges in caring for their children after the death of their husbands. This was the eligibility and inclusion criteria used to select widows to participate in the study (Denscombe 2014; Gray 2014; Padgett 2017). The widows who had no children to take care of after the death of their husbands were excluded to participate in the study. The widows were chosen from either Binga North (BN), which is peri-urban, or Binga South (BS), which is largely rural, ensuring that the district's two poles were represented. From a total of 24 widows who participated in the study, ten widows took part in individual in-depth interviews, and 14 widows took part in two independent focus group interviews. This was done to ensure that widows from Binga North and Binga South participated in the study as they resided in two separate geographical locations with different socioeconomic conditions. The widows were selected on a random basis to become either part of the individual interviews or focus group interviews. Using two methods of data collection ensured that data that could be missed by one method could be captured in another data collection method. This was also informed by in-method data triangulation to ensure the trustworthiness of the data (Denscombe 2014).

## 2.2. Data Collection Methods

Data were collected in two phases. In the first phase of the study, data were collected in December 2016 through one-on-one interviews with the widows (Stinger 2014). The second phase of the study comprised focus group interviews with each focus group comprising seven (7) widows in which data were collected in January 2017. The value of focus group interviews in this study is that they allowed the researcher to collect data that would have otherwise been missed during the one-on-one interviews with the widows. In this study, two interview schedules were used. Individual interviews with the widows were directed by one interview schedule while the focus group interviews in the second part of the data gathering procedure were directed by the second interview schedule (Stinger 2014).

Ethics of research, according to Bryanard et al. (2014), entails that the researcher must be aware of what constitutes 'good or wrong' conduct on the side of the researcher, which then serves as criteria for evaluating research conduct. In accordance with research ethics, the researcher obtained ethical permission from the North-West University's Higher Degrees Committee, (Ethics number: NWU-004S91-11S-491), acquired access from the gatekeepers, and obtained informed consent from the widows who were participants in the study. The information gathered during the study was kept confidential and private by the researcher. This was accomplished by utilising pseudonyms instead of the participants' true names. As a result, the names of the participants in this study are not the real names of the participants.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

In this study, categories were created based on themes and emergent issues to organise and interpret the analysed data, much like Braun and Clarke (2013), who claim that data analysis happens after data collection. The six categories that the data analysis followed were familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing the topics, defining and labelling the themes, and finally preparing the study report (Maguire and Delahunt 2017; Braun and Clarke 2013). After listening to each of the twenty-four (24) audio-recorded interviews, the researcher transcribed the conversations verbatim. This was possible as the participants both from the individual interviews and focus group interviews had responded to the interview questions. The participants in the individual interviews used pseudonyms such as "Anna" in the transcripts while those that participated in the focus group interviews were given alphabetical letters such as "Participant A or B". This aided in the identification of source of information in the transcripts and collating information related to specific questions according to the themes of the study. Transcriptions and thematic data analysis were manually performed, with a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet used to record information. The data were then extracted into text. The emergent patterns in the data were then described and compared with existing literature to generate synchronised information for reporting the findings and their implications.

## 3. Findings

Personal information about the participants was sought to begin the interviews in order to develop a biographical portrait of the 24 widows who took part in individual and focus group interviews. To safeguard the participants' identities as an ethical requirement, pseudonyms were utilised. Important emergent themes such as age, number and gender of children, size of the household, level of education, and mode of sustenance were gathered and discussed from the predetermined themes of participants' personal information.

The participants' ages ranged from 20 to 68 years old at the time of the study. The frequency table below indicates the ages of the widows who participated in the study.

In Table 1, two participants were between the ages of 20 and 29, one was between the ages of 30 and 39, and six were between the ages of 40 and 49. Furthermore, ten participants were between 50 and 59. Table 1 summarises the ages of the participants in the study, with the total number of participants being twenty-four (24). When their husbands died,

the widows were between the ages of 18 and 50. This is the age range in which women look back on their lives and assess their accomplishments and happiness (Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman 2013); unfortunately for the widows, they mainly experience unhappiness and lack of accomplishments as they struggle to raise their children. As a result, there were young widows in the Binga District who were exposed to many psychosocial issues. The issues were associated to widowhood and inadequate resources to meet the daily demands of child care. The widows' district of domicile is poor and lacks the necessary resources and programmed intervention measures.

**Table 1.** Ages of widows who participated in the study.

Age Range	Number of Widows
20–29	2
30–39	1
40–49	6
50–59	10
60–69	2
Age unknown	3
Total number of widows	24

The widows who took part in the study had dependents in their care. Many of the dependents, especially among young widows, were their own children who were between the ages of one year and seven years old. Older widows recounted the struggles of caring for their children when they were still young. This suggested that, in addition to caring for and providing for their own children, widows were also responsible for caring and providing for other dependents due to the district's frequent extended family arrangements, thus stretching their meagre resources to provide for their families. Because their children were mostly girls, they were culturally barred from inheriting property when their spouses died, which further reduced the basic resource needed to care for their families (Nkomo 2014).

