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An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa



Faculty of Humanities

School of Human and Community Development

Department of Psychology

A Research project submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA by coursework and Research Report in the field of Psychology in the faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

15 March 2023

by

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SENATE PLAGIARISM POLICY

Declaration by Students

I**,** *KEDEBONI PRECIOUS MAMOSADI* (student number: *2175763*) am a student registered for **MASTER OF ART BY COURSEWORK AND RESEARCH REPORT (PSYCHOLOGY)** in the year 2021. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at this or any other university.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
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Abstract

People from diverse cultures have unique ways of conceptualising and responding to death through varying degrees of mourning and grieving processes. This study is centred on exploring the traditional mourning rituals of African indigenous people with reference to the people of Bethal, in the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. The study adopted a qualitative research methodology, with critical phenomenology as a research approach. The participants were the residents of Bethal, a small, under resourced township in the Govan Mbeki District, Mpumalanga Province. Eight in-depth, semi structured, face to face interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed verbatim; and analysed through Thematic Analysis. Sampling procedure followed a purposive strategy while this cohort of people were selected according to their willingness to participate, their availability and being permanent residents of this area. The study found that mourning can be an individualised and collective experience. The study further describes how African people inherently ascribe to certain traditional mourning rituals in order to deal with the loss of a loved one. Findings contribute to existing research on African ways of grieving by highlighting grief and mourning rituals through an African lens embedded in the subjective narratives of the participants. Results from this study further demonstrate how Covid19 restrictions have affected these traditional mourning rituals. Finally, recommendations are provided on how African people can realign their mental healthcare, while preserving their cultural mourning rituals.

KEYWORDS: *Eurocentric paradigm, Afrocentricity, grief-work, mourning rituals, culture, psychosocial aspects*

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Chapter 1: Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Death and grief are said to be a universal life experience (Nwoye, 2013). Thus, everyone experiences death or grief at some point in their lives. According to Howarth (2011), one of the most distressing emotional experience a person would face is the loss of a loved one. Although this is an unavoidable phenomenon, Howarth (2011) suggested that there are different ways in which it is conceptualised. For example, the authors Cavanaugh and Blanchard- Fields (2019) postulated that every culture has its own unique way of describing death. Therefore, the concept of death bears different meanings for different people. Also, Cavanaugh and Blanchard- Fields (2019) define death as the point where a person is no longer alive. These authors view death as a transitional process from being alive to being dead. Baloyi (2014) defined death as a situation where the soul separates from the body. Consistent with this view, Adeyemo (1979) argued that when someone passes on, their spirit still lives, but outside their body. Thus, the person moves from being mortal into an immortal being (Tjibeba, 1997).

As common as death is, its meaning varies across cultures, and people respond to it with varying degrees of mourning and grieving processes (Makhubu, 1988). Howarth (2011) added that in different cultural beliefs, bereavement and grief are expressed through the process of mourning. This may include a number of cognitive, emotional, psychological and behavioural reactions to the loss (Brown & Goodman, 2005). In order to deal with grief, one study suggests that most African communities (particularly the black population) rely on indigenous healing practices such as performing different mourning rituals (Makgahlela, 2016).

There are different definitions and understandings of mourning. For the purposes of this study, Asuquo's (2011) definition of mourning has been adopted, and it refers to certain activities that a bereaved family and community will most likely engage in as a way of dealing with any type of personal loss for example, washing the body of the deceased the day before the funeral as a sign of respect, the slaughtering of specific animals such as a cow or a goat and allowing only the women in the family to sit on the matrass in honour of the deceased. Additionally, mourning rituals are regarded as those practices that arise as a result of mourning (Asuquo, 2011). These rituals often go hand in hand with the grieving process and play a very important role in how people deal with losing a person they love. Grief, according to

Makgahlela (2016), is defined as the process where grieving people connect with each other and can express their bereavement with members of a community with which they can identify.

This study has explored the concepts of grief and mourning, and how this commonly experienced phenomenon distinctively relates to the overall grieving processes of African people. Research literature exploring the concept of mourning within African communities as well as an emergence of subsequent mourning rituals which can accompany this phenomenon, was considered. It is postulated that these grief and mourning rituals have a significant effect within both the personal and social aspects of human functionality. This meant that this phenomenon needed to be examined not just from an individualistic point of view, but holistically from a psychosocial sphere as well.

1.2 Aim

The main aim of the study is to unearth understanding of the experiences of the people in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province in relation to their grieving and mourning rituals.

1.3 Objectives

Deriving from the initial quest of conducting this research, there are objectives which the study tries to address. And these are:

- To explore which existing grief and mourning rituals are considered to be important within traditional African perspectives in order to provide a better understanding as to why they exist.
- To explore some of the benefits as well as the drawbacks of these mourning rituals on African people.
- To understand how certain historic events, socio-economic, education, age and gender factors influence the mourning rituals of African people.
- To explore how Covid -19 restrictions and regulations affected the traditional mourning rituals of this community of African people.

1.4 Paramount research question

What is the phenomenological experience of the people in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province in relation to grieving and mourning rituals?

1.5 Sub-research questions

1. What mourning rituals are considered important within traditional African perspectives? And why?
2. What are some of the benefits as well as the drawbacks of these mourning rituals on African people?
3. What is the influence of historical, socio-economic, education, age and gender factors on the mourning rituals of African people?
4. How have the Covid-19 restrictions and regulations affected the traditional mourning rituals of this community of African people?

1.6 Research Rationale

The exploration of different cultural grief and mourning rituals has become an area of study that is gaining some momentum by psychology scholars such as Asante (2007), Baloyi (2014), Nwoye (2013) and Okechi (2017) just to mention a few. Although this may be the case, the African wisdom as captured in the process of mourning has not yet been thoroughly investigated and documented. The area that is of main concern for the researcher is the notion of using only the Eurocentric approach for dealing with critical psychological issues affecting people who are of African descent. This may in turn, affect the way Western societies view and understand the whole idea behind African mourning practices. These challenges have raised the attention of some of the abovementioned researchers to be more involved in new theoretical paradigms which are more action-based in attempting to close the gap of knowledge systems consistent with these two different paradigms. This could be advantageous` for many African communities as this research could shed some light on several issues that may arise on the different perspectives of the African knowledge system as captured in mourning rituals as a practice (Okechi, 2017). A study by Nwoye (2015) pointed out the fact that one of the other ways that Eurocentrism had actually failed the primitive tenet of the African paradigm is that research pertaining to African practices is seen more relevant when conducted according to Western methodologies instead of the traditional worldview of native African people and their cultures. Thus, Asante (2007) postulated that the grieving and mourning concepts within the African context are a few of the least explored areas of studies within the African community

itself. This may provide some sort of explanation as to why very few researchers have explored this phenomenon. This kind of discrepancy has propelled the researcher to try and close the existing gap of knowledge systems that currently exists between the Western and the African ways of defining this phenomenon.

Another area of concern, according to Nwoye, (2015) would be the hidden inadequacies and shortcomings in the existing Eurocentric models which attempt to explain the process of grief and mourning of African people through western ideas. Since the entire process of grieving and mourning is relative to context, the manner in which different people conceptualise and express their emotions towards this very issue is influenced by their unique belief systems (Okechi, 2017). This research hopes to bring about a new frame of reference and of cultural inclusion as it will draw on the experiences of those grief/mourning rituals of an underdeveloped community within the South African context, which is also home to mostly Zulu-speaking people.

Whilst studies by authors such as Cavanaugh and Blanchard- Fields (2019) and Brown and Goodman (2005) have been conducted with their main area of focus primarily on the mourning processes of people in Western societies, very few studies have successfully explored the indigenous mourning practices that are native to the African context (Nwoye, 2015). I initially found this particular gap within such knowledge systems to be very confounding. Essentially, as a researcher, the notion or the idea of the human body- specifically the black person's body- and how it relates to other bodies of different races, was absolutely intriguing (Okechi, 2017). Subsequently, my interest was immediately peaked as I yearned to learn more about the common yet sacred practices of black people. Since most views on the different concepts of death are mostly based on original Euro- American paradigms, the Eurocentric approach still dominates most aspects of the professional study of Psychology in Africa (Nwoye, 2013). However, some evidence brought forth from research done by scholars such as Asante (2007), Nwoye (2013) and Okechi (2017) does exist which suggests that there are some studies that have sought to respond to and possibly rectify these challenges through the investigation of mourning rituals in Africa. The present research study seeks to contribute to such efforts, and the researcher aims to broaden the existing knowledge systems and understanding towards the concept of death, including factors surrounding the process of mourning. This process will be achieved through the exploration of the specific mourning practices relative to the black population in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province.

1.7 Contribution to Knowledge

The purpose of this study would be to contribute to the existing studies which seek to respond to, and possibly emphasize certain challenges brought on by the Eurocentric paradigm in relation to grief and mourning rituals within the African context. Also, it would be imperative to introduce the Afrocentric paradigm in the understanding of traditional grief and mourning rituals in order to bring to light black people's personal reflections upon or their interpretations of these rituals. These personal accounts will be the result of certain practices that usually take place in a particular context or environment. In short, the grief and mourning rituals of African people are influenced by a number of variables. We can postulate that although these grieving processes are subjected to the contexts in which they are observed, they do serve as a unifying agent for this cohort of people.

1.8 Chapter Outline

Having already produced a short summary of what this study entails, the structure of this research report will be presented in the following order: the first Chapter has presented an introductory section by giving a brief background to the study as well as the research questions and some of its main objectives. Furthermore, since it is important for any research project to generate a new body of work and provide a fresh perspective or insight into the relevant current systems of knowledge in order to demonstrate sustainability and/or bring to light any gaps that may be prevalent, this study will also present a suitable rationale in support of the abovementioned. The study simultaneously brings into focus some of its contributions to the African knowledge systems which pertain to traditional mourning practices that already exists within African studies. Chapter two continues to introduce the two key theoretical concepts or models upon which the main framework of the study lies, forming the foundation of the study, as well as a review of the literature and the body of work that speaks to the different aspects relating to this research, while the third Chapter explains the research paradigm, methodology as well as those specific approached that have been used to analyse the data set. The subsequent analytic tool in Chapter four will identify and discuss the themes that have emerged from the findings of the study as well as present the discussion of these main findings. And then lastly, Chapter five makes provision for the concluding remarks - while taking into consideration the limitations of the study as well. This final Chapter also includes some recommendations for

the mental healthcare/well-being for said participants, suggestions for future studies and for different cultural preservation methods that would be of benefit for African people as a whole.

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

The main premise of this study is rooted on the basis of fundamentally exploring the concept of mourning within the African context, and how the emergence of those subsequent mourning rituals usually compliments this phenomenon. The purpose of the literature review would be to locate this body of research into the broader context of other research findings, and to indicate how it shares certain similarities and contradictory aspects with these already existing phenomena (Delport, De Vos, Fouche & Strydom, 2011). The discussion will start off with defining the Afrocentric and Eurocentric paradigms, defining Afrocentricity and the African worldview. Then constructs such as death/loss, grief, mourning and the various psychosocial aspects of mourning will also be discussed.

It is important to note that the primary function of the next section serves not to compare the two paradigms, but simply focuses on why the Afrocentric view may be the most appropriate approach for this particular study. Also, the concept of Afrocentricity will be defined as it relates to the Afrocentric paradigm.

2.2 Afrocentrism and Eurocentrism

The notion of the Afrocentric paradigm emerged as the result of trying to highlight why it would be important to place Africa at the centre of the epistemological foundation – a term later known as "Black constructivism" (Adeleke, 2015). On the basis of this author's findings, in certain areas such as America, the Eurocentric paradigm became a threatening component to black people, and for many centuries prior, this particular threat had already existed, and continued to play a crucial role in spite of the efforts and accomplishments of previous generations of this cohort of people (Adeleke, 2015). Furthermore, in Asante's (1990) view, Eurocentrism had essentially destroyed some aspects of the African culture by inhibiting both the cultural and economic developments. This author further theorised that the Eurocentric paradigm was symbolic to a future threat to the cultural, political, social and economic development of black people (Asante, 1990).

As a way of eliminating these injustices, the concept of **Afrocentrism** was first proposed. According to Adeleke (2015) this paradigm was developed mainly as a way to counter-act what was perceived as the "accepted" Eurocentric way of life, and in so doing, the

importance of a new ideology arose. Subsequently, Asante produced somewhat of a standard definition of Afrocentrism: as "…. a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person, and which seeks in every situation the appropriate centrality of the African person" (Asante, 1990, p.171). Through the emergence of this ideology, it was postulated that the black person's sense of knowledge and awareness of African histories and cultural heritages needs to be strengthened (Jackson, 2003). Asante (1990) postulated that essentially, Africa can then be made as the starting point of some theoretical knowledge- the same type of knowledge that can form a "defensive" weapon against the overpowering Eurocentric worldview.

Adeleke's (2015) claims are further supported by the findings of Augustine Nwoye (2015) through his ideas of making use of the Afrocentric paradigm to make clinical diagnoses within African Psychology. Nwoye (2015) postulated that a missing link does exist within the Eurocentric paradigm, and its treatment plans make it impossible to appropriately address and directly deal with specific illnesses faced by black Africans. His theories solidified that there is a missing gap that exists between these two knowledge systems as certain (and very important) aspects of the African person's livelihood hasn't been thoroughly and contextually investigated through the Eurocentric paradigm (Nwoye, 2015). He adds more content to his previous theoretical assumptions by emphasizing crucial implications brought forth by Western ideologies: he points out that Eurocentrism has a tendency to define human beings predominately as observable phenomena, while in the same breath, fails to acknowledge the aspect of African spirituality, which is a major component in how Africans conceive their world (Nwoye, 2015). In such instances, it poses as problematic since in African psychology, spirituality and having a holistic approach are important factors which have an influence on human well-being (Nwoye, 2015).

2.3 The concept of Afrocentricity

In this regard, Chawane (2016) defines **Afrocentricity** as an action-based thought process; one in which the African person's values, interests and perspective are emphasized. Additionally, this author stipulates that this concept can be regarded as a way to exercise knowledge in order to include a new historical perspective (Chawane, 2016). As the originators of the very civilisation currently known today, Afrocentricity essentially gives credit to African people (Chawane, 2016). The common conception with these definitions is that there is a call

for change in the way our world has been previously perceived, and radical change that should encompass every attribute of human existence- with emphasize placed directly on the centeredness of African lived experiences (Chawane, 2016). However, Chawane (2016) acknowledged Asante's (1990) work by pointing out a noteworthy directive: that Afrocentricity may not be regarded as the direct opposite of Eurocentricity, nor does it seek to replace it. These two paradigms should co-exist with each other. Concurrently, this phenomenon is constructive in the sense that it doesn't deny others their place but aims for multiculturalism. The gist of this argument is that Western views must not be imposed as universal as Africans are also entitled to bestow their own perspectives and should be awarded the right to exercise their own sense of self-knowledge (Chawane, 2016).

The foundation of Chawane's (2016) arguments suggest that this concept bears a lot of value for Westerners as well by allowing them the ability to see things from a different perspective. Stikkers (2008) postulated that a counterforce is then experienced that derails Western influences and traditions. An important premise that emerged from the idea that human progress has only come from Western philosophies, and not the human race as a whole should be corrected (Asante, 1990). Authors Early, Letkowits, Moses and Wilson (1994) further suggest that the truth is conventional; therefore, through Afrocentrism, Africans may mentally position themselves in a state of forming their own sense of the truth which encapsulates their own social and political agendas. The assumption is that the ideologies of each paradigm appear to be more relevant to the context in which the subject is being studied. The Afrocentric paradigm could be more beneficial to an individual who resides in Africa, and who may have adopted an African way of living – and vice versa.

The whole notion behind these two paradigms has been an ongoing argument for a very long time. After much deliberation, I can make the assumption that even though both frameworks are important, each is more useful in terms of their own contextual stance. In other words, each paradigm (and its ideologies) appears to be more relevant to the context in which the subject is being studied. Thus, the Eurocentric paradigm could be more beneficial to an individual who resides in the Western world, and who may have adopted a Westernised way of living – and vice versa. This may provide some sort of explanation as to why these two paradigms have such contradicting views. What is evident is that Afrocentricity emerged as a result of African scholars seeking to challenge some Eurocentric perspectives of looking at the world only from their own point of view.

The next section will discuss the essence of the African worldview, along with those particular concepts which emerge in support of this phenomenon, such as the African epistemology, the primary tenets of being an African, the African cosmology and the African personhood.

2.4 The African worldview

According to Mkhize (2004) a worldview represents those unique assumptions that a particular cohort of people develop as an attempt to explain their realities, place, and purpose in the world. She goes on to say that when trying to explain their unique realities and purpose in the world, people develop compartmentalised assumptions that govern their way of life (Mkhize, 2015). However, it is not to say that because this worldview exists, every single member of an African culture should automatically subscribe to it (Hook, 2015). Nwoye (2015) describes this concept as those perceptions that Africans place much value on, whereby the **African epistemology** describes the different ways in which Africans understand and conceive the world in which they live (Baloyi, 2008). It seeks to communicate a culture of unity set in place to provide a basic conceptualisation of the African context (Grills, 2002). This phenomenon shares a similar sentiment to **African personhood.**

To be able to comprehensively describe **what constitutes being an African**, we first need to contextualise the use of the word "African", as it refers to a person whose dealing with the world is influenced by an African Cosmology (Nwoye, 2017). Similarly, **African cosmology** is the peculiar manner in which African people understand the world and how it functions. At the centre of this ideology (and with grief/mourning rituals) is the idea of universal oneness, thus, representing a sense of interconnectedness and solidarity amongst members of a community (Moleko & Visser, 2012). Additionally, this worldview pre-determines the behaviours and belief systems of African people and seeks to bring to light the realities what of it means to be a black person within a predominately Eurocentric world (Moleko & Visser 2012). Another aspect to consider is that African cosmology is a theory that is profoundly grounded in the African culture (Mkhize, 2004). Thus, since it encompasses the total way of life, it will influence the worldview of African people. This means that their overall behaviour and practices will be arranged into recurring and observable phenomenon (consistently practiced and passed on from generation to generation) making it harder to accept a new tradition and way of doing things (Mkhize, 2004). Another scholar, Musana (2018)

concurs by reiterating the idea that these characteristics of a unified community define certain attributes that are inherently of value for this cohort of people. Obiechina (1993) stated that through socialisation, people from different cultures will subsequently pass down their unique practices onto their young.