The participants in the study had little to no formal education, according to the findings. Their educational background ranged from those who had never attended school to the most learned widow, who had only managed to attend school up to form two. In other countries such as South Africa, this is equivalent to Grade 9 in their education system. This compounded their incapacity to comprehend and negotiate their rights after the death of their husbands. It also made it more difficult for them to find formal jobs and even engage in commercial farming. This is directly against the provisions of article 10 of *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)* (1979), which mandates equal rights for women in education. It means that women in Binga have not fully benefited from the calls of this international instrument. These findings in the Binga District are a litmus test for lower milestones in light of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number four, which aspires for educational equality among people of all communities (*Bureau for Rights-Based Development (BRD)* (2022)). These findings are similar to those of *Van de Walle* (2011), who found that 88% of women in Mali were illiterate, denoting the need to further aggravate calls for equal education for citizens of African communities.

It also emerged in the study that a lack of formal education and the geographical location, which is predominantly rural, influenced the mode of sustenance for the widows. Widows survived through subsistence farming, which is a major mode of survival for many women in Zimbabwe (*Human Rights Watch* 2021). The widows grew maize, sorghum and millet as their main crops. Subsistence farmers have been defined as “those who grow what they eat” (*Dube* 2016). Subsistence farming, suggests that widows in the district grew crops for food. In other words, the widows practice “hand-to-mouth farming”, which means they have nothing to sell and technically reduces them to the poverty-stricken populations in the district. This demonstrates how lower socioeconomic situations affect widows.

### 3.1. Widows and Childcare Challenges

The study sought to figure out the child care challenges experienced by widows in the Binga District. In this section of the study, emergent themes are classified as physiological, psychosocial, economic and educational needs as expressed by the widows who remained in charge of taking care of their children after the death of their husbands. The emergent themes were compared to the existing literature to create a critical analysis and find intervention gaps.

#### 3.1.1. Physiological Needs of Children

Widows were asked to recount their experiences in meeting the physiological needs of their children after the death of their husbands. Astonishingly, all the twenty-four (24) widows who participated in the study revealed that they failed to meet these needs. Widows articulated their difficulties in meeting the physiological needs of their children such as food, shelter and medication for some of the children that had chronic illness. Some of the widows had this to say during the interviews:

*“I actually started borrowing some money from other people to buy food for my children because they could die from hunger”.* (Julia (BN))

*“Some of my children are not well. I needed support for taking care of the health of my children, and food for feeding my children”.* (Participant B, BN))

*“What was troubling me was that I felt so lonely and now who will help me with money to take my child to the hospital?”.* (Anna (BN))

*“I used to have painful thoughts after his death. I used to think about who would help me fend for my children or renovate these huts”.* (Esnathi (BS))

Meeting physiological needs is an integral part of childcare for the widows, and the inability to meet these needs places them under immense stress and anxiety. This finding is not unique to the widows in the Binga District in Zimbabwe. Similarly, in a study in Kottathara, in the rural district of Wayanad in Kerala, India, [Mohindra et al. \(2012\)](#) found that widows struggled to meet the physiological needs of their children, which included food and medical expenses for the ill children. This implies the need for professional assistance since the physiological needs of children are an integral part of healthy living for both the widows and their children. This implies that social workers need to intervene and mobilise resources to assist widows in meeting the physiological needs of the widows' children. [Mogoatlhe and Gralki \(2019\)](#) assert that failure to meet physiological needs of the children has resulted in hunger for many children in the African continent, which is the cause of death for many children. The authors bemoaned that this is against the provisions of Goal 2 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and a serious drawback to achieving this goal.

#### 3.1.2. Psychosocial Needs of Children

Psychosocial needs are an integral part of children's needs. Moreso, psychosocial support from the family of the deceased husband seems to be critical for widows in order to complete the needed support and care for the children. For some widows, (sixteen of the twenty-four), the study found that families of the deceased husband never fulfilled that role as part of the psychosocial support network for the widows. As a result, the widows felt let down and lonely in caring for the children and recounted this:

*“I have difficulties in supporting my young child since my late husband did not get along with his relatives. They could not even show love and provide social support for the children. Sometimes I even try to take the children to the relatives of my husband, they refuse to support them”.*(Choolwe (BN))

In other instances, the families of the deceased husbands were part of the tormentors for the orphans as they seized the property intended to provide needed resources. Seizing property is traumatic to children and opposed to meeting their psychosocial needs. The

results are that both the widow and her children feel more vulnerable and alienated in the supposedly reliable psychosocial support network. This is what two widows recounted during the interviews:

*“When I met my husband’s family after his death, nothing was said about what the children could get. They shared everything the way they wanted and the children got nothing. Even today, they have totally forgotten about the children”.* (Mary (BS))

*“A-a-a-a! Immediately after his death and whilst we were still mourning his death with my children, they (relatives of the husband) demanded household items that we had BEFORE HE WAS EVEN BURIED! After his burial on Sunday, on Tuesday again they wanted the cow which I bought myself from the money I got from growing cotton. This was after demanding household items before his burial. We were traumatised with my children. Who then will provide psychosocial support for my children?”.* (Otilia (BN))

The importance of psychosocial support cannot be overemphasised. Research has established that widows and their children need psychosocial support as a buffer for stressful events and an adaptation mechanism and compensation for the loss (Ndabarushimana and Dushime 2018). If psychosocial support is not provided by family members of the deceased husband, there is evidence that widows and their children experience a certain level of psychological fear and uncertainty (Mohindra et al. 2012).

### 3.1.3. Economic Needs of Children

The economic needs of children are arguably the cardinal and pinnacle of all the challenges experienced by widows. The African family setup has it that men are the providers in the family and their death has seen the dwindling of economic and financial resources for the women and their children. This also has been exacerbated by cultural practices such as property grabbing and evictions from property, businesses and land, which are mainly economic resources (Korang-Okrah et al. 2019). Property grabbing and evictions are widespread in the African context as property ownership is patrilineal, therefore, technically meaning that the widow does not have the power to own property after the death of her husband, resulting in children suffering (Korang-Okrah et al. 2019; Sulumba-Kapuma 2018). Loss of economic and financial resources has been found to be an impediment to accessing services and a serious obstacle for meeting various needs of the widows’ children in the study. Many of these widows in African communities are young and do not pass the means test for certain grant aid systems available. The widows had this to say during the interviews:

*“When my husband died, there was no money left. His relatives did nothing to help me. The children needed food, clothing and school fees”.* (Nomia (BN))

*“I wanted and today still need financial support. Even if a child gets sick I cannot have means to take the child to the hospital”.* (Choolwe (BN))

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

*“When my husband died, they (relatives of the husband) grabbed ALL the property and ordered me to leave the home. This caused a big problem because I am an orphan, my parents had died a long time ago. I had nowhere to go with my very young children”.* (Sophia, (BS))

Inability to meet economic resources needed to care for the widows’ children has various implications for children and the widows. For children, it has been found to be a major contributor to malnutrition, school drop outs and health care issues. If this scenario is not prevented, it can contribute to the intergenerational poverty in families. Dube (2016) discovered that widows’ lives are significantly impacted by a lack of financial resources, which exacerbates depression symptoms. Financial troubles among widows significantly enhanced their “psychological and emotional stress,” (Dube 2016). Widows, on the other

hand, require a steady stream of income in order to alleviate the effects of financial stress. This has led to the mushrooming of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to patch the gap of care for the needy children in many African communities, (Dereje and Jibat 2015), of which much of the interventions have been criticised for being unsustainable and failing to close the poverty gap (Mlambo et al. 2021; Mutale 2016).

#### 3.1.4. Educational Needs of Children

Children's education is a global requirement and among the critical needs for them. The United Nations Sustainable Goals, (Goal number 4), articulate that there is need to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" (United Nations 2021). For the widows' children, this has not been the case. On the contrary, widows struggled to meet the educational needs of their children. Absurdly, all the twenty-four (24) widows that participated in the study struggled to meet the educational needs of their children. Some widows articulated this in the interviews:

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

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

*" . . . Also for school needs of my children".* (Participant B, BN))

There is growing evidence that children from disadvantaged family backgrounds, especially in developing countries, are prone to various circumstances leading to lack of education. The Allison Academy (2021) found that among other factors, lack of money, unfavourable geographical location, prejudice, inadequate condition and lack of understanding of the importance of education are prominent factors leading to children's failure to acquire necessary education. These factors are present and often witnessed among the widows' children in low-resourced communities such as Binga in Zimbabwe. Even though it is not by will that widows fail to meet the educational needs of their children, research has established various consequences for failing to educate children, especially for the children themselves. Adalaba (2020) found that children who fail to access education have higher risks of being trapped in poverty, have difficulty in raising their own children, are prone to various forms of exploitation and have higher chances of being unemployed when they seek employment. This implies that there are high chances of replicating a similar scenario with their own children. This recycles poverty, which then is passed from generation to generation.

## 4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study were quite incisive, with insights into pertinent issues that are normally ignored in various discourses. Whilst many discourses have shed light on the experiences and suffering of widows, the question of how widows meet the various needs of their children has generally generated less research appetite. The discussion of the findings centres on the widows' childcare challenges and essential considerations for social work practice. From these two discussion points, relevant conclusions were drawn.