Moreover, Nwoye (2017) supported these authors' arguments by highlighting that Africans view their world as consisting of the physical as well as the spiritual realms, which are realms that are believed to be in constant communication with each other. This phenomenon forms the foundation of some of the ideas that this study proposes. In other words, whenever these grieving/mourning rituals are properly implemented according to the various African customs, then there will be a balance between the physical and the spiritual world.

My understanding is that The **African worldview** forms the most basic component of what it means to be African. It plays a very important role in the attempt to conceptualise how the African person relates to their own extremities, and how they actually conceive their own realities to place meaning to their lives. This perspective is pivotal for the study of mourning within the traditionalistic African context, and it forms the foundation of these guidelines in which these rituals are individualised, prioritised and ultimately performed. As we develop an understanding of these guidelines, one has a better chance of conceptualising some intrinsic details of some of the grieving processes of African people. Essentially, we come to the understanding that mourning rituals (as a tradition) are not only passed on from one generation to the next but are also a shared experienced between members of a community.

The following section represents the core essence of the study, as it will look at the different ways in which the concept of death/loss can be defined, the description of grief and mourning, and how these subsequent mourning rituals emerge as a result of dealing with such phenomena.

Death and grief are said to be universal life experiences (Nwoye, 2013). According to Howarth, (2011) one of the most distressing emotional experience people face is the loss of a loved one, and virtually everyone will deal with grief at some point in their lives. Although death and loss are a universal experience, Howarth (2011) also suggested that there are different ways in which these two terms can be conceptualised.

2.5 The Eurocentric and Afrocentric concepts of death

Cavanaugh and Blanchard-Fields (2019) conceded with the idea that the process of defining the concept of **death** is very complex as it involves intricate perspectives and disillusions about what death (or the idea of dying) really means. They add that one of the most fundamental aspects of this phenomenon are determining where exactly the point at which life ends and has led to the following two concepts: *Functional death (clinical death)* is defined by the lack of a heartbeat and breathing, while *Brain death* occurs through the measurement of brain activity (Cavanaugh & Blanchard-Fields, 2019). These two concepts have been used as two different medical determinants of physical death (Cavanaugh & Blanchard- Fields, 2019). Furthermore, death is a universal, central human concern, and authors Ahmed, Azam, Hussain, Rafique and Salah (2019) stipulate that this phenomenon can be a transformative process for those family members left behind.

Moreover, Cavanaugh and Blanchard- Fields (2019) concurred with the works of Howarth (2011) by stating that every culture has its own unique way of describing death, which means that the concept of death bears different meanings for different people. Some writers have somewhat of a similar theory of death. Baloyi (2008) postulated that the Eurocentric paradigm views death as the obsolescence of life. In the same breath, the African worldview sees death as the moment when the soul separates from the flesh (Baloyi, 2014) thus, transcends from the physical world to the spiritual world. Therefore, people do not cease to exist. Baloyi's (2014) description of death was consistent with Adeyemo's (1979) argument that when someone passes on, their spirit still lives on; however, it exists outside their body- transitioning from a mortal being into an immortal one. On the other hand, Adeyemo (1979) further argued that death is the entity standing in between the two different worlds: the world of the departed souls and the world of human beings. When a person departs from this physical world, a ritual is required in order to unite the two worlds (Adeyemo, 1979). Both these authors' ideas support the notion that whenever these mourning rituals are properly implemented, an explanation about the process of transition of the deceased to another state of being in the spiritual world is provided.

Contrary to the above two authors, Makhubu (1988) viewed death from a different perspective. The argument here is that for African people, the concept of death should not be applied to human beings, but to plants and animals only. This may be due to the fact that death

may be regarded as a very negative connotation when it's directly applied to human beings (Makhubu, 1988). To further emphasis this point, Okechi (2017) explains that among the traditional African societies, death is so sacred that it makes it difficult for people to view it as just a natural phenomenon. Asuquo (2011) stated that the common belief is that death was made for the purpose of recalling any individual whose time on earth has been fulfilled. Thus, death becomes an inevitable and inescapable phenomenon for every single person who comes into this world. Another author, Opoku (1978), had theorised that death is not necessarily the end of life, but a transitional process from this world to the land of the spirits. He added that death should not sever the family connections because the dead become their ancestors and continue to live by forming part of their ancestral lineage (Opoku, 1978). On the other hand, the findings by Okechi (2017) contradict these claims by suggesting that from the African perspective; only the elder or senior family members are assumed to have completed their assigned tasks here on earth and can be perceived as due to go back home to their ancestors – anything beyond that is the hand of an enemy. For example, if a young person dies prematurely, their death is not naturally accepted. Okechi's (2017) findings are not necessarily aligned with Asuquo's (2011) as he insists that death is a creation made by God Himself, made for the sole purpose of removing people from the earth when their time is up. Furthermore, Adeyemo (1979) stipulated that death is the only object standing in between these two worlds, thus a ritual is required to unite the departed spirit with the physical world. This very reason forms the basis for performing mourning rituals since Africans regard death as merely a transition into the spiritual world. Therefore, the dead continue to live as ancestors and the belief is that they will continue to communicate to their loved ones through dreams, visions and hallucinations (Opoku, 1978).

2.6 Grief

As common as death is, Makhubu (1988) postulated that people respond to it with varying degrees of mourning and grieving processes. In different cultural beliefs, bereavement and **grief** are expressed through the process of mourning, which includes various emotional, psychological and behavioural counter-reactions to the loss that they experienced (Brown & Goodman, 2005). The meaning of grief is not simply "the losing of…" but incorporates other intense feelings of sorrow and despair brought on by losing the person you love. It's a type of emotional pain with complicated meanings attached to it (Salah et al, 2019). Grief is said to be

the price we pay for love - the deeper and more intense the love is, the greater the depth of the grief that will be felt after the loss (Salah et al, 2019).

2.7 Mourning

In order to deal with grief, a study by Makgahlela (2016) suggests that most African communities (particularly the black population) depend on indigenous healing practices such as performing different mourning rituals. **Mourning** is a term which refers to certain activities that a bereaved individual will most likely engage in as a way of dealing with any type of personal loss (Asuquo, 2011). Closely related to this definition, mourning rituals are regarded as those practices that arise as a result of mourning, and these rituals often go hand in hand with the grieving process and are said to play a very important role in how people deal with the loss of a loved one (Asuquo, 2011). Makgahlela (2016) further stipulates that these processes are often viewed as a way for grieving people to connect with each other and to be able to freely express their bereavement with members of a community that they can fully affiliate with. The duration of the mourning period (which consists of many rituals or physical activities) is uniquely subjective, and it may later serve as a rite of passage to grieving in the most "appropriate" manner (Hall, 2014). This simply means that this important period cannot be limited within any specific time - frame as people's response to grief is very multifaceted.
Baloyi (2008), who focused on more traditionalistic mourning practices, highlighted a perspective of what it means for African people to mourn in a coherent and respectful manner in order to maintain a balance between those who are still alive and those who have passed on. In Africa, most mourning practices are ritualised (Long, 2016). This meant that different ethnic groups perform different mourning rituals, and these rituals all possess some sort of symbolic significance to each one of them (Baloyi, 2008). According to Ademiluka, (2009) these types of performed rituals are usually based on who the deceased was, and the kind of role they played not just within the family context, but the community as a whole.

Moreover, since the Afrocentric paradigm forms the basis of the African lifestyle, a lot of emphasis has been placed on the importance of the Metaphysical world (Long, 2016). Another theory formulated by Baloyi (2008) stated that in order for African people to maintain the harmony and balance between the dead and the living, these ritualistic activities need to be properly implemented.

As it has been already mentioned, these concepts are perceived in a unique and distinctive manner within the African context as compared to other parts of the world. I concede with this notion simply because it is based on those traditionalist cultural and psychological undertones which deal with death in a different way. However, I must disagree with some of the findings or remarks brought forth by Asuquo (2011), which claim that in the event of the death of a young person, it is seen as the result of the work of a perceived enemy. In my opinion, death means that God has called you back to Heaven as you have completed the purpose of why He had put you on this earth to begin with – complimenting the theories postulated by Okechi (2017).

2.8 Psychosocial aspects of mourning

This part of the review seeks to discuss a few of those psychosocial aspects in relation to mourning such as the history and politics, the socio/cultural/racial aspects and then finally, the gender/age/economic aspects in relation to mourning.

2.8.1. History and politics in relation to mourning.

South Africa is a diverse country and living in a society that is constituted by so many cultures and beliefs means that most memorable events can be celebrated in many different ways. According to Ademiluka (2009) in Africa, as in the Old Testament, death is regarded as one of the most important rites of passage amongst other things. Therefore, the mourning of death can be accomplished through various activities. The findings of Lee and Vaughn (2008) introduced another dimension: they proposed that the dense literature on African beliefs related to mourning has been significantly disconnected from the demographic history- which posed as a challenge for historians of death within the African culture. This may result in many regions having a constricted basic idea of the demographic trends in Africa prior to the 2nd half of the 20th century (Lee & Vaughn, 2008). Additionally, the concepts of "death" and "Africa" are worlds which are unfortunately often intertwined (Lee & Vaughn, 2008), for example, in Western media coverage, Africa is often portrayed as a constituent of death (for example, Famine, diseases, war, etc). These scholars suggest that this is not a new phenomenon as it dates back to the years of slavery (Lee & Vaughn, 2008). Additionally, political violence is also a phenomenon which stands out in contemporary Africa in most recent literature (Lee & Vaughan, 2008). Some regimes of violence have become so common that it has rendered death itself as empirical of its sediment meaning (Lee &Vaughan, 2008).

Furthermore, research by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) observed how certain social constructs operate through the use of capital. Bourdieu (1986) stipulated that capital is accumulated labour that enables people to live or survive. This was an important phenomenon as it provided a description of those specific principles that underlie the imminent irregularities of our social world. This author also referred to how we live in a world where capital and the availability of opportunities is unequally distributed, and that these are either gained or inherited, but are never fairly obtained by every individual in society (Bourdieu, 1986). This means that the economic play field is already set, and that we are born into/enter into an already unequal playfield. In his work, Bourdieu (1986) claimed that the dispersal of the different types of capital represents the existing unequal social class structures, and how important it is for the system to maximize its profits. Bourdieu's (1986) argument is based on a Marxist's theory which explains how monetary value is placed on human beings, including certain aspects of culture. According to Bourdieu (1986) humans (more specifically their physical bodies) are seen as the sites where society's monetary value or the economy can be driven by – as a result, society is dependent on economics. A few years before Bourdieu's (1986) research, another author Burawoy (1981) postulated that within the South African context, the unequal distribution of political, economic and other resources among the different races of people was generally rooted in racism which stemmed from the Apartheid era. Moreover, to be able to conceptualise the different ways in which people are able to access these resources, one needs to take note of how the theory of Capitalism presupposes the general allocation of resources (Burawoy, 1981). By an extension, understanding racism in the context of Capitalism looks at precisely where the different racial groups are located within the capitalist social structure (Burawoy, 1981).

2.8.2 Socio/ Cultural/ Racial aspects of mourning

Ademiluka (2009) proposed that there are several elements of mourning that are meant to play a certain social role in society, for example, the washing of the corps and plaiting of the hair are some of the rituals used to dignify the deceased. Evidently, the mourning of a loved one in a respectable manner is a type of honour that isn't just bestowed on the dead body itself, but also on the spirit and the memory of the deceased (Ademiluka, (2009). From a traditional standpoint, the way a bereaved individual experiences a death depends on how the loss is interpreted (Nwoye, 2013). The whole process begins with how the news is broken to family members. A home setting is the preferred option. Afterwards, most community members will

show up in solidarity to offer their support (some may even shed a few tears together with the family). Nwoye (2013) also reiterated the idea that the community can lend a helping hand by offering financial help, bringing over refreshments or whatever else the family may need. Thus, the mourning practices can help address both psychological and interpersonal needs for the bereaved. For example, during the actual funeral, people provide emotionally sustaining speeches that help put some sort of meaning to death and provides some sort of emotional support for the family. Even after the funeral procession, stories are exchanged about the life of the deceased. Another function of mourning within a socio-cultural system is the preservation of cultural heritage and people's traditions, and as such, these mourning rituals enable people to form a group identity and organise themselves as a collective whole (Ademiluka, 2009). In addition, engaging in mourning rituals is a symbolic gesture for the African people's social order, and it also becomes a way to sustain a subjective sense of their own society. Whenever people gather to mourn their deceased in their own customary manner, they inadvertently revive a renewed sense of themselves which solidifies how legitimate their social organisation is (Ademiluka, 2009).

Mourning rituals are also regarded as a unifying agent for African people and serve as a reunion for long-separated relatives, irrespective of distance and relationships (Ademiluka, 2009). These funerals are also considered to be very social events for the community as a whole (Baloyi, 2008). Africans consequently mourn collectively for multiple reasons such to offer much-needed assistance to the bereaved family members, to partake in certain rituals, to identify with the grief of the mourners, to avoid misfortune/sickness and to also provide a chance for those children born out of wedlock to be accepted back into the family (Baloyi, 2008). Lastly, one of the most obvious yet important reasons for mourning would be to pay our last respects to the deceased.

2.8.3 Gender/Age/Economic aspects of mourning

According to Demmer and Rothschild, (2011) the effects that mourning rituals have on children has been neglected. These scholars suggest that the daily struggles that some families face may have inadvertently cause children and adolescents to repress their feelings about grief (Demmer & Rothschild, 2011). Furthermore, these authors found that in the South African context, the task of mourning is exacerbated for those children who may have lost someone to

a highly stigmatised disease (e.g. Aids), which often leads to hidden grief (Demmer & Rothschild, 2011).

Furthermore, according to authors Demetrovics, Kopp, Pilling and Thege (2012), certain practices are gender- specific, which means there are prevalent gender roles during the mourning process. This will then lead to differences in the mourning rituals applied by men and women. In light of Ademiluka's (2009) research findings, the widows of the deceased usually play the most important role in the bereavement of their husbands. There are specified rituals that they have to partake in such as rubbing their bodies with ashes, and after a certain period of time, the bereaved widow is allowed to take off the clothing in which they grieved in. These items of clothing must then be burnt by specific members of the family. Both the widow and widower must take a ritualistic bath to mourn their spouses. These are just a few of the mourning rituals.

Moreover, a majority of South Africans live below the breadline, and most live in households where money/resources are in short supply (Demmer & Rothschild, 2011). These authors add that in such instances, the cost of funeral expenses can be very overwhelming, and often unattainable (Demmer & Rothschild, 2011). Van den Berg (2012) concurs that there are short- and long-term economic impacts that emerge after death – and because the mourning period varies across cultures, the bereaved may be away from work for a substantial amount of time. It can subsequently become difficult to go back to work, or they may even lose their jobs due to some psychological traumas that may arise during the grieving period (Van den Berg, 2012). He adds that at the extreme, some bereaved individuals may suffer such psychological traumas that they may never re-enter the employment environment again, causing economic suffering a long time after the grief has subsided (van den Berg, 2012).

This section of the research report has provided an extension of a broader conceptualisation of this research study by exploring the different concepts relating to the Africanised way of mourning; including those various psychosocial aspects which are a representation of this phenomenon. The next part of the discussion will include aspects relating to the theoretical framework of the study, as well as the underlying theoretical models.

2.9 Theoretical Framework

The next section will engage the theoretical framework of the study. The focus will be on two theories of psychological grief and bereavement, and how they relate to grief work. Attention will be attributed to Nwoye ‘s sources of gain in African grief therapy model, and then we will re-direct our attention to the Continuing bonds bereavement model. However, even though “grief” and “mourning” are terms which are often used interchangeably, it is noteworthy to emphasize that they are two different concepts. In addition, to fully conceptualise the mourning rituals of African people, the study first needs to provide a basic theoretical understanding of grief, and how this phenomenon manifests into subsequent mourning rituals which are crucial in the process of dealing with the loss of a loved one. In other words, grief-work is one of the main constituents of these mourning rituals.

2.9.1 An Afrocentric conceptual framework

The study has employed the **Afrocentric conceptual framework** to explore the grief and mourning rituals carried out by people who are of African descent residing in the community of Bethal; situated in the Mpumalanga region. The Afrocentric approach intends to provide a clear and coherent argument of the way Africans view and describe themselves (Asante, 2007). Mazama (2001) postulated that the Afrocentric paradigm is based on the premise of the importance of assisting people develop a more comprehensive understanding of African people by placing them within their own historical or cultural framework. This framework also seeks to re-locate and re-evaluate the African person as an agent in human history and strives to minimize the illusion of outsiders (Asante, 2007). The approach further places the African subject at the centre of its analysis and tries to interpret why the African person would be subjected to certain cultural activities- (Mkhize, 2004) and in this case, to mourning practices. Therefore, the Afrocentric perspective emphasises the understanding and the description of African people and their experiences within their own cultural context (Asante, 2007). The Afrocentric approach is considered to be a more suitable theoretical framework for the present study, as the aim of the study is to explore the mourning rituals of African people in a rural community in Mpumalanga.

This study’s **theoretical models** – which are the Africanised African Grief Therapy and Continuing bonds bereavement models will now be explicated.

2.9.2 African Grief Therapy model (AGT)

According to Nwoye (2000) the **African Grief Therapy model** can be defined as those specific ways/practices in which a community can create for the purpose of healing of a bereaved individual. This model has three main objectives namely, 1) to offer certain services or rituals that remedy the effects and pain caused by grief, 2) to offer protection from the loss suffered and the availability of traditional bereavement rituals, which are foremost approved by the community. And lastly, 3) these rituals help to facilitate an understanding and acceptance of grief-work within an African context (Makgahlela, 2016).

Nwoye (2000) further proposed that the African Grief Therapy model also addresses this question: what exactly does this AGT model heal? Some of the more important psychological aspects that this model attempts to heal are the negative images, fantasies or daydreams the bereaved may possess, including those inevitable mental and emotional consequences of the entire grieving process (Nwoye, 2000). One of the key assumptions of this model is that the sudden news of the death is often received with shock, leading to certain mental images of fantasies of "bleakness" (Nwoye, 2000). He also postulated that this framework is based on an explanation of imagination by the community as a whole, and the grieving person's thoughts and negative expectations after the bereavement (Nwoye, 2000). Also, these traditional mourning rituals which are conducted successfully tend to create a new and lasting impression on the grieving person's cognition as opposed to that initial negative internal dialogue they used to contain (Makgahlela, 2016). The bereaved then faces new messages that have a contradictory effect on their initial belief before the death. Makgahlela (2016) contributes to Nwoye's (2000) interim that this process helps them to assimilate the positive support and communal solidarity which helps in the healing process. The main goal is to encapsulate those negative emotions and translate them into new meaning – the feelings of loss are not allowed to persist (Makgahlela, 2016). Through this model, the bereaved family and overall community may be provided with a shared belief and understanding towards dealing with grief and loss.

2.9.3 Continuing bonds bereavement model

A postmodernist school of thought about the grief-work and bereavement process is represented by the **continuing bonds bereavement model** theorized by authors Klass, Nickman and Silverman (1996). This model (unlike traditional grief theories which usually focus on the loss of attachment from the deceased) looks at the continuation of the emotional ties/bonds with the deceased as an important coping mechanism for the grieving person (Klass et al., 1996). The focal point of this model is the need for the bereaved individual to try and form new bonds or relationships within their own environment. Furthermore, scholars Bonano and Kaltman (2001) defined these bonds as an active connection with the deceased, which does manifest itself through dreams, mementos or other actions. Most importantly, these newly established bonds should be the main lifeline to the bond that already existed with the deceased (Makgahlela, 2016).

Furthermore, Madison (2005) brings forth the idea that instead of pushing for the bereaved to "let go" of their feelings of loss, the primary focus would be to maintain the memory and spiritual presence of the deceased within the family itself and society as a whole. In so doing, the entire premise behind grief-work and mourning aims to maintain the memory and spiritual presence of the deceased within the family structure and social relationships. This can be achieved through the establishment of a continuous role for the deceased in the current lives of the bereaved (Madison, 2005). The end goal would be to maintain such bonds in such a way that it's possible for the bereaved to be relieved from the intense feelings of grief and allows them the opportunity to continue with their lives (Hall, 2014).

This scholar insisted that such bonds should not be seen as an indication that grief is resolved, but rather as a way to adapt to the perceived loss. This continuous bond can be expressed in a number of ways, for example, the deceased may have been perceived as a role model to the bereaved before their passing; thus, they may turn to them for guidance in some aspects of their lives (Hall, 2014). Another way to maintain that close bond is by occasionally visiting the grave, seeing them in their dreams, and through rituals (Makgahlela, 2016). This scholar insists that such bonds should not be seen as an indication that grief is resolved, but rather as an adaptive response to the perceived loss.

2.10 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a deeper understanding into the study of traditional African mourning rituals as well as the various theoretical perspectives that will assist with the critical conceptualisation of the research's main findings. When discussing the link between the factors surrounding grief work and those psychosocial aspects of mourning, Chapter two has thus laid important epistemological groundwork from which the experiences of the African person can be better understood. It has explicated on the Afrocentric conceptual framework from which the study is based on, as well as the two key theoretical concepts of psychological grief and bereavement, and how these theories relate to grief work. The Continuing bonds theory and the African Grief Therapy model encapsulates important mourning rituals directly from African people's lived experiences. These two models place the African person in centrality of entire premise: providing a more personal and subjective account of people's own narratives with regards to the broad spectrum of mourning rituals. These two theoretical models are thus considered more appropriate for the Global South, particularly for application in this study. However, before we can properly analyse the findings of this study, the next chapter will demonstrate the study's methodological structural composites, ethical considerations and other strategies for ensuring rigor and trustworthiness.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The discussion in this chapter is based on the research design and the methodology that is appropriate for this enquiry. According to Creswell (2007), some crucial decisions need to be made at the beginning of any research report regarding aspects relating to the study's research paradigm and the methodological factors that ultimately form the foundation of the study's content or structure. Furthermore, in order for a researcher to construct the most appropriate research design, they would have to first choose a research method that is primarily based on the research questions. The researcher should ask themselves: What is the best approach to finding answers to the questions, considering the available resources, time, the depth of the answers needed, the theoretical framework, and the already existing knowledge on the subject? The following section of the paper will provide an explanation as to why an interpretative approach was the most suitable paradigm upon which the methodology for this research project is based. This section will also further explain the data collection techniques, the procedure of gathering data as well as the method of data analysis – including other aspects related to the study's trustworthiness, reflexivity and ethical considerations.

3.2 Research Design and paradigm

For this research study, the researcher adopted **an interpretative phenomenological perspective.** From this perspective, one of the main aims is to understand and essentially provide a description of a certain aspect of human nature (Garner, Kawulich & Wagner, 2012) and in this case, what motivates people to engage in traditional African mourning rituals. This paradigm signifies people's subjective experiences of grieving as an important aspect of their reality. Subsequently, both the research topic and the specified approach ultimately have a similar purpose by allowing the researcher to explore the participants' personal experiences when engaging and performing mourning rituals. Thus, a **qualitative research approach** was used to collect and analyse the data obtained (Durrheim, Painter & Terre- Blanche, 2006). The purpose is to describe the phenomena from the participants' subjective through narrative-type descriptions, classification and/or measuring relationships (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). These authors further stipulate that this perspective seeks observations because it does not focus on

isolating and controlling variables, but rather on extracting and extending the power of ordinary language/expression to foster understanding of the social world. This paradigm involves taking people's subjective experiences seriously as the essence of what it is real for them (ontology), making sense of people's experiences by interacting with them and listening carefully to their narratives (epistemology), and making use of qualitative research techniques to collect and analyse information (methodology) (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Additionally, since we understand that different people socially construct their own realties, this suggests that people are most likely to have a shared understanding of these mourning rituals, which may be constructed through their shared historical, cultural, geographical and even political experiences and/contexts. As such, this mode of enquiry relies on first-hand accounts of these mourning rituals. Concurrently, Terre Blanche et al (2006) adds that interpretative research relies on first-hand accounts, tries to describe what it sees in rich detail, and then presents its 'findings' in interactive and often evocative language to illustrate the participant's emotion or thought from the interpretations of the findings. Two key principles include understanding in context, which means that we need to understand the context in which the author writes. The second is that it positions the researcher as the primary instrument for both collecting and analysing the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The overall purpose isn't to collect pieces of 'real-life', but to place real-life events and phenomena into some kind of perspective (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This approach was then able to give us some insight as to why these participants are continuously able to participate in traditional African mourning rituals. However, it should be noted that these findings are limited to the eight participants, and that definitive results for a larger scale which would be representative of the general public would need a larger sample size.

3.3 Corpus of texts/collected data to be analysed.

3.3.1 The Participants

For the study at hand, the researcher had made use of **purposive sampling** to identify no more than eight families or households (approximately eight participants from each household respectively). In purposive sampling, a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some features which are of interest for a particular study (Leedy and Ormrod, 2015). The participants selected for this study was a particular cohort of people who are of indigenous African descent. These families had been selected from the area of Bethal, which is an under resourced community in the Govan Mbeki Municipality, Mpumalanga Province. These

participants are permanent residents of this area. For recruitment purposes, the researcher had requested the assistance of some of the community members, the Govan Mbeki Municipality and certain community organisations (NGO organisations) to help identify potential participants. The eight participants that the researcher chose were for the most part recommended by Sister Norah Soko, the head nurse and project leader of one of the NGOs in which she volunteers in around this community. Each participant was approached separately through the help/connection of Sister Norah, a few other community members as well as some employees from the offices of the Govan Mbeki Municipality. After the researcher was provided with the necessary information about these potential participants, it became her responsibility to approach each participant consecutively. Separate interviews and date/time schedules were then set up for each participant individually after contact details were exchanged between said parties. All eight participants were willing respondents to this process, and some were previously unbeknownst to the researcher. These participants had not only experienced a loss at some point in their lives (and have subsequently dealt with grief) but had also engaged in/performed traditional African mourning rituals in the past as well. Additionally, the study also made use of both the male and female gender as an inclusion criterion as there are those specific rituals directly affecting either men and/or women respectively. The different ages of the participants were very significant, so the search was narrowed down to people who were 18 years and older as to include multiple generations of people who would provide different and unique perspectives of mourning rituals. For ethical reasons, minors were excluded from this study because they had culturally limited exposure to the intricacies of death and were considered young to fully conceptualise the true meanings behind these mourning rituals. Below is an outline of the profiles of the participants:

> The *first participant* is a 64-year-old female who has three children and has been divorced for many years. Although her children are now adults, they all still live together in her home. As she was born and raised in the community of Bethal, she has been a local resident for all her life. The participant has worked as a Matron at the local hospital for many years and will soon be retiring from this position. She is a frequent churchgoer and says that she finds pleasure in taking part of some of the church-related activities.
>
> The *second participant* is a 36-year-old female who has two young children. Her eldest son is five years old, and the other has just turned five months old. She has

recently just got married in the traditional sense (lobola); however, she still lives at home as her husband currently lives and works in Johannesburg. She lives with her mother and younger brother instead. She hopes to join her husband at their family home (with their children) as soon as she can get a transfer from work. This participant was born in Bethal and has lived there all her life as well. Although she travels back and forth between Johannesburg and Bethal every other weekend, her hometown is where she's currently based. She works as a Data Capturer for the Department of Health at Trichardt Clinic, which is a 30-minute drive from Bethal. She commutes to work every day. This participant is a young mother who devotes most of her time to raising her two boys. Whenever she finds the time, she enjoys going to church services on Sundays.

The *third participant* is a 21-year-old medical student. She has no kids and still lives at home with her mother and younger brother. Her father passed away when she was still in Primary school and was essentially raised by her mother and aunt. She enjoys spending time with her friends and also lives an active lifestyle by going to the gym as often as she can and jogging around the neighbourhood with her friends. She is currently doing her third year and is ultimately working hard to fulfil her dream of becoming a doctor/physician.

The *fourth participant* is a 31-year-old male named Sunnyboy Eric Siluma. He is a teacher by profession. Mr Siluma does hold two academic qualifications, one of which is a bachelor's degree in education (further education and training). He also possesses an Honour's degree in Education Management and is currently employed at a local high school as an educator for Grade 12, while also serving the school as the Head of the Department. He is also currently pursuing his master's degree in education management. This participant is married with three young boys. He lives with his nuclear family in a townhouse nearby and enjoys spending time with his friends and family during the weekends when he isn't working.

The *fifth participant* is a 61-year-old retired High School teacher who has been teaching for the past 33 years. She has only one kid, a son, and has two grandchildren. She enjoys her retirement as she feels that she doesn't even have to get out of bed if she doesn't feel like it on that day. She is an active member of the community and is also a regular church goer. She enjoys spending time with her son and her

grandchildren as well. She also enjoys going on regular trips around the country with some of her close friends.

The *sixth participant* is a 27-year-old male driver for a courier service company. He has lived in Bethal his entire life (born and bred) and doesn't have any children yet. He claims to not have much a dating or social life anymore as his job requires him to be on the road for most days of the week. However, although his social life has suffered a bit since he had started this job, he does still enjoy spending time by himself on the road and exploring new cities and meeting new people. He further stated that even though this type of lifestyle of constantly being on the road isn't necessary the best, the job pays the bills, and he doesn't have much of a choice in the matter as employment is scarce these days. He had been unemployed for many years prior to this job, and he is extremely grateful to have any sort of employment at this point in order to sustain himself.

The *seventh participant* is a 29-year-old Reverend at an Anglican church called St Paul's right here in the small town of Bethal. He is married to his young wife, and they currently have one child together. This close-knit family lives at the mission house on the church premises. Although the participant is a minister by profession, he still finds time for his personal and social life as well. Whenever he spends time with his friends, they always try to discover new types of music. He enjoys this activity so much so that his friends have even awarded him the nickname "aux god". The participant also finds pleasure in spending quality time with his wife and young child as well. He proudly stated that although being a part of the ministry of God is very much fulfilling for his soul and spiritual journey, nothing brings him more happiness than being a husband and a father.

The *eight participant* is a 22-year-old student at Rosebank College. Although she is currently unemployed, she is in school and one of her main aims is to complete her degree in the faculty of Education as she is currently doing her third year in the course. She finds the course relatively easy as she confidently stated during the interview that if something is a passion for an individual, then said person will not have any difficulty in completing said task. It essentially comes easy to them. The participant doesn't have any children yet. Also, since the participant is a young adult

still in her early twenties, she enjoys an active social life by going out with her friends in her spare time. She also finds pleasure in singing and spending quality time with the people she loves.

3.4 Research method and data collection procedure

The research method refers to the method of gathering data. In order to collect the most appropriate data, eight individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Authors Johnson and Rowlands (2012) postulated that in the context of a qualitative research study, in-depth interviews are a distinct type of social interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee, which also seeks to gather the kind of information that usually goes much deeper and beyond the surface level – unlike the kind of information that can be accessed through other mediums such as focus groups or even surveys. For the current research, face-to-face interviews were employed, which is a very common data collection method in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). This method was chosen because it was the most appropriate for this type of research as it is primarily designed to allow the researcher to access personal details and information about the participant's lived experiences (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). These personal and interactive types of interviews provide for a detailed and in-depth subjective understanding of the participant's feelings, experiences and behaviours (De Vos et al., 2011) – and in this case, their motives behind their involvement or engagement in traditional African mourning rituals. Additionally, in order for the researcher "to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 6), which is one of the objectives that are in line with the interpretive phenomenological design, she needed to first gain an appropriately contextualised insight and understanding of the participants' subjective narratives – which this in-depth interview method has made provision for. Moreover, a semi-structured interview was the best option to allow for the necessary topics to be openly discussed, and for important or relevant information to be gathered. It also allowed for the participants the platform to give more insight and to further elaborate on their experiences without any constraints. Although these interviews were conducted in English (as per the participant's request), the mode of communication was usually in isiZulu, which is their mother tongue. The interviews lasted for approximately 30 minutes to an hour, which was in line with the standards for ethical research. These interviews were conducted mostly at the researcher's place of residence, which was a neutral venue for all parties involved; with one interview taking place at the local church. The researcher's home was chosen as a place of convenience due to

either the distance and/or the amount of privacy that it offered. Also, the most appropriate time suitable for all parties involved was also prioritised. All eight interviews took place in the small and intimate area of Bethal in the year 2022 and 2023.

3.4.1 The research instrument

For this study, the research instrument is the interview schedule/guide *(See Appendix D)*. This interview schedule, which was developed by the researcher and subsequently approved by the University's ethics committee was used to frame and guide the interviews. The researcher had intentionally framed the interview questions in such a way that they would illicit the most appropriate responses from the participants. Such responses would then form the groundwork upon which the initial as well as the sub-research questions would then be answered. For example, by asking the participants to share their personal views of how the Covid19 pandemic had affected their experiences with these traditional mourning practices, the researcher was able to gather specific information relevant to the different ways in which restrictions from the pandemic had subsequently affected the traditional mourning rituals of this community of people: (*Question 4 of the sub-research questions).* This method of asking questions also provided answers for the unique ways in which the participants were able to reinterpret and conceptualise these changes. For each participant, the researcher had asked a series of open- ended questions (with probing questions) from the interview guide *(see Appendix D)* regarding their personal experiences in relation to grief and African mourning rituals. These types of questions allowed space for the participants to essentially guide the interviews by expressing their experiences and opinions in an unrestricted way, thus obtaining even more information that could be relevant to the study. Below is an outline/example of some of the questions that were asked: *(see Interview guide, Appendix D)*

1. In your opinion, why are these specific mourning practices so important within the African context, and for its people?
2. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected the traditional mourning practices?

3.4.2 The interview process

The entire interview process did not prove to be too much of a difficult task. During these processes, all eight participants were very co-operative as they expressed their familiarity with the interview process since they all had experienced this process in varying degrees at some point in their own lives. Some of the participants exhibited a sense of calmness as they

shared their personal experiences relating to these African mourning rituals with the researcher, while others seemed to be nervous at first, but then gradually became more at ease. During each interview, as soon as all formalities were out of the way and both parties were acquainted with each other, they settled in into the interview room – which was a private and quiet setting. Before the interview could commence, the first thing on the agenda was the signing of the written informed consent forms; thereafter, all questions and concerns were dealt with. These forms were available in both English and Zulu to accommodate each participant's language preference. Some of the responses from the participants often needed to be further elaborated on whenever they became too ambiguous or broad for the researcher to understand or grasp fully. Additionally, the researcher approached these interviews with a few questions already prepared beforehand (in order to guide the interview), although she had to be open to each participant's unique way of expressing themselves. Therefore, the researcher wasn't bound to her own initial questions. Within the interview setting, the researcher was non-judgemental, inquisitive and engaging. She also exhibited emotional control whenever a challenging situation would arise. There was an overall atmosphere of openness and a sense of rapport during these interview processes during which time the respondents were made to feel free enough to share their personal experiences. Additionally, each interview was relatively more of an informal dialogue or conversation, with the researcher doing most of the listening while the participant did most of the talking; and whereby a collaboration was formed between the researcher and the participant in order to reach the same goal of obtaining the relevant data. The researcher was also vigilant or mindful for subtle yet meaningful cues in the participant's facial expressions, demeanour, occasional side-tracks, etc. Furthermore, these interview processes were conducted in a non-harmful way and no privacy was violated. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded on a cell phone. The data was transcribed a few days after each interview took place – while the process and respondents' responses were still fresh in her mind. This was a necessary precaution in case the recordings were not clear enough to make out. The data transcriptions were done manually, whilst the responses were written down word-for-word. A process report was included for each interview *(see Appendix H).* This process made it possible for the researcher to have a much better understanding of the data material at hand before she could start with the next step of the data analysis process.

3.5 Data Analysis

Once data was collected through interviews and transcribed, it then needed to be analysed, through **thematic analysis**, for meaning making in relation to the research questions and the aim of the research study. *Thematic analysis* can be defined as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting common patterns or themes within data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.79). This method of analysis was the most appropriate technique for analysing the data content that was obtained for this research study *(see Appendices E-G)* as it can describe and organise data material in sufficient detail – whilst being able to interpret various aspects of the research topic, and in this case, what the phenomenological experiences are for the people in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province in relation to grieving and mourning rituals?

Findings further stipulate that thematic analysis is different from other analytic methods that aim to describe patterns across qualitative data, and that although this method of analysis is poorly demarcated and rarely acknowledged, it is still widely used in qualitative analytic methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, not only is thematic analysis a commonly used analytic method, but it's compatibility with the interpretive approach also allows the researcher to make a concise report of the meanings, and virtual realities of grief and mourning of each participant individually (Braun & Clarke, 2018). It can be considered either a realist or constructivist method that is able to generate unanticipated insights into previously undisclosed information, while still being able to make provision for both psychologically and socially driven ways of interpreting data (Braun & Clarke, 2018). The data analysis procedure is discussed in the next chapter.

3.5.1 Method for analysing the data set.

Braun and Clarke (2018) further suggest six phases that should be followed through when conducting thematic analysis. They may not always be in one sequential order and researchers do move back and forth between the different phases. These phases are:

1) *Familiarizing yourself with your data:* It's important to read through the data content and for the author to immerse themselves the corpus of data to the extent of being familiar with the depth of the research content (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg.3352).

   The initial and what I would consider to be the most important step was to first identify what kind of participants would be the most appropriate for this study. After identifying and interviewing said participants accordingly, I then read through the data content at

hand by taking notes and noting down all observations during the interview processes, while also searching for meanings and patterns of the data. This initial process allowed me to become familiar with the corpus of data I have collected as a whole, while simultaneously acquiring a general sense of the main or most relevant ideas of these interviews in relation to the research questions of the study. Additionally, to constructively form a basic understanding of the data processing, I have intrinsically incorporated the works of Braun & Clark (2018) to shed light on some of the traditional African mourning practices and their subsequent theoretical frameworks on the grieving process of its people. In so doing, I was able to generate fundamental data codes retrieved from the data content by marking down ideas or in other words coding all the relevant information that I to go back on. Since the study makes use of verbal data, transcribing the data into written format was crucial as this allowed me to generate the transcriptions of the audio recorded individual participant interviews. These transcriptions were also used to make important notes while using various shapes to identify patterns and potential codes and themes.

2) *Generating initial codes:* This step sees the organisation of the corpus of data in a systematically meaningful way (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg. 3352). The coding process reduces large content of data into smaller chunks (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg. 3355). Upon completion of extracting data from the interview processes, the next step involved the organisation of the data in a more meaningful way by separating the data into different sections. I then collated each extract within specific codes and grouped them under an overarching thematic code. According to Braun & Clarke, (2018) a code is an element that allows the researcher to identify a feature of the data that appears interesting. I was then able to organise the data into meaningful groups. I needed to code for as many themes as possible, and as many times as I had to address the research question and aims. However, codes are not themes- themes are much broader and are created later from codes that present certain commonalities or are representative of the same pattern. Therefore, varying codes had emerged and were generated based on the research questions at hand. This reduced the size of the collected data and consolidated it into more manageable sections.

3) *Searching for themes:* This phase encompasses the sorting of the different codes into potential themes by analysing these codes. A theme is a pattern that captures a

significant component about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, pg. 3353). There are no rules for what makes a theme; however, a pattern should be formed. In this instance, I combined different codes to create different themes. Following these suggestions, making use of a visual mind map was very useful when evaluating the interconnectedness or the intersections of the general themes and sub-themes which were relevant to the main focus of this study. This phase encompassed the sorting of the different codes into potential themes by analysing these codes. I searched for relationships between codes, themes and sub-themes. It should be noted that some codes did fit under more than one theme or combine to form an overarching theme. Some codes did not belong anywhere - a theme was created from this. By the end of this phase, I had an idea of the importance of each theme. At this stage of the process, the patterns were used to capture important data in relation to the research questions. I had searched for themes based on the research question. Themes are features of the participants' accounts which characterize their own perceptions/lived experiences that the researcher sees relevant to the research question. Thus, a theme is characterized by its significance (Braun and Clarke, 2018). *(See Appendix E).*

4) *Reviewing themes:* During this stage of analysis, the author has reviewed the different themes that have been developed in Step 3. Gathering the relevant data that liaises with each respective theme is significant at this stage (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Furthermore, the abovementioned themes were reviewed and modified. The reviewing and refining of these themes and sub-themes were done by noting whether themes were actually themes on their own, or if they should be combined with another, if the sub-themes fit with their prospective main themes or if they should be broken down further. I had to check if the existing themes were relevant. There were sub-themes that had emerged during the process, which were of value to the analysis of the data. Upon competition of identifying and coding thematic patterns from the data set, I then refined the indicated themes so the data flow could be consistent and coherent. This was done through Patton's (1990) dual criteria for reviewing thematic categories, which consisted of internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity. This step involved two levels of reviewing and refining themes. Level 1 pertained to reviewing at the level of the coded data (Reviewing the codes and data extracts) while level 2 encompassed the overall reviewing of themes with the data set (Patton, 1990). This process encompassed two different levels of review as stated previously; in the first level I specifically cross-

examined the coded data extracts for coherency and relevance. This pertained critically reading the collated extracts under each overarching theme. I observed certain themes that were rather problematic with in terms of coherency. These themes were either discarded or revised to more accurately reflect the core ideas evident in the data. Thereafter, the final thematic map was brought forward as a product of refinement and reviewing. The second level of review involved a more centrally focused concentration of the whole data set. To achieve this step, I perused the data set for overall coherency and relevance to the study research question and focus. Those themes that did not seem to present an accurate depiction of the research questions were either revised or discarded altogether. *(See Appendix G).*

5) *Defining and naming the themes*: This step involves the final refinement of the themes and to identify what each theme is truly about (Braun & Clarke, pg. 62). I also had to find the link between the overarching themes and the sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Stage five involved the researcher clarifying the different themes, and essentially explained the relation between main and sub-themes. The clear defining of themes also involved redefining the theme through finding links and similarities between themes. This meant that I had identified the central idea of each theme and determined what aspects of the data each theme tried to capture. Each individual theme did require its own detailed analysis to demonstrate how each theme related to other themes, the data set and the research study as a whole. At the end of this phase, I was able to clearly define what these themes were and what they were not.

6) *Producing the report:* This phase involves the final analysis and writing-up of the report. As the author, I had to script all my ideas in a coherent manner (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a continuous process of reflection by the researcher in relation to the study as a whole (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). In so doing, as the researcher, I was able to evaluate whether or not my own perceptions about certain aspects of my own life may have inadvertently influenced the study. Reflexivity also entailed being aware of the possible effects of my own bias and acknowledging that this had shaped the research in some way (Stiles 1993).

To achieve this, I thus had to be careful not to impose my own personal views and/or opinions on the results of the data. With regards to this research study, I did share an indistinguishable cultural background with the participants. Being born and raised in the same community in which I had wished to conduct the research; I had faced some advantages as well as disadvantages when it came to approaching the study. The same was true when it came to analysing and interpreting the data at hand. Additionally, I have been raised with similar cultural belief systems relating to traditional African mourning rituals as the participants I was interviewing. This had inadvertently caused somewhat of a skewed judgement on some of the aspects revealed when reviewing the results. Although these various aspects of my personal life had informed my perception of the data, I have acknowledged my positionality, and as a researcher, I was careful not to impose any of my personal views or opinions on the results of the data. I have also ensured that I have presented the views of the participants only, while providing a clear reflection of their realities. I have kept all of these aspects in mind in order to prevent researcher bias.

3.6.1 Positional reflectivity

My positionality as someone who was born and raised in the community of Bethal, and who's also had to make use of these traditional African mourning rituals as a way of dealing with the grief of losing a loved one (and in my case both my parents), I have shared some strikingly similar experiences with some of the participants. This may be worth noting as it is similar to the participant cohort that was used for this research study. I have also had to adapt to certain changes to these mourning rituals due to the recent Covid-19 restrictions. This similar positionality may be misconstrued in the way I may present myself to the participants, and also how they may respond the questions asked. I may also be biased in how I interpret the results of my findings. However, it's important to note that I was fully aware of this potential bias, and therefore was able to do a continuous self - reflection in order to avoid any personal experiences from influencing how I conduct the study. Moreover, I have a social positionality of being a lower-middle class citizen who shares similar sentiments with some of the participants, such as having the financial constraints that do not allow for the affordability of most of the expenses associated with these traditional mourning rituals. Also, I live in the same community where there is prevalent and substantial underdevelopment of the lower-social class structure. Therefore, I do have a much better understanding of some of the problems faced by some of these participants in this regard. These are some of the similar sentiments shared by

the participants who may have some sort of influence on how I have read and interpreted the raw data. Another important reflection that may also be noteworthy is the fact that although I may have used Thematic Analysis as a method of analysing data in the past, it was never at this depth and on this level before. I must consider this level of analytic approach as a learning curve that has definitely improved on my data analysis skills.

3.7 Quality Criteria

This part of the discussion looks at the different strategies which have been adapted to ensure the quality and thus *"trustworthiness"* of this qualitative study. This concept suggests that "a trustworthy study [is] one that is carried out fairly and ethically and whose findings represent as closely as possible the experiences of the participants" (Padgett 2017, p. 296). Before the researcher can design, conduct and report a high-quality qualitative research study, she has to be aware that research in this specific field of study could be regarded as subjective (Padgett, 2017). When a study yields subjective results, the entire research topic could possibly be compromised (Stiles, 1993). The concepts of reliability and validity (in this case) are closely related to the concept of 'trustworthiness' (Stiles, 1993). According to Stiles (1993, p.601) 'the term "reliability" refers to the trustworthiness of observations or data; and "validity" refers to the trustworthiness of interpretations or conclusions' Although these two concepts are usually discussed in relation to the successful execution of quantitative research, these terms are, however, not considered to be the appropriate terminology for qualitative research approaches (Smith, 2006). For this study, the researcher made use of a pilot interview to enhance the reliability of the research instrument. After this pilot interview, the researcher was able to ascertain that the interview questions were clear enough and would ultimately generate the kind of information needed to answer the research questions. Following this, a few adjustments were made to rectify the instrument for future reference. Such adjustments included the reduction of certain questions as they were too long to comprehend, while adding three more questions that were important for the study. The researcher was also able to alter the way in which she conducted the interviews by working on how she would build rapport with the participants and using clear and concise sentences when asking questions. Making use of some words that are in isiZulu was essential in getting the message across to participants. However, it is important to note that the data gathered from the pilot interview was not made a part of the actual study but was rather used to improve the research instrument. Additionally, to ensure rigor of the

results from the study, a horizontal and vertical analysis of the data content was also applied *(see Appendix F).*

Furthermore, Smith (2006) made use of the following terms: "credibility", "dependability" and "triangulation" as the key concepts that are relevant for describing trustworthiness in qualitative research. Contextual differences, in this instance, should also be taken into consideration. According to Stiles (1993) the epistemological shift of focus in qualitative studies is necessary. This shift moves from the truth of statements to understanding by people – therefore, encompasses a shift in criteria for evaluating interpretations. Terre Blanche et al (2006) adds that many qualitative researchers reject 'reliable' and 'objective' measures as invalid – the argument is that social phenomena are context-dependent, and that the true meaning of whatever it is that the researcher is investigating depends on the particular situation that the individual is in. Thus, for this study, this phenomenon is directly linked to how the process of grieving and mourning is relative to context, and the manner in which the African person is likely to have a subjective view of their own reality regarding these traditional practices. The foundation for these subjective narratives plays a very important role when attempting to understand how the African person relates to their own extremities, and how they may use the African culture as a basis to conceive their own realities in order to place meaning to their lives.

3.7.1 Dependability

For a research study to be considered trustworthy, a certain criterion needs to be met in with regards to 'dependability', 'trustworthiness' and 'credibility' (Stiles, 1993). This author defines the concept of 'dependability' as a reliability measure which can be achieved through the process of triangulation (Stiles, 1993). Dependability is also defined as "the degree to which an independent "auditor" can look at the qualitative research process and determine its "acceptability" and, in so doing, create an audit trail of the process" (Lavrakas & Roller 2015, p. 21).

3.7.2 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the process of using multiple data-gathering techniques and data sources to allow for more credible research findings (Stiles, 1993). It also provides some sort

of evidence trail to support the accuracy of translations of information from various data sources (Stiles, 1993). In order to prove triangulation, the study has made use of several participants who although live in the same impoverished area, are different and unique in their own right. They come from different walks of life and have varying degrees of family involvement. These participants do have a shared experience when it comes to mourning or grieving in the traditional sense. Moreover, the researcher also used more than one method of recruiting the potential sample, for instance, instead of just going door to door seeking people who would be willing to participate, she requested the assistance of a well-known community figure (Sister Nora) to help guide her in selecting the most suitable candidates. This individual played a very important role in this recruitment process as she was able to provide an extensive list of possible participants since she is an active member in one of the NGOs in and around the Bethal area.

3.7.3 Credibility

Credibility takes into account all the relevant methods that make the findings of the study more "credible" – for example, the proof consistent with thematic analysis is evident that the results drawn were from analysing the data provided by the participants in the transcript form (Smith, 2006). Authors Lavrakas and Rolller (2015) also postulate that during the data collection stage, the manner in which the data is gathered is a key factor in indicating the completeness and accuracy of how the collected data will be presented. In order to ensure its credibility, this study has provided a clear and coherent definition of the target sample or the participants that have been interviewed, the strategic methods of recruiting said participants, the specific research instrument that has been used to illustrate how the interview processes had played out, a detailed account of how the data had been gathered as well as the analytic tool and the method for analysing the data content. Additionally, in order for the researcher to gain the participants' trust and cooperation during the interviewing processes, there are specific techniques facilitating rapport, which may include active listening and/or follow up-questions, that were extensively used. Assuring the potential participants of complete confidentiality (if they so wished) and the guarantee for privacy and comfortability further helped to reduce the risk of reluctance or the refusal to participate throughout the recruitment process. In terms of the data gathering process, credibility was assured by having a detailed understanding of the construct(s) under study, including those aspects of how the data content would be analysed.

According to Smith (2006) the presence of credibility and dependability can lead to an increase on the level of trustworthiness.

To conclude this section, the way in which authors represent themselves and whether or not they provide their own perspectives, or simply just provide solely those responses from the participants may ultimately have an effect on the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies. To explain this statement more thoroughly, researchers should be careful not to impose their own personal views and/or opinions on the results of the data. They must present only the participants' views; whilst the study should be reflective of their experiences and reality only. In addition, Stiles (1993) agrees with the above mentioned by stipulating that even though qualitative research is not necessarily objective in nature, when compared to quantitative research, it can possess the element of permeability – which means that some theories can change when this research encounters certain observations. One way that this study prevented permeability was to critically analyse the researcher's reflexivity by demonstrating that being aware of how her own positionality as a young, black lower middle-class student might impact the data collection as she shared a lot of similarities with the people she was intending to interview. In so doing, the study is able to highlight potentially commonly shared interests, values and even experiences between said parties. Furthermore, sharing a potentially similar understanding of what it means to be a resident of an underdeveloped community could be seen as a uniting or connecting factor.

3.8 Ethical considerations

When a researcher engages in any type of research study, they should ensure that it always remains ethical. Terre Blanche, et al. (2006) stipulated that research ethics involve more than just a focus on the welfare of research participants – it extends into other research areas such as scientific misconduct and plagiarism. Corey (2009) concurred that not only will these ethical principles form a basic part of our professional practice but will also highlight its importance so that a solid foundation for making ethical decisions can be established. Moreover, although researchers cannot fully eliminate their own personal values and preconceptions, they can still work on making them less biased (Stiles, 1993).

3.8.1 Informed Consent

For this study, before the interview process could commence, the respective participants were first given an information document which consisted of all the details of the research study *(see Appendix A)*, as well as a consent form should they wish to participate *(see Appendix B)*. These consent forms were signed prior to the commencement of the interviews. *Informed consent* implies that the participants are willing (with the absence of any coercion) to participate in the study. Consent from all eight participants was an important factor as it was crucial that they were willing participants of the study. The participants were also extensively made aware of the nature of the research study and what it entailed. This also meant that their *voluntary participation* would be their freedom to decline and/or withdraw from the study at any point in time (if they so wished) even after it had started. In addition to the abovementioned, the participants were made aware ahead of time that the entire interview would be recorded on a recording device – which was the researcher's cell phone. Consent for these recordings was a requirement as well *(See Appendix C).* This had all been done in writing (Terre Blanche, et al., 2006) with each form translated into isiZulu to accommodate the participants' mother tongue *(see Appendices A (1), B(1) and C(1)).*

3.8.2 Privacy and confidentiality

The information that the participants had provided has been securely stored in a password protected computer, and will not be disclosed to anyone else, as only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The interviews were completely confidential as no identifying information was revealed. Concurrently, pseudonyms were used for each participant respectively.

Terre Blanche et al. (2006) postulated that there are four widely accepted principles used to ensure ethical practice, and they are as follows:

3.8.3 Autonomy and respect

Participation in this study was completely voluntary**,** and the participants had the freedom to choose if they wanted to be involved in the study or not. They also had every right to withdraw/opt out of their participation at any given point in time if they chose to, or whenever they felt uncomfortable to respond to questions. Additionally, respect for the

dignity of the participants as well as their concerns have been upheld, including any enquiries they had regarding the research topic– this was also inclusive of the protection of both individual identity and institutional confidentiality.

3.8.4 Nonmaleficence

Nonmaleficence means that the researcher ensured that no harm would befall the respondents due to neither indirect nor direct consequence of the research. These harms included wrongs and deception. If the participant experienced any sort of distress or discomfort at any point in time during this process, we would stop the interview, or even resume at another time. If they needed some support or counselling services following the interview, they were informed of a counselling service that is available free of charge at Bethal Hospital (contact details are provided on the consent forms: *see appendix A*).

3.8.5 Beneficence

Beneficence ensures that the study yielded some benefits or positive outcomes for the participants as well, such as the recognition of some aspects of the traditional practices of the people of Bethal, overall cultural inclusion, the contribution towards the advancement of African knowledge systems and to also allow the space/opportunity for this cohort of people to express their own narratives in their own way. However, the participants were not paid for taking part in the study as the report is currently just for academic purposes.

3.8.6 Justice

Justice within this research paradigm meant that the researcher made sure that the participants were always treated fairly and equally during each phase of the research process.

The research process for this study was conducted in an ethical manner whilst the four principles described by Terre Blanche, et al. (2006) were adhered to and applied to the study. All eight participants willingly signed the consent forms which stated that they had already been informed of the nature, purposes and particulars of the study. They were made aware that if they so required, their identities would be kept confidential from the general public and anyone else who wasn't a part of the research process. The researcher has kept these forms in a safe place. The researcher also informed the participants of all aspects of the study and was

truthful when answering any additional enquiries, they may have had. The researcher did not deceive them in any way whatsoever, nor did she pay them any sort of compensation for their participation. The participants were fairly chosen and treated. They were just as equally treated as well. It is the researcher's wish that at a later stage, this type of research can be conducted on a larger scale with a lot more participants so that a better generalisation of the results could be achieved.

3.9 Dissemination of the Results

A copy of the research report will be submitted to the University of the Witwatersrand Library system, and most importantly, part of the report findings or results may be published as journal articles.

3.10 Conclusion

As we proceed forward with the discussion, Chapter three has provided some elaborate details about the study's research design and methodological structure, which includes the data collection method and instruments, as well as the data analysis method. The researcher's positionality and reflexivity have also been brought to light. Furthermore, an extensive summary of the study's ethical considerations as well as the different criterion that define its level of trustworthiness has also been described.

The next phase of this research project, which constitutes the Chapter four of the research project, explores the thematic exploration of the data content, which will simultaneously provide a more in-depth explanation, analysis and discussion of the data obtained, including those findings that have subsequently emerged.

Chapter 4: Research Findings and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains content that relates to the findings emanating from the analysed research data that was collected through face-to-face individual interviews. The purpose was to use the anecdotes provided from the participants' responses to answer the main research question that was posed during the initial stages of conducting research: What is the phenomenological experience of the people in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province in relation to grieving and mourning rituals? This was the final step in the application of Braun & Clark's (2018) Thematic analysis. This phase of the analytic process involved the final writing-up of the patterns/themes of the research findings. This section was to essentially interpret the five main themes as well as the subsequent sub-themes that emerged while conducting a research analysis on the study implemented on eight community members who are permanent residents of this small rural town. These participants are of African descent and are traditionalistic in the sense that they preserve an African customary way of life – including that of practicing mourning rituals in the traditional sense. The results are illustrative of these eight participants respectively. In this section, I have also discussed the themes with their findings and meanings as they relate to the literature on mourning within an African context. This discussion will be guided by the study's theoretical framework models and the literature review.

4.2 Presentation and Discussion of Findings

After thematic analysis was conducted on the eight transcribed interviews, an average of 46 codes were identified, which were further categorised into 5 overarching themes and 7 sub-themes. The main themes are:

1. The African worldview in relation to traditional mourning rituals
2. Distinctive traditional bereavement rituals conceptualise grief.
3. The effects of Covid-19 restrictions on traditional mourning rituals
4. The mourning environment may not necessarily be peaceful.
5. Modernisation has changed traditional mourning rituals.

The sub-themes emanate from the second main theme.

4.2.1 The African worldview in relation to traditional mourning rituals.

"We are different people in Africa …that's where we learn about ourselves".

The African worldview as an important component for the study of mourning within the traditionalistic African context is an overarching theme that encapsulates the main premise of the study and what the actual phenomenological experiences of mourning for each participant entails. Having a basic understanding of this theme and its central idea of what constitutes being an African is important as it directly correlates to the meaning-making behind such mourning rituals and explains why they even exists in the first place. Therefore, to be able to fully conceptualise what death means for African people, including those factors which surround the process of mourning and grieving for this cohort of people, one needs to understand the African worldview and the different ways in which Africans conceive the world in which they live in. The rest of the themes are directly linked to this main theme, as they each share similar notions or ideas that primarily develop from this theme.

South Africa is colloquially known as the "Rainbow Nation" as it is a country of diversity and a multitude of unique cultures. The true essence of our county's multicultural nature stems from having an expansive number of races, languages, religious beliefs, ethnic communities, customs, socioeconomic classes and the list goes on. Because of the richness of our African cultures, there is a vast array of traditional cultural practices and customs that govern the way of life for many South Africans – in particular people in black communities. There is no doubt that African people typically ascribe to a type of distinctive livelihood that most people who aren't of African descent are not likely to fully comprehend. This is because the *African worldview* forms the basis of the day-to-day realities of the African person. Therefore, this phenomenon sort of predisposes this cohort of people to deal with or understand the world in an already "influenced" manner. Furthermore, although Africans conceive their social environment and how it functions in a peculiar way, this doesn't necessarily mean that every member of an African culture should automatically subscribe to this notion or way of life (Hook, 2015). However, even though this may be the case, the majority of African people do in fact place a substantially high value on this customary way of living. This sentiment is supported by this statement made by a 36-year-old mother of two young children:

"…as an African person, I'm very proud of my culture. And, yeah, I'm very happy to be African… privileged to be to call myself an African, it makes me very proud to be associated with African culture in general" **(Participant 2, 36-yeal-old female)**

Additionally, the study found that African people feel like they are the result of their ancestors, and that they are meant to be united as Africans. Some of the participants felt like these rituals need to be performed to be identified as Africans who are linked to one another. They also postulate that Africans have a rich culture, and that mourning rituals serve as a purpose of keeping this culture alive. Therefore, the African worldview forms the most basic component of what it means to be African. It plays a very important role in the attempt to conceptualise how the African person relates to their own extremities, and how they conceive their own realities to place meaning to their lives, as made evident by the following sentiment that was shared by **Participant 1, a 64-year-old female** in one of the interviews:

"*…participating in these rituals, I feel as a whole person, as an African. I feel as if I don't lack anything if I observe this custom… I feel whole as an African".*

Furthermore, being part of the African culture allows the African person to have a strong sense of self. It helps to reveal more about who the individual is through their culture. It is more of an aspect of identifying themselves, and in this case, identifying as a traditional black woman. The affiliation to this traditional type of lifestyle teaches the African person about who they are, their cultural roots as well as where they come from.

This strong sense of self becomes the building block that forms the person's African identity which subsequently connect them with a cohort of people who strengthen their affiliation to the culture. In an individual interview, the following participant expressed how being in touch with their African roots as well as their ancestral origins formed the foundation of their own sense of self, personal identity and how they were able to learn more about themselves:

"Such mourning rituals also made me feel more in touch with my African roots as I said, where I come from, my background, it builds all of that up… this is a very important building block for my own personal identity as a black person" **(Participant 2, 36-year-old female).**

In so doing, the individual will most likely feel like they belong to a group or community with whom they are able to share similar cultural beliefs with as it feels like they are sharing and experiencing one in the same as Africans. In another interview, a 21-year-old female participant was able to share their personal accounts of how it felt to belong/be affiliated with the African culture. She expressed that they essentially felt the feeling of belonging to other people who shared a similar cultural belief system and historical views as herself.

This perspective is pivotal for the study of mourning within the traditionalistic African context, and it forms the foundation of these guidelines in which these rituals are individualised, prioritised and ultimately performed as mourning rituals play a very essential role in the lives as black people. As we develop an understanding of these guidelines, one has a better chance of conceptualising some intrinsic details of some of the grieving processes of African people. Essentially, we come to the understanding that mourning rituals (as a tradition) are not only passed on from one generation to the next through the process of socialisation but are also a shared experience between members of a community. As a result of this intergenerational transference of cultural knowledge, such traditions can be preserved for future generations. Cultural preservation can be thus achieved. Cultural preservation basically implies that those scared teachings of these traditional mourning rituals should essentially be taught at a very young age to preserve its importance for future generations. As a senior citizen and someone who has practised such rituals for many years, the first participant, who is a 64-year-old female, expressed that the younger generation should inextricably know about such rituals which are incredibly sacred and unique to the African community. In this way, these customs can remain the same to pass the sacred knowledge to the next generation thus be preserved for future generations. The culture cannot be lost. The following opinions were shared by these participants regarding the matter of cultural preservation:

> "*…there's certain traditions and customs that are sacred and unique to us, you know as African people… should be preserved in a way"* **(Participant 3, 21-year-old female).**
>
> *"In isiZulu we always say that "lighotjwa lisemanzi"*[1] *we need to speak to our children about our culture for them to develop their love for their culture"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female.)**

Findings from the first theme speaks to the uniqueness of African people and the black community as a whole, and how they ascribe to a distinct yet peculiar type of lifestyle. This frames Mkhize's (2004) theory about using the Afrocentric paradigm to interpret why the African person would be subjected to certain cultural activities, and in this case, mourning practices. The study has found that this cohort of people place a lot of value on their traditional

[1] An African proverb meaning to correct or handle a situation while it is still in its infancy stages.

way of life as they exhibit an overt sense of pride each time they reflected upon their African roots or culture in general.
In this individual interview, a professional schoolteacher expressed that:

> *"… mourning rituals are our pride as Africans… they are a part of my identity of being an African"* **(Participant 4, 31-year-old male).**

This statement suggests that the participant's culture plays a significant role in how he perceives himself as well as in relation to his environment. Additionally, these findings illustrate that the study's theoretical framework, which is the Afrocentric paradigm, is the blueprint for the African worldview as it also provides a description of the way Africans view and describe themselves (Asante, 2007). The findings also propose that to help people develop a more comprehensive understanding of African people, the study had to thus position the African person within their own cultural context and historical framework (Mazama, 2001). The study also found that another function of mourning within a socio-cultural system is the preservation of cultural heritage and people's traditions, and as such, these mourning rituals enable people to form a group identity and organise themselves as a collective whole (Ademiluka, 2009), which thus relates to one of the social aspects of mourning.

Expanding on this, the following 36-year-old interviewee indicated that:

> *"…as an African person, I'm very proud of my culture. And, yeah, I'm very happy to be African… privileged to be to call myself an African, it makes me very proud to be associated with African culture in general"* **(Participant 2, 36-year-old female).**

The findings and the opinion of this participant further demonstrate that one of the main reasons why Africans observe these customs is to feel connected or linked to one another. This provides a sense of unity in a shared goal of keeping their African culture alive. Whenever people gather to mourn their deceased in their own customary manner, they subsequently revive a renewed sense of themselves which solidifies how legitimate their social organisation is (Ademiluka, 2009). This shared objective forms the foundation for one of the cornerstones which essentially explains the main constituents of what it means to be African. Formulating a basic understanding of the central idea behind what this theme represents will help people have a grasp on the meaning-making behind such traditions and why they even exist in the first place.

Therefore, the African worldview is a pivotal component for one to be able to conceptualize what death truly means for African people, including those factors adjoining this phenomenon.

4.2.2 Distinctive traditional bereavement rituals conceptualise grief.

"African people have an entirely different grieving process than any other culture. This solidifies how distinctively unique and special our black culture is."

Since the entire process of grieving and mourning is relative to context, the way African people conceptualise, behave and express their emotions towards this unique phenomenon can be misunderstood/mis conceptualised by some of their non-black counterparts. As a result, this theme postulates that most African people have developed an array of distinctive traditional rituals to deal with bereavement after the loss of a loved one. These idiosyncratic mourning rituals are first and foremost approved by the African community and are ultimately used to help remedy the effects and pain caused by grief. This theme also captures the true essence of what it means to explore mourning rituals through an African lens by placing the focus on the shared belief, understanding and behaviours that African people have when it comes to dealing with grief or loss.

As mentioned previously, one of the leading objectives of this study is to ultimately understand and describe African people and their lived experiences within their own cultural/traditionalistic environment. Since the entire process of grieving and mourning is relative to context, most African communities (particularly those people within a black population) depend on indigenous healing practices such as performing different mourning rituals in order to deal with grief. The second main theme consists of a variety of distinctive traditional bereavement rituals which fully support the notion that was shared by a 36-year-old mother of two young children, which is that there are certain mourning rituals that are unique to her as a black woman, and thus there is a particular traditional procedure that she has to follow. Concurrently, the idea here is to place some emphasis on how these traditional grieving and mourning practices – which may be considered by the average non-black person to be different from the usually "acceptable" Eurocentric grieving practices - could potentially be misconstrued by those individuals who may not fully grasp what they entail. This is mainly due to the fact that non-Africans usually do not mourn the way Africans do, and this is

attributed to the notion of the African culture being so different from any other culture (Asuquo, 2011). This is what a 27- year- old male courier driver and a 22- year- old female student from Rosebank College expressed about what they thought of these mourning rituals: "*African culture is so different from any other, and we do things that would shock other people… that makes us unique"* **(Participant 6, 27 -year -old male)** *"…seeing how they mourn, you now are aware that us as black people, we are different, in our own way"* **(Participant 8, 22- year -old female).** However, despite the fact that these misconceptions do exist, the notion behind this theme postulates that the African community has long developed an array of distinctive traditional mourning rituals to deal with bereavement after the loss of a loved one. Such rituals are mainly used to help remedy the effects and pain caused by grief.

Furthermore, it is no secret that the African culture has somewhat of a strict policy when it comes to how their traditions should be practiced as well as governed. This cohort of people believe that for a funeral to go according to plan, there must be order during the planning of the funeral. The study found that the in the traditional African culture, a lot of people are very stringent in carrying out certain traditions. Therefore, even though these rituals or practices may be peculiar in nature, they are first and foremost approved by the African community. The implication here is that the implementation of these mourning rituals is deemed as a cultural necessity and is thus expected. This means that there are certain things that Africans need to consistently observe as being part of the African culture – and this is done by sticking to the rules and regulations of said customs, and by no means necessary should the importance and the value of this tradition be undermined and underappreciated in any way possible. Also, accepting the customary way of mourning is a key component of why it is deemed a cultural necessity. This notion is supported by the following statements made by the eighth participant:

> "*…rituals are important things which has to be done in the process of mourning… We do not do it any other way. It is culture and it has been like that"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female).**

Also, it is worthwhile to note that although these distinctive bereavement rituals were created for the purpose of healing a bereaved individual, they remain different in nature while simultaneously serving a unique purpose. In a nutshell, the uniqueness of these mourning rituals solidifies how distinctive these grieving processes are within the African culture. Additionally, not only do these rituals serve a different purpose, but there is also a symbolic meaning attached to each one respectively. To further demonstrate on this point, the 31-year

male schoolteacher and a 29-year-old male Reverend at a local church have shared their personal experiences in this regard:

> "*…of why it needs to be done…this is our practice, and these are the reasons why we are doing that"* **(Participant 4, 31-year-old male).**
>
> *"…they have significant meanings or symbolism…"* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).**

To further elaborate on this matter of meaning and symbolism, in African culture, a funeral is not just a funeral. There's a lot that goes into it. Firstly, the deceased's home automatically becomes the point of reference. This is also where the funeral will take place. The whole family gathers here, including both immediate and extended family members. Those relatives who are not nearby will have to travel to this place of residence upon receiving the news. This is where everyone will be stationed and are expected to remain until the day of the actual funeral. This is also the preferred setting where the news of the passing should be broken to the family. There is also a number of other elements within mourning that are meant to play a certain social role in society, for example, the washing of the deceased's body and the slaughtering of specific animals (which is an integral component of the entire process) are some of the rituals used to dignify the deceased. Immediately upon receiving the news, the television and radio must be switched off, while all the mirrors inside the house are covered with blankets. A room is designated (usually the deceased's bedroom or the main bedroom of the house) where every item in the room is removed and placed elsewhere and only the matrass remains. This mattrass is then placed flat on the bedroom floor. This room will be treated sacred as it is where people will specifically come to offer their condolences, their prayers, moral support/words of encouragement and any kind of emotional/psychological support to the grieving family. The matrass is placed flat on the floor as it symbolises the deceased's current state of being – which is that he/she is laying down and is no more or no longer alive. After everything is cleared out of that room and the matrass is flat on the floor, the deceased's next of kin is expected to sit and sleep on this matrass for the entire duration of the grieving period. However, it is important to note that only the women are permitted on this mattress and not the men, for example, when a husband passes on, then his widow, his mother, grandmother, his sister (s) and even aunt (s) will be the ones on the mattrass. Furthermore, a white candle will be consistently lit (day and night) from the day of receiving the news until the day of the funeral and will be placed on the floor next to the mattress. This white candle symbolises the constant physical life that was once lived by the deceased and the light that it gives is a representation of life. The candle also has a spiritual connotation as well as described in the following statement made by a male Reverend

of a local church in Bethal: "*…the symbolism of Christ in being the light"* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).**

Other factors consider the cause of death, or depending on how the person died, will ultimately determine when/how the body will be brought back home. Sometimes the body of the deceased is not allowed inside the homestead as the traditional African belief for someone who has died from an unnatural cause of death such as a car accident, suicide, murder, etc is to prohibit their bodies from entering the premises. It is believed that such actions will prevent a bad omen form transpiring. Instead, the body will be brought back home on the morning of the actual funeral and not the day before. In such instances, the coffin will remain outside the yard and doesn't enter the house. Should the body be brought back inside the home, then the same unnatural death will befall another family member, as mentioned by this participant: *"Other family members might go through the same thing"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male)**. The day before the funeral, certain members of the immediate family will go to the morgue to wash and prepare the body themselves as a sign of their last respects to the deceased. However, the belief here is that only immediate family members are permitted to touch the body of the deceased, and not friends or extended relatives. Thereafter, they will come back home with the deceased, and will place the coffin in that designated sacred room. Moreover, the African culture believes that one should "talk" to the deceased whenever they wash their body or even when they transport the body back home or to the cemetery. Constant communication with the deceased is crucial during the mourning period and there is a specific way in which this is done. The *"umlahla nkosi"*[2] is used by specific elders within the family, preferably males who are the seniors of the immediate family.

As we've already mentioned (however briefly) the importance of slaughtering specific animals, and how this is an integral component of the African mourning process. The slaughtering of a cow specifically in the African culture, and not just any other animal, has a very significant meaning. The skin of the cow is needed to be placed on top of the coffin as an important representation or symbol of the deceased's blanket, which is believed will be used in the afterlife and is also a way for them to traditionally keep warm in their final resting place. This is sort of like a spiritual blanket that keeps them "safe" and warm even though they are no longer physically with us. This custom is explained by the following participant: "*… to signify a spiritual blanket to keep them warm…"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male)**. This cow

[2] The branch of a specific tree that is used to communicate with the spirit of the deceased.

needs to be slaughtered the day before the funeral to extract the skin while it's still fresh. The family will often eat the tripe of the cow that same night and the rest of the meat will be prepared to feed the people attending the funeral the next day. The family eats the tripe as a way to gather the whole family before the actual funeral. The cow is also a symbol for unity as mentioned in this comment: "*…you can't slaughter a cow alone… you slaughter a cow for a community"* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male)**. In the same context, when it comes to the passing of a father-figure who was the head of the family, there are definitely no compromises made in this regard - a cow has to be slaughtered. However, at a later stage of the mourning process, during what is known as a cleansing ceremony, a goat is bought instead of a cow and is brought to the homestead. During this stage, the African culture considers the slaughtering of a goat as the more appropriate tradition of cleansing any bad luck that may occur or might have already occurred due to the death that has taken place within the family. This is done to get rid of any bad luck that is linked to the death. The family members are also cleansed with a mixture commonly known as *"umswane"* [3]. However, although the cleansing ceremony takes place at a much later stage after the funeral has taken place, during the grieving period, the mourning process is ongoing and continues even after the actual funeral because this process doesn't just end on the day of the funeral. Basically, this is a healing process that starts when the family receives the news that their loved one has passed on and continues for those days up until the time comes to bury the deceased, and for many, it does indeed persist even for an extended period afterwards. Evidently, whenever a family and the community at large mourn a loved one in a respectable manner, then this type of honour that isn't just bestowed on the dead body itself, but also on the spirit and the memory of the deceased.

The following excerpts are derived from a 64-year-old retired matron of a local hospital and a 36-year-old mother of two. Both participants are females and share that:

> *"African people have an entirely different grieving process than any other culture"* **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female).**
>
> *"…there are certain mourning rituals that are unique to us…a particular traditional procedure that is followed"* **(Participant 2, 36-year-old female.)**

[3] A traditional African mixture used for cleansing which contains water, the bile of a goat and other content of the goat's intestines.

The findings for the second theme as well as the sentiments shared by these participants indicate the importance of understanding a phenomenon in relation to its context. By an extension, the lived experiences of African people subsequently need to be analysed in relation to the environment in which these people live as well as the type of customs they inherently adhere to. Thus, since the process of grieving and mourning is relative to the context, the study found that such practices could potentially be misconstrued by some people who may not necessarily understand their traditional and social meanings to the full extent. This is because as common as death is, people respond to it with varying degrees of mourning and grieving processes – a notion that has been derived from the works of Makhubu (1988). Despite this, the African community has a relatively extensive history of unique and indigenous cultural practices – especially those which relate to the mourning rituals that help guide people in how to deal with the pain that comes with the loss of a loved one (Asuquo, 2011). However, although such bereavement rituals were generated for the purpose of healing, they are naturally different from each other, while each one simultaneously serves a special purpose. The motive behind this theme shares a similar notion to that of Nwoye's (2000) African Grief Therapy model in the sense that these unique bereavement rituals are practiced in a specific way and were fundamentally created to remedy the effects and pain caused by grief. This perspective solidifies the true distinctiveness of these grieving processes that binds the African culture to the healing of its people as well as facilitating an understanding and acceptance of grief-work within an African context (Makgahlela, 2016).

The next section of our discussion is a culmination of the seven sub-themes which relate to this main theme:

Sub-theme 1: Mourning rituals are a unifying agent.

"A death of a loved one brings a lot of people together".

The first sub-theme under this main theme looks at *mourning rituals as a unifying agent for African people.* Mourning together not only as a family but as a community reiterates the idea of oneness and a sense of interconnectedness/solidarity amongst members of a certain group. As a result of this unified community, certain attributes that are inherently of value for this cohort of people will develop and subsequently form those compartmentalised assumptions that govern their way of life and the ways in which they think about the world. Furthermore,

funerals bring people together- distance does not impede long lost relatives or loved ones from coming together to bury a loved one.

The passing of a loved one is one of the hardest times for any family. This is the most crucial moment where people rely on each other the most. The task of mourning is not just for a single individual to bear on their own, but the entire family and community plays a big role too. Mourning together not only as a family but as a community as a whole reiterates the idea of oneness and a sense of interconnectedness/solidarity amongst members of a certain group. It is also a way of connecting with each other. The mourning period also allows for a bonding experience where people connect with each other in a unified way. Such an experience brings a sense of unity and that of belonging, which ultimately makes grieving a lot easier for African people. The notion of a unified stance is expressed by the following participant: "… *as black people, we believe in unity and unifying as one"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female).** As a result of this unified community, certain traditions that are inherently of value for this cohort of people, for example, engaging in mourning rituals, will develop and subsequently form those compartmentalised assumptions that govern their way of life and the ways in which they think about the world, made evident in this statement made by a 29 year old male Reverend for a local church: *"… it brings unity when we do that ritual… they help people come together"* **(Participant 7, 29 year old male).** Furthermore, since each and every relative that does not live in the same household or even region has to be informed of the passing, they are made aware as soon as the immediate family learns of the news so that they will have sufficient time to make the necessary arrangements to come. It is customary for relatives, friends, colleagues and even acquaintances to travel long and far distances to attend these funerals – some even travelling across provinces and/or borders just so they can have the opportunity to pay their final respects and say their last goodbyes to the deceased. One of the interviewees, a 22-year-old female student, expressed that although she didn't have enough money at the time to attend her friend's father's funeral, she had to make other arrangements to attain the funds so she could be there physically for her friend, and not just emotionally. She was adamant that her presence was necessary as it was a sign of respect for her relationship with her friend. Essentially, African funerals bring people together. This means that distance does not impede even those considered to be long lost relatives or loved ones from coming together to bury a loved one. This tradition of unity also signifies respect to the remaining family members as well. As mentioned earlier, paying final respects as a community provides a sense of

interconnectedness and that of "togetherness". Through these mourning rituals, a lot of people come together to offer their condolences and their support to the grieving family. Therefore, the idea of unity is reinforced through the engagement of these mourning rituals, a notion which is inextricably supported by the following statement made by one of the participants: "… *It's all about togetherness, this mentality of binary thinking "them and us" it's not there in the African context"* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).**

This theme also recapitulates the idea of a shared sense of grief and that of trying to help relieve the pain of loss whenever people mourn together as a unit. This indicates that the community has an important role to play in ensuring that the family does heal in a proper and orderly manner by coming together for the family, especially in their time of grief when the bereaved need their support the most. The same participant also revealed that grieving as a unit is sort of trying to help heal the wounds or make the family that has lost their loved one feel like they are not alone in this difficult time, and that people are aware of the pain that they are going though.

The focus of this theme was to reiterate the idea of mourning as a collective whole instead of a single unit. The findings indicate that mourning together provides a sense of interconnectedness and serves to bring solidarity by connecting people through the shared sense of grief that is experienced by every individual who has been affected in one way or the other by the loss of a loved one.

The following excerpts were shared by a young female student as well as a mother of two young children. These women believed in the spirit of unity that black people can attain which can be facilitated through the practice of mourning rituals. The shared that:

> *"…as black people, we believe in unity and unifying as one"* **(Participant 8, 22-year -old female).**
>
> *"Through these mourning rituals, a lot of people come together to offer their condolences and their support to the grieving family"* ***(Participant 2, 36-year-old female.)***

The participants in this study have strongly expressed that sharing this type of bonding experience with other people that are going through the same thing has made their grieving experiences that much easier. Also, these findings suggest that mourning as a collective can help address both the psychological and interpersonal needs for the bereaved individual(s),

which is a premise that is in line with Nwoye's (2013) inaugural lecture at the University of KwaZulu Natal. Additionally, African funerals are also considered to be very social events for the community (Baloyi, 2008). Furthermore, other findings brought forth by thoroughly investigating these results shows that there is a very high chance that the death of a loved one will most certainly bring a lot of people to the same vicinity (which is the deceased's home) as it is customary for extended family members, friends, colleagues etc to attend an African funeral by all means necessary- no matter the distance and/or the status quo of their relationships (Baloyi, 2014). The participants also expressed that this extensive attendance of funerals also signifies who the deceased was, and the kind of role they played not just within the family context, but the community as a whole - by all those who knew him/her, fiends or foes (Ademiluka, 2009). This tradition of unity shows respect for the deceased and the remaining family members as well.

Sub-theme 2: Engaging in mourning rituals provides a sense of altruism.

"Makes you feel good because you know that you've made a difference in someone's life during their time of need".

This theme observes how lending a helping hand to another individual during their time of grief can actually yield positive results for all parties involved. The idea is that people who choose to participate in these mourning rituals solely out of their selfless concern for the well-being of those who are bereaved may also gain a positive effect out of the experience.

"…it makes me feel happy inside to say I have shown my support to people… it makes me feel that I have been part and parcel of their grieving moments. So, I've shown them that I also care about their loss. So, it makes me feel happy and fulfilled." **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female)**. This sentiment shared by the first participant beautifully illustrates how most people feel after they've provided any kind of assistance to another individual during their time of grief. One of the main purposes of the second sub- theme was to observe and/or demonstrate how lending a helping hand to another person during their time of grief can result in a positive outcome for both parties involved. The idea here is that people who choose to participate in these mourning rituals solely out of their selfless concern for the well-being of those who are bereaved may also gain a positive affect out of the experience. This is what this participant

expressed they felt whenever they offered their support to some of the grieving families: "*…when I saw how much relief my support gave her, that made me feel very happy"* **(Participant 2, 36-year-old female).** Also, another 22-year-old female participant added that these families may also feel a sense of gratitude towards those who are helping them because they are in some ways relieved of most of the things that they are supposed to do and the overwhelming amount of time and efforts that goes into planning a funeral.

Moreover, people take the time to offer physical support to the bereaved family to alleviate some of their daily responsibilities. They take turns to offer their availability so as to help the bereaved family out with some of the chores around the house such as cooking and cleaning. This kind of physical support helps the family to lessen the stress of having to focus on the daily responsibilities and place the majority of their focus solely on grieving. Essentially, the support from the community enables the family to grieve in a way that is unhindered – with the main aim of making the family's grieving process that much easier. Also, what's important is that support for the grieving family comes through in various other ways such as physical, emotional and even spiritual support. Not only do people come together to get things done such as cooking and cleaning – a term commonly known as *"ukunika izandla"*[4], but mostly through prayers and emotional support as well. The seventh participant, who is a male Reverend, expressed that he has contributed to a grieving family in need to show that he is with them and mourning with them as a family. As a pastor of a congregation, the main source of support he has offered is prayer and spiritual comfort and guidance for those family members who required it. Another important directive when it comes to the notion of emotional support is that during the mourning period, it is where all forms of counselling are offered. Results from the study also postulate that most black people within the African culture do not believe in going to doctors or psychologists to speak about some of their emotional problems. They thus only rely on their church members, pastors or even bishops to support the family emotionally. These people offer prayers, they offer support, and most black people do depend on them for that important aspect of psychological support. Some people may even offer financial support to the grieving family as well. When people offer support to the bereaved family, it's also a sign of paying their final respects to the deceased as well. This is an important tradition for black people as respecting the deceased, who is now considered to be an ancestor, is an intrinsic

[4] An African term used to describe an act of service usually in the context of physical assistance.

part of the traditionalistic mourning process. it is regarded as the African way of life, and it forms part of who they are:

Another important aspect to consider when observing this phenomenon is that of hospitality. Hospitality during the mourning period is an important aspect of black culture. A unique way in which the bereaved African family shows gratitude to the people who have come to support them during their grieving period is by showing them hospitality – and this is predominately done by making sure that these visitors are well fed throughout the duration of the burial process, as one participant shares that "…*you have to ensure that you provide them with proper food…"* **(Participant 4, 31 year old male).** Since we've already established that it is customary for African people to attend funerals in large numbers, the family would then be required to buy groceries in exceedingly large quantities in order to cater for these masses of people who have come from far to pay their final respects to the deceased. And because many of these people would be travelling from afar to pay their last respects, it is expected that the family ensures that they are properly fed and well taken care of before they go back home. During the week (while the family waits for the funeral to take place), people close to the family and those who are in and around the community such as neighbours, church members, friends, colleagues, etc are also expected to be taken care. These people are usually given biscuits and scones, along with tea or juice as a way of thanking them for offering their support and for paying their condolences to the family. Findings suggest that all of this is a traditional way of showing gratitude in the African culture – by making sure that people are satisfied and happy during that time period, a notion that was derived from a statement made by the following participant: "*That's a way of thanking them sort of to say thank you for supporting us"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male).**

The sentiments shared by the following two participants depicts a picture of how people feel when they've helped someone else in need during the grieving period:

> *"…makes you feel good because you know that you've made a difference in someone's life during their time of need"* **(Participant 4, 31-year-old male).**
>
> *"…there's a sense of relief and gratitude from the family… it makes me happy to be here and assisting this person. And just to let them know that I'm here"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female).**

All the participants in this study have indicated in their responses that they have indeed provided some kind of assistance (whether physically, emotionally and financially) to another person(s) during their time of grief – all in varying degrees, of course. These findings also reveal that lending a helping hand towards another individual during these moments where they may be the most vulnerable does have the potential to result in a more positive outcome for both parties involved, although such outcomes are experienced in different ways. Essentially, the main premise of the findings from this theme demonstrates the different ways in which those who have selflessly chosen to concern themselves with the well-being of others have also benefited from the experience as well. Nwoye (2013) proposed that most community members will show up in solidarity to offer their support and lend a helping hand in various ways (some may even shed a few tears together with the family) such as offering financial help, bringing over refreshments, cooking utensils or whatever else the family may need during that time directly reflects the participants' responses regarding their own experiences in such instances. Additionally, the study has found that whenever the bereaved family would receive any sort of outside help, they would then be able to place the entirety of their focus on actually grieving the loss of their loved one instead of concerning themselves with other extremities both related and unrelated to the funeral. As a result of this, these families were afforded the opportunity to mourn in such a way that is unhindered by external forces. Lastly, the foundation of this theme is essentially built on the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which is a well know Afrocentric value reflected in volunteering help for the bereaved.

Sub-theme 3: There are varying degrees of involvement in the mourning ritual.

"They all play a different role, important in their own right".

The central idea with this theme is that different people will be involved at different stages or levels with these mourning rituals. This means that there will be contrasting roles that various people will play at a certain point in time during the grieving process – all of which are important in their own right.

The central idea with this theme is that different people will be involved at different stages or at varying levels with these mourning rituals. This may also mean that there will be contrasting roles and responsibilities that various people will play at a certain point in time during the grieving process – all of which are important in their own right. Another factor to

consider is that there are differentiated roles that people play at varying degrees depending on how close they were to the deceased or the type of relationship they had with the deceased. Some of these people will automatically play a bigger role than others as they may be the nearest person to the deceased or may have had a much closer relationship with the deceased than what other people have. These individuals are usually the immediate family members. Also, some people are more likely to play a key role or are considered more important in the arrangement of the funeral because without those people, the funeral itself may not even proceed or take place at all.

Furthermore, these bereaved individuals will most likely voluntarily sign up to take over the funeral responsibilities as a way of grieving or mourning their loved one. The responses from a 64-year-old female put forward the idea that taking on these responsibilities sort of becomes their way of healing from the pain they are experiencing with the loss as they feel like planning a proper burial or send-off for their loved one will help them come to terms with their loss. In so doing, it is believed that the deceased will always be with them in spirit, and thus assisting them to come to terms with the loss. Additionally, the elders also play a very important role as they are regarded as the seniors of the family and the custodians of these traditional mourning rituals. This means that these elders of the family have an important role to play in terms of guiding the family on how to conduct the entire funeral process, including how the rest of the family members should conduct themselves during this period. In the African culture, we essentially accord them that status or the role of seniority during the mourning process, for instance, whenever the news of the passing is broken, it is traditionally the elders of the family that would normally be contacted first. Then they are the ones to inform the rest of the family. This procedure of doing things is also sign of respect. This is done to acknowledge the fact that the elders have been through life and have a lot more experience than we do. They are thus able to give the proper direction because we look up to them as they are the ones who are more competent in teaching the next generation, as supported by the following extract: "*... if we learn from adults/elders then we'll be able to teach the next generation"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male).**

The study found that the planning process for any traditional African funeral is an ongoing, extensive and often times strenuous event that requires a substantial amount of time and a significant number of people who would be willing to be fully involved as well. It's basically all hands-on deck. The findings related to this theme suggest that different people are

usually involved at varying levels and in varying degrees with these mourning rituals. It has found that the same people will have contrasting roles and responsibilities at copious intervals during the grieving period.

The abovementioned observation is in conjunction with the following response from a 27-year-old male participant:

> *"…they all play a different role, important in their own right…different people will take on different responsibilities"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male)**

However, these roles are often times dependent on how close the person was to the deceased or the type of relationship they had with them. The study also found that whenever certain people would take on these responsibilities, it became somewhat of a mechanism for healing as it is believed that planning a proper burial for your loved ones will naturally help you come to terms with their loss. Also, by engaging in such, the deceased will remain with you in spirit, guiding and protecting you for the rest of your life. Moreover, in the African culture, the elders of the family play the most important role as they are traditionally accorded the status of seniority within the family dynamic. These seniors are therefore responsible for guiding the funeral process and giving direction to each of the family members on how they should conduct themselves during this bereavement period and in general as well.

Sub-theme 4: Certain rituals are gender specific.

"There are specific things that the men can do that the women can't, and vice versa".

The fourth sub-theme that directly correlates with the distinctiveness of these mourning rituals is the fact that *certain rituals are gender specific***.** This simply means that there are prevalent gender roles during the mourning process, which will then inadvertently lead to obvious differences in the mourning rituals applied by men and women.

There are specific gender roles assigned to each gender during the mourning process**.** This simply means that there are prevalent gender roles during the mourning process, which will then inadvertently lead to obvious differences in the mourning rituals applied by men and

women respectively. For example, whenever the deceased is a male, then only the male family members are permitted to go to the morgue and wash the body. And if the deceased was female, then the same rule applies. There are other factors to consider as well such as only the women are allowed to sit on the matrass that is used to grieve on, and that only the men of the immediate family will go look for a cow. Also, only the women are allowed to prepare the food while the men are the only ones who can slaughter the cow. In the case of a deceased's widow, she will be expected to be dress in all black. This becomes her mourning attire for however amount of time her in-laws allow her to mourn for her husband. This is done so that people are aware that she' in mourning. However, the same rule doesn't apply for a widower who's in mourning for his wife. In this instance, he will only be allowed to place just a black piece of cloth on the right shoulder of his jacket. The widower is also not expected to mourn for an extended period of time. On the day of the funeral, only the male figures of the immediate family such as the grandfather or the eldest uncle are authorized to carry the *"umlahla nkosi"*[5]. They are in fact, the ones who are expected to lead the funeral procession throughout. It is also the responsibility of the men in the family to dig the grave in the early hours of the morning of the funeral, and after the coffin had been lowered into the ground, most of the men who are in attendance will work together to assist in filling up and covering the grave as well.

Immediately upon receiving the news, certain family members will wear specific items of clothing as a sign of bereavement and respect. Basically, the dress code changes to a more respectable one. The women will wear skirts or dresses, shawls and headwraps to cover their heads and another shawl to cover their shoulders. The men of the family will wear Blazers or jackets and are not allowed to wear shorts or anything sleeveless. Naturally, whenever other African people in public start seeing that, they are immediately made aware that something is happening to this family member, and that they are going through the process of grieving the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, on the morning of the funeral, all members of the family will be dressed in black. The widow will cover her face using a black cloth to make sure that she doesn't make eye contact with the people who are attending the funeral – or anyone for that matter. This tradition or action is a sign of respect to her deceased husband. Concurrently, if the father or the head of the household has passed on, then his eldest son has to wear his jacket inside out and also carry a knobkerrie. This symbolizes that the responsibility has now fallen onto the son to continue to be the man or the head of the house and should take care of the household now that his father is no longer alive.

[5] Ibid.p.51.

It is also important to take into account that grieving for specific bereaved family members continues long after the funeral has taken place. The grieving process for the grieving widow doesn't stop. It will end usually after 12 months. However, in the case that the wife has passed on, as a husband, the widower can only mourn for a period of 6 months. Essentially, the grieving period does take longer if the deceased was an intimate partner as there are certain rituals that have to be performed after the funeral. Furthermore, since it is believed that grief is also associated with death, the bereaved are thus cleansed during this grieving period. A cleansing ceremony symbolises the bereaved acceptance back to the community after this period of seclusion – which also gives the bereaved the opportunity to mourn with little to no interference.

Considering these observations, the following participants shared these responses:

> *"…where only women are allowed to sit there and not men"* ***(Participant 8, 22-year -old student)***
> *"…only men will go look for a cow…"* ***(Participant 6, 27-year-old male)***

This theme speaks directly to the simple fact that in the traditional African culture of mourning, there are specific things that the men can do that the women can't, and vice versa. This means that there are specific gender roles that are both culturally and instinctively ascribed to each gender during these processes of mourning. Much like the work by authors Demetrovics, Kopp, Pilling and Thege (2012), this study also proposes that certain practices are gender- specific, which means there are prevalent gender roles during the mourning process. Such findings further suggest that these prevalent gender roles will often subsequently lead to obvious differences in how mourning rituals are applied by men and women respectively. Furthermore, when talking about these specific gender roles and how each one should be executed, the researcher made an interesting observation: none of the participants appeared to be overly concerned about why each gender had unique responsibilities and why each one was assigned a specific role. This may be an indication that these are some of the traditional norms within the African mourning process, and that such customs are predominately practiced in such a way that certain behaviours that relate to gender roles are deemed as a cultural requirement - which are basically expected from each individual and each gender respectively.

Sub-theme 5: Funeral expenses represent a major drawback in the African mourning process.

"Our funerals as black families have become very expensive".

The issue of *funeral expenses* as a sub-theme is substantially important and can be considered to be one of the more vital components of the mourning process as it highlights one of the major drawbacks of this cultural phenomenon. The financial costs surrounding the burial of a loved one can often be overwhelming for most families and may even lead to debt.

Most people are already familiar with the reality of planning a funeral and how expensive this process can be. The issue of funeral expenses as a sub-theme is substantially important in this regard and can be considered to be one of the more vital components of the African mourning process as it highlights one of the major drawbacks within this cultural phenomenon. The financial costs surrounding the burial of a loved one requires a substantial amount of money which can be overwhelming for most families – often times even leading to financial constraints that cause these families to go into a lot of debt. Most black families do consider the financial component as the most difficult and stressful aspect of the funeral arrangement process as it leaves many black families financially strained. Unfortunately, in many cases, in an attempt to properly perform all the required mourning rituals and customs, many families end up borrowing money, acquiring loans and getting into debt for a funeral that they cannot really afford. Sometimes, the funeral cover or funeral policy that the deceased had isn't enough to cover the cost of all expenditures. Therefore, giving the deceased a proper burial has now superseded the expenditures that the family is really faced with. This is a sad reality for most black families. However, the upside to all of this is that having a funeral cover helps finance the funeral even if it does come unexpectedly. Numerous black families are fortunate enough to prepare themselves in advance by taking out sufficient or adequate funeral policies because *"… you'll find that death does not come when you have money…"* **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female).** Also, many black people have a collective or communal system of saving money such as a burial scheme or "stokvel" as it is formally known. People come together and create these burial societies as way to mitigate against the financial crisis that comes as a result of death in a family, as well as to help the bereaved family reduce the financial costs of planning

a funeral. The following participant revealed how members of the community would come together for those who may not necessarily have the means to bury their loved one: *"…members who are preparing anything for the burial society if you don't have anything* **(Participant 5, 61-year-old female).**

While we're on this topic, let's not forget that for most families, the breadwinner usually bears most of the financial responsibilities of the funeral. There's usually that one person (sometimes more) who is the main source of income for the family. This individual brings in most of the money and they are usually the ones who bear the responsibility of taking care of everything in that household - if not most of the financial components of the burial process.

Since the study has previously established that the funeral planning process can be highly strenuous, the findings also consider that the reality of planning such a socially big event can prove to be a very expensive one as well. This is because a majority of South Africans live below the breadline, and most black people live in households where money/resources are in short supply (Demmer & Rothschild, 2011). The study found that in such instances, the cost of funeral expenses can thus be very overwhelming, and often unattainable. Such findings are supported by research done by authors Demmer and Rothschild (2011). Van den Berg (2012) concurs that there is short- and long-term economic impact that emerge after the death of a loved one. The findings from this theme basically consider the prevalent issue of funeral expenses and how this circumstance can be regarded as a key component of the African mourning process because it highlights a major disadvantage within this cultural occurrence. In other words, an expensive funeral for families who can't afford them is likely to cause financial problems, which may then lead to an increase in stress and anxiety levels for those family members who are directly and indirectly faced with this dilemma. In some cases, this may even cause a ripple effect on the rest of the family. Unfortunately, the results from this study have found that this is one of the main reasons why most black families view the financial aspect to be the most difficult part of the funeral arrangement process– with the breadwinner of the family bearing almost all the financial responsibilities. Also, many black people form burial societies as a communal or collective mechanism to mitigate against the financial crisis that is caused by a death in the family.

The above-mentioned findings directly correlate to the following response shared by one of the participants:

"…financial aspect is the most difficult/stressful part of arranging a funeral…it is very expensive and causes family to get into debt and borrowing money…" **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female)**

Furthermore, colonisation and capitalism also had an impact on financing such rituals - with colonisation and apartheid, black people were dispossessed of their cattle and land, whereas they previously did not need to buy cows or meat for the burial of their loved ones. Such actions subsequently increased the financial component of planning such funerals. Also, the financial struggles faced by black people were further perpetuated by the unequal dispersal of capital, opportunities and other political/economic resources among the different races. These are either gained or inherited but are never fairly obtained by every individual in society – a social construct that has been rooted in racism stemming from the Apartheid era (Burawoy, 1981). The study found that the experiences shared by these participants directly correlate with these theories. And because the economy and society are driven by the monetary value that is placed on human beings, most black people are automatically at a disadvantage as they are born into an already unequal play field caused by these existing unequal social class structures (Bourdieu, 1986).

Sub-theme 6: The continuation of emotional ties with the deceased as a coping mechanism.

"Especially for black people, because it's a way for them to keep being connected with their loved ones that they have lost. To them, if they observe these customs, it feels as if they haven't lost the person".

The continuation of emotional ties with the deceased as a coping mechanism for the grieving person is exponentially one of the most important reasons why African people will even engage in mourning rituals in the first place. The idea here is that instead of trying to force the bereaved to release their feelings of loss, the aim would be to preserve the memory and the spiritual presence of the deceased within the family itself and the community as a whole. Such emotional bonds with the deceased will allow the bereaved to experience some sort of relief from the intense feelings associated with grief, thus making it possible for them to move on with their lives.

For African people, these traditional mourning rituals essentially serve to conserve an ongoing connection/relationship between the grieving person and the loved one that they have lost. This means that whenever they properly implement these traditions, then the spirit of the deceased will continue to live among them because *"to them, if they observe these customs, it feels as if they haven't lost the person"* **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female).** And although they have physically lost the person, through these rituals, they will be able to maintain a connection with them and not feel like the person is completely lost to them. Essentially, though the deceased cannot be seen nor touched, their presence will be felt to those they have left behind, so in a way, they keep on living among those they have left behind.

The study has found that losing a loved one is an extremely painful experience, and those remaining family members need to find a way to deal the loss and the pain that would naturally come with the grief. Participant four, a 31-year-old male, also disclosed his feelings towards this matter by asking: "*How do we move forward after our loved one has departed"?* Therefore, the idea here is that instead of trying to force the bereaved to release their feelings of loss, the aim would be to preserve the memory and the spiritual presence of the deceased within the family itself as well as the community. Such emotional bonds with the deceased will allow the bereaved to experience some sort of relief and healing from the intense feelings associated with grief, thus making it possible for them to move on with their lives. Another noteworthy directive stems from how mourning rituals define the healing process for bereaved individuals as "… *their focus will be on grieving* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).** The findings suggest that this process explains the way in which Africans grieve and how they find their healing. The focal point of the matter will be on how to make the whole process become a more bearable one by helping the person accept their new normal of living in a reality where their loved one no longer exists.

Now that we've established the importance of allowing the bereaved to heal from the loss by preserving a continuous relationship with the deceased, the next question we need to ask ourselves is how exactly can this be accomplished? Simply put, what are the different ways through which this relationship can be maintained? The African culture believes that preserving the memory and the spiritual presence of the deceased within the family itself and the community as a whole can aid in this matter. One of the ways in which this can be done is by showing respect for the deceased through a dignified burial. Africans believe that to ensure that their loved one is laid to rest in a peaceful way, their funeral must be conducted in a respectful and dignified way. This is part of respecting the person who has passed on, and mourning

rituals play a significant role in that regard. This also bestows honour on the memory of the deceased.

Another way to honour the memory and the spiritual presence of the deceased is through cleansing ceremonies. After about a month or so (for others three months) after the funeral, most African families will host a family gathering. This is referred to as the cleansing period, which is also more of a memorial service in some sense. However, this one is more pleasant and joyful in nature as the family, friends and other close relatives come together yet again to celebrate the life and memory of the deceased. Cleansing ceremonies serve as a remembrance and memorial of the life once lived by the deceased. It is a way for the remaining loved ones to reconnect with each other again while sharing memories of the deceased. Furthermore, a cleansing ceremony also allows for healing through an emotional release of pain caused by grief. Such ceremonies are performed so that the family comes to terms with the passing of their loved one by emotionally and physically releasing the pain: *"And sometimes to cry it out…show that you are missing this person* **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female).** During this cleansing period, healing from grief usually looks like sharing the good times that were had with the deceased while coming to terms with their death. And since the deceased is now considered to be an ancestor, the family is then able to ask for blessings and protection moving forward. The African culture believes that it is grief that is associated with death hence the bereaved are cleansed. A cleansing ceremony symbolises the bereaved acceptance back to the community after a period of seclusion during the early mourning period. This period of seclusion allowed the person to mourn with little to no interference.

Additionally, there is an African belief that a person's spirit continues to live among loved ones as an ancestor, and their presence is acknowledged through certain rituals. Therefore, to be able to ask for blessings and protection from the deceased as an ancestor, the family needs to first help invite their spirit back home and back to the family as the deceased will be the one who will protect the house and everyone inside - this can be achieved by conducting a cleansing ceremony. This is also a way to officially begin the practice of communicating with the deceased in an ancestral way. However, the deceased would have to be buried for at least three months before this ritual can take place. During this cleansing ceremony, the family will slaughter a goat, brew traditional home-made beer, and only those close immediate family members will go to the cemetery to visit the grave of the deceased and to talk to them. This type of communication acknowledges the deceased as an ancestor and protecter of the family.

The study has identified several different reasons as to why African people will engage in mourning rituals, and this theme is undoubtably the most important reason thus far. Losing a loved one can be an overwhelmingly painful experience, and the remaining family members need to find an effective way to deal with the pain that would naturally come with this grief. The findings from this theme directly correlate to the continuing bonds bereavement model, which was theorized by authors Klass, Nickman and Silverman (1996) and its focal point is the need for the bereaved individual to try and form new bonds or relationships within their own environment after experiencing loss. This theme also speaks to those unique ways in which the bereaved individual can actually maintain some sort of connection to their loved one.

During one of the interviews, one of the participants mentioned the following:

> *"... especially for black people, because it's a way for them to keep being connected with their loved ones that they have lost. To them, if they observe these customs, it feels as if they haven't lost the person"* **(Participant 1, 64-year-old female)**

This response implies that the connection and the emotional ties to the deceased are active bonds and are a very important aspect in the culture of mourning as it is believed that if the grieving person continuously observes these customs in a proper manner, then they would feel like the deceased isn't truly lost to them forever. Some of the other participants also expressed that this meant that they would then be able to preserve a portion of the attachment they had with the deceased while they were still alive. Most importantly, these bonds should be the main lifeline to the bond that already existed with the deceased (Makgahlela, 2016). The study also found that creating such an emotional bond with the spirit of the deceased is perceived as a coping mechanism which helps relieve the pain caused by the grief. The idea here is that instead of forcibly trying to release this pain, they can alternatively preserve the memory and the spiritual presence of the deceased within the family itself and the community as a whole. This can be achieved through the establishment of a continuous role for the deceased in the current lives of the bereaved (Madison, 2005). This African belief postulates that a person's spirit continues to live among loved ones as an ancestor, and their presence is acknowledged through certain rituals. Therefore, findings prove mourning rituals serve to conserve the relationship between the grieving person and the deceased; even though they are no longer physically there. However, such bonds should not be seen as an indication that grief is resolved, but rather as an adaptive response to the perceived loss (Makgahlela, 2016). This type of healing process will make it possible for the person to move on with their life.

Sub-theme 7: African culture links death to bad luck.

"Death is darkness that has overcome the family".

The final sub-theme that relates to the uniqueness of these mourning rituals looks at how the *African culture links death to bad luck.* Although the concept of death bears different meanings for different people, the African culture postulates that whenever these mourning rituals are implemented properly, then the process of transition of the deceased to another state of being within the spiritual world can be justified (Adeyemo, 1979). Therefore, since death is regarded as the only object standing in-between the physical world and the world of the departed souls, certain rituals are required to unite the two worlds. If these rituals do not happen, or are not performed in the correct manner, then the deceased is not considered to be resting peacefully, and their death may subsequently bring along bad luck to the remaining family members.

The African culture affirms that death brings bad luck to those remaining family members as it is believed that after a person within the family has passed on, the rest of the family is sort of "not clean". Therefore, since death is regarded as the only object standing in-between the physical world and the world of the departed souls, certain rituals are required to unite the two worlds and maintain the balance that already exists. However, during the grieving period, if these rituals do not happen, or are not performed in the correct manner, then the deceased is not considered to be resting peacefully, and their death may subsequently bring along bad luck or a bad omen to the remaining family members. So, whenever the family mourns the death of their loved one by performing these rituals, then they have traditionally removed this dark cloud or bad luck that comes with death. This sentiment is shared by some of the participants and is a reflection of how this dark cloud after a person has died symbolises the pain and sadness associated with the loss.

Furthermore, since the African culture has a strong belief that going through the process of mourning as well as performing those subsequent rituals will help remove the bad luck associated with death, there is a specific ritual which needs to be practiced completing this process.

This ritual is called *"ukugezwa"*[6] "*...it's basically a cleansing ceremony"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female).** Additionally, as part of the cleansing ceremony, the process of *"ukugezwa"*[7] is said to remove this dark cloud or bad omen by using the cleansing mixture of *"umswane"* [8]. The immediate family members will wash themselves with this mixture to cleanse themselves of the darkness related to the death of their loved one.

The study found that in the African culture, observing mourning rituals in a culturally acceptable manner helps the deceased to transition into another state of being within the spiritual realm. Thus, since death is regarded as the only entity standing in between the spiritual world and the world of the living, when a person passes on, certain mourning rituals are required to bring these two worlds together to maintain a balance between the two spheres (Adeyemo, 1979). After an extensive search, the findings propose that this very reason forms the basis for performing mourning rituals as Africans regard death as merely a transition into the spiritual world. However, the findings of this study also support the notion that should these rituals not take place, or should they not be practiced in the correct manner, then the deceased will not be able to rest peacefully; and if this happens, their death may subsequently bring bad luck to those remaining family members.

These findings are supported by the following statement:

> *...it's a traditional thing, which helps us because there's always a dark cloud whenever someone dies… it's believed that when you mourn for the person, you remove the dark cloud"* **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female)**

This means that since death in the African culture is generally linked to bad luck in the first place, the participants have a strong belief that mourning and performing these rituals will help remove this bad luck associated with it. The study found that the African culture also believes that grief is associated with death as well, hence the bereaved are cleansed. A cleansing ceremony symbolises the bereaved acceptance back to the community after a period of

[6] A mourning ritual that forms part of the cleansing ceremony and where the entire family is traditionally cleansed. This is mainly a process where the family is cleansed from the death of a loved one.
[7] Ibid. p.71.
[8] Ibid. p.52.

seclusion during the early mourning period. The period of seclusion allowed the person to mourn with little interference.

4.2.3 The effects of Covid-19 restrictions on traditional mourning rituals.

"COVID-19 has had a very negative impact on our culture of burying and mourning- …we don't grieve anymore…now we just bury".

This theme focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic and how its regulations have inadvertently affected the essence of these mourning rituals in regard to how they should be practiced as well as affecting African people in a number of different ways. The main idea behind this theme is to showcase the importance that the effects of the pandemic has had on the traditionalistic African mourning practices and on these cohort of people during undoubtedly one of the most stressful times of our lives.

There is no doubt that the Covid-19 pandemic had disrupted the way of life for every individual alive. This global pandemic has led to the closure of various facilities, social settings and even tragically, caused a high number of deaths. This theme focuses on the Covid-19 pandemic and how its regulations have inadvertently affected the traditional mourning rituals in regard to how they should be practiced as well as affecting the burial and grieving processes for African people in a number of different ways. The central idea behind this theme would be to showcase the importance the effects of the pandemic has had on the traditionalistic African mourning practices and on these cohort of people during undoubtedly one of the most stressful times of all our lives. The Covid pandemic has affected how these rituals were practiced, and by an extension, affecting the grieving processes of the bereaved family and friends. Additionally, Covid-19 regulations have affected the core of these mourning rituals by restricting the most fundamental traditions from taking place. This meant that the changes that have been brought on by these regulations disrupted the African way of healing during those bereavement processes which have unfortunately fallen during this period. Such changes included but were not limited to:" *… the preparations for the funeral are only for fewer days because of the pandemic rules that are being set…a day before the funeral, the body will come*

and rest in the house overnight. But because of Covid pandemic, that is no more being practiced" **(Participant 8, 22-year-old female)**.

These restrictions have also affected those involved in various other ways such as: firstly, the African families are said to have been affected the most by these restrictions. Those affected families may have not necessarily received the closure that comes with the traditional viewing of the body. This has been an African custom that has brought a lot of comfort to families for many years. Such a tradition would allow the family the opportunity to spend those final moments with their loved one before they actually bury them. These restrictions have also deprived the families from having the right or the appropriate amount of time to mourn their loved ones in a dignified way. These restrictions have also had a ripple effect on the extended family and friends, as well as on the community at large and not just solely on those immediate family members. For instance, a lot of people could not pay their final respects as they normally would as the number of mourners who were allowed to attend these funerals was significantly reduced (as a precautionary measure of course). As a result of this, the sense of unity which naturally comes from mourning together as a group is essentially lost - which is such an important aspect of the black culture. All of this has had a very negative psychological impact on those affected as well because "*…we did not receive the psychosocial support that we are accustomed to over the years…"* **(Participant 5, 61-year-old female).** The psychological support that participant 5 is referring to is the emotional and psychological support or counselling that the black community usually receives from their pastors, ministers and other church members during the bereavement period. All these changes meant that African people were either forced to implement said changes and adapt to new and alternative methods of mourning or they had to abandon many of their cultural practices relating to mourning rituals altogether.

This excerpt was shared during one of the individual interviews, and it depicts the following picture:

> *"Covid-19 has disrupted the African way of healing during the bereavement process"*
> **(Participant 4, 31-year-old male)**

The findings from this theme (including the above-mentioned response) demonstrate that some of the Covid-19 regulations have inadvertently affected the traditional mourning rituals in terms of the way they should be practiced. As a result, these restrictions have affected

the overall grieving and burial processes for African people in various ways. Almost all the participants have expressed that losing a loved one during the pandemic meant that no one could fully grieve their loss in the conventional way. They were just expected to bury them without cause or without properly adhering to their customary ways of burying a loved one. This theme also highlights the varying effects this has had on this cohort of people. Furthermore, since the essence of these mourning rituals had been disrupted, by an extension, the traditional African way of healing had also been disrupted. The study also shows that African families were predominately the most affected by these alterations to their cultural practices. These changes also reinforced the idea that these people could either adapt to these new and alternative methods of mourning, or they had to unfortunately, abandon many of these practices altogether.

4.2.4 The mourning environment may not necessarily be peaceful.

"The mourning period is supposed to be peaceful; this is actually, the opposite at times".

Although mourning together and having a shared sense of grief allows for a culture of unity and that of shared common interests, the mourning environment during the bereavement period may not always be a peaceful one. It can in fact, increase the stress levels for the grieving family as there are various external factors that can cause exasperation for the family. The purpose of this theme is to illustrate that the grieving period may not always be experienced in the most positive way, and this correlates to some the negative aspects of mourning.

Although mourning together and having a shared sense of grief allows for a culture of unity and that of shared common interests, the mourning environment during the bereavement period may not always be a peaceful one. It can in fact, increase the stress levels for the grieving family as there are various external factors that can cause exasperation for the family, for example, due to the number of people who are present, the household naturally becomes over-crowded, and the space to accommodate everyone can thus be limited. Also, having to deal with all the different personalities of so many people and their presence in the home, including all their demands during this grieving period can prove to be extremely challenging and stressful for most families. In addition to this, some families may even have to deal with people who may be demanding and some who may have their own unique ways of doing things. Such

people are more likely to impose on how the family does things and subsequently force them to do things their way or in their own terms. This can be very stressful for the family, and these family members can even run the risk of placing too much focus or attention on people instead of actually on what's more important – and that is mourning or grieving the loss of their loved one. Some families even felt that it would have been much better for their grieving process if they could just deal with this loss on their own as a family, but instead, grieving as a community as opposed to grieving as a unit is an essential part of the African culture, and as much as they wanted to, they could not exclude all these people. The main purpose of the findings here was to illustrate that the grieving period may not always be experienced in the most positive way, and this correlates to some the negative aspects of mourning.

This extract proves the following:

> *"…the mourning period is supposed to be peaceful; this is actually the opposite at times…due to the number of people who are present…household becomes over-crowded, and it becomes more stressful…"* **(Participant 3, 21-year-old female)**

The findings from this theme essentially paint an entirely different picture of the mourning process by illustrating the different ways in which this bereavement period may not necessarily be always experienced in the most positive way. The findings did reveal that one of the ways that the mourning environment may not always be a peaceful one is due to various reasons – one reason being that some of the houses do run the risk of being overcrowded because of the number of people who would be offering their assistance as well as their condolences. Some of the participants have also shared that catering to the masses of people had been a very stressful situation, and for some, anxiety inducing. They added that going through this type of experience basically took away from experiencing a proper grieving process. These types of results directly correlate to the more negative aspects of mourning.

4.2.5 Modernisation has changed traditional mourning rituals.

"These rituals have changed over time. Some rituals
are no longer performed the same way".

The final theme observes how basic traditions have changed over time – especially traditional mourning rituals. Modernisation has ultimately transformed the way in which people view and

experience their customary way of life and how they perform certain practices. This theme also describes how African people feel about such changes to their culture.

The final theme observes how basic traditions have changed over time – especially traditional mourning rituals. Some of these rituals are no longer performed the same way as before. Modernisation has ultimately transformed the ways in which people view and experience their customary way of life and how they perform certain practices. In support of this notion, participant four expressed that *"…the western culture has an influence on our culture and it's getting modernised"* **(Participant 4, 31-year-old male).** Furthermore, because these traditions have changed, people have now found some shortcuts in performing these rituals, for example, instead of slaughtering a cow, most people nowadays prefer buying the meat from the butchery - which is a more convenient way. Another tradition would be for *"abo mama"* or the women of the community to be the ones who prepare food for the people, but nowadays people are hiring catering services instead. This theme also describes how African people actually feel about these changes to their culture, as the following two participants shared the following sentiments:

> "*I agree with the change. I think they should change with the times…"* **(Participant 6, 27-year-old male),** and participant seven sharing that:
>
> "*Culture is bound to change. It evolves… it's a modernised way of thinking. But that also kills African culture "***(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).**

The changes made to these traditions also create more convenient mourning rituals, which are ultimately new forms of traditions. Moreover, although many traditionalists would disagree, some of the participants have expressed that they have indeed welcomed some of these changes, with one participant stating that:

> "*I believe that future generations should be able to make their own convenient mourning rituals to be able to accommodate the times they're in"* **(Participant 3, 21 -year-old female)**, and another participant expressing that:
>
> "*…it has helped us in a way to grow and to look in a different direction… was a new way of looking at things, especially looking at how we respond to bereavement"* **(Participant 7, 29-year-old male).**

The second participant (a 36-year-old female) also mentioned that she thought that some of these traditions should change with the times, however, her argument was that these changes would make it that much easier for people or for some families to perform these rituals no matter where they reside. This perspective brings us to our next scope of discussion, which

relays the logic that mourning rituals are not necessarily practiced in the traditional sense in different geographical regions. This argument is based on the premise that people who live in the more urbanised areas in our country usually do things slightly differently from those who live in the more rural or township areas. Participant seven, a 29-year-old male, postulated that in most of the urban regions, some of these rituals may not be practiced in the correct manner. Another participant, a 22-year-old female, went on to say that people who reside in these contrasting areas may even have different cultures or lifestyles altogether**.**

Furthermore, because of their geographical locations, most of these people are most certainly restricted from performing certain rituals, and for others, some of these rituals may not even be practiced at all. And because of this, the study stipulates that a lot of the traditions are lost in these areas**.** Another valid reason as to why some people are not afforded the opportunity to practice their cultures in the traditional sense would be the type of residences in which they live in, for instance, most people in urban areas live in flats, complexes, or estates where some of these rituals may be difficult to perform. To add to this dilemma, many would also be faced with the challenge of being misconstrued by certain neighbours who may not necessarily be well-informed nor properly conceptualize why most of these rituals are even performed in the first place. A good example of such a scenario would be that a cow may not be allowed to be slaughtered in any of these residential areas because some of the neighbours might be offended or consider that as animal brutality. Additionally, most people nowadays make use of catering services as a big part of the food preparation process while people in the rural or the township areas still make use of the traditional way of allowing the community members to come and assist with the cooking. Another point to consider is that such locations are often not the most suitable to accommodate a large number of people who would be attending a funeral. Therefore, because of these reasons and others not mentioned here, most people would rather go back to the rural areas or the different hometowns where they grew up to give the deceased the burial they deserve and also to perform other customs or cultural practices without any hindrances. And the main reason for this is that in those rural and township areas, these practices are a norm and a part of everyday life, and that type of environment allows African people to do just that. With that said, the gist of the argument here is that urban areas are essentially designed to suit the western or modern-day lifestyle. It is not customary designed to suit our African way of living. On the other hand, township and rural areas are still more suitable locations when it comes to performing traditional African customs and the people here try as much as possible to keep the tradition going because there are people who understand this way of life and may even expect you to practice said traditions.

Another important aspect to reflect upon when conversing about how modernisation has altered traditional mourning practices would be to consider how there is a lack of traditional knowledge in modern households. It is evident that most modern households are now managed by young people/young adults who may also be quite inexperienced and/or unknowledgeable when it comes to dealing with some of the more important aspects relating to African culture – and more specifically, traditional mourning practices. And if there haven't been any elders within this type of family dynamic or structure who would play the role of instructing/ giving the necessary direction about how such customs should be practiced while simultaneously passing down such valuable knowledge form one generation to the next, then it is postulated that this modern generation will eventually lose a sense of who they truly are. All in all, the African culture will thus be lost forever.

The findings from the final theme observed how basic traditions have changed over time, and how most of these rituals are no longer performed the same way as before. One of the most important observations made here is that modernisation has ultimately transformed the ways in which people perceive and experience their customary way of life; essentially affecting how they perform certain rituals. This study has also given us a description of how African people feel about these changes to their cultures – with some welcoming said changes while others were very reluctant of accepting them. Moreover, industrialisation and capitalism also contribute to the changes on traditional mourning rituals through the migrant labour system. Due to economic inequalities, people often migrate from one region/county to another to find employment. As a result, Eisenbruch (1990) postulate that whenever an individual loses their social structure and culture, it may cause somewhat of a grief reaction. Thus, many black people who work far from home are usually subjected to the inability of performing their culturally sanctioned rituals due to their location. The results also found that when a death occurs, these people are compelled to travel long distances back to their homelands to bury their loved ones. Another aspect to consider in this discussion is that different geographical regions also play a crucial role in how these rituals are practiced.

Furthermore, participant five shared the following sentiment when it comes to this matter:

> "*The young generation will do as they please, they will change everything since there will be no elderly people who will call them into order, or who will tell them what to do in their homes"* **(Participant 5, 61-year-old female).**

This participant has also highlighted on the issue of how nowadays there is a lack of traditional knowledge in modern households, and how the absence of elders within most of these family structures usually exasperates this problem as their absence does affect the transference of cultural knowledge towards the younger generation. Thus, this is one of the many ways in which cultural preservation can be lost over time.

4.3 Conclusion

This Chapter made use of a thorough step by step thematic analysis to explore the corpus of data that has been previously collected from the participants' responses. The findings were then categorised into five overarching themes and seven subsequent sub-themes which were important in answering the paramount or main research question that had been posed during the initial stages of conducting this research. The main theme, which encapsulates the premise of the study, discusses the findings of what it means to be an African within the context of the world they live. This is important as it directly correlates to the meaning-making behind such mourning rituals and explains why they even exists in the first place. The second theme observes the findings of how African people have developed an array of distinctive traditional rituals to deal with bereavement after the loss of a loved one. The results focus on the actual phenomenological experiences of mourning for each participant. The third theme discusses the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on these traditional African mourning rituals, including the people who practice them. The fourth theme observes a negative aspect related to mourning as the findings illustrate that the grieving period may not always be experienced in the most positive way. The final theme observes how basic traditions have changed over time – especially traditional mourning rituals, and how modernisation has ultimately transformed the way in which people view and experience their customary way of life and how they perform certain practices; including how people feel about such changes to their culture.

The next section represents the final chapter of the study, and it basically provides