### *Widows' Childcare Challenges and Essential Considerations for Social Work Practice*

The findings of the study show that the widows who participated in the study had a huge age gap between the youngest widow aged twenty and the oldest widow being sixty-eight years old at the time of the study. This age gap signifies that widowhood cuts across all ages (Dube 2016). This is despite the fact that widowhood was associated with older women in the earlier days as compared to the new trends, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where young widows are a growing phenomenon (Van de Walle 2011). Even though the ages of the widows may vary, there are typical struggles across all ages of widows, which range from lack of support, prejudices, economic insecurity and reduced social statuses

(United Nations (UN) Women (2021)). When older widows recounted their experiences, there were similarities with younger widows on the experiences of caring for their children, signifying that the struggles of widowhood are intergenerational.

In lieu of the research findings, widows in Binga District have struggled to meet the physiological, psychological, economic and educational needs of their children. These needs form integral parts of a holistic approach to the needs of children for survival.

Allowing children to reach their full developmental potential is both a human right and a necessary condition for long-term growth. Research in child development has proved the importance of meeting the necessary needs for optimal child development, which many of the widows' children lack in low-resourced communities. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2020) has argued that providing necessary developmental conditions for children facilitates their health, nourishment, security, and safety, as well as responsiveness. Providing needed care and providing opportunities for their children are the everlasting and stressful thoughts for the widows (Dube 2016).

The widows' children have unfortunately befallen short of the needs they require for optimal development. Apart from the loss of their fathers and torment of their mothers after the death of their fathers, their own development is hijacked and marred with practical involuntary circumstantial interruptions.

In this regard, social work interventions should be deliberate, embrace and facilitate compassionate interactions and relationships in well-planned programmes that promote health and appropriate nutrition, shield widows' children from risks, and provide optimal conditions for the children's development. Social workers' planned interventions should also offer guidance on which children and widows can access services they are rightfully entitled to have. This is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2021).

Furthermore, it is suggested that social work intervention adopt a holistic approach to the widows' needs in collaboration with other stakeholders to mobilise needed resources and interventional networks needed by the widows and their children. Many of the low-resourced communities require a multi-sectoral approach to accrue enough resources for sound interventions. These interventions can also be carried out at the micro level and mezzo levels (Dube 2021; Shulman 2012). This will ensure that all aspects of both the widow and their children's needs, including socioeconomic, spiritual, psychosocial, and legal needs, are met, with a focus on a viable referral system that connects widows to well-trained interventionists who are equipped with contemporary human rights paradigms and practices to match current and global intervention trends.

## 5. Limitations of the Study

The study was sensitive as it sought to investigate the painful life experiences of the widows. This was also evident in the interview processes where there were times when the widows experienced deep pain in responding to the questions. However, before the interviews began, the participants were told that they were free to not respond to some of the questions they felt uncomfortable answering.

The age differences among the widows were considerably huge. The experiences of widowhood could be different depending on the age of the widow. Older widows may experience widowhood differently as compared to younger widows. Some of the older widows' children were grown up during the study, and the widows had to recount older experiences of caring for their children. The older widows' emotional experiences were witnessed in the study as they relived their older experiences of caring for their children when they were still young. This was rich information as their experiences and those of the younger widows were similar, denoting that social workers need to intervene to break the integrational plight of the widows.

## 6. Conclusions

It can be concluded from the findings of the study that many of the widows struggle to meet the various needs of their children after the death of their husbands. The widows' inability to meet the needs of their orphaned children has various untold consequences for their general welfare as these unmet needs form an arsenal of critical needs for proper child development.

In lieu of their explanations, it can be concluded that widows fail to meet physiological needs such as food and health related needs. The widows also alluded to struggling with meeting the psychosocial needs of their children, denoting that social workers need to assist the widows in meeting these particular needs as this can have negative implications for interactions with other people in their children's social circles. Further, widows fail to meet the economic needs of their children, which then affects other needs such as education, as these have financial implications and would require a sound economic resource base.

It can further be concluded that failure to meet their children's needs has double the impact. The first impact is experienced by the widows themselves as they struggle to meet the needs of their children. This is traumatic for the widows and creates psychological problems such as anxiety, stress and depression. The other impact is experienced by the children whose needs cannot be adequately met. The children's developmental needs are affected, therefore, limiting optimal development for children. This has various implications such as lack of nourishment, health, a sense of insecurity and lack of intellectual development. This hijacks and thwarts necessary developmental milestones for the children and results in poorly developed future adults.

Further, this paper concludes that interventions in the lives of widows and their children by social workers are indispensable. A holistic social work approach to interventions should be adopted to ensure that all aspects of the widows' lives and their children are carefully analysed and proper interventions are planned and executed to meet the needs of the widows and their orphaned children.

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**Informed Consent Statement:** Consent to participate in the study was obtained from the widows who were part of the study prior to conducting the study.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

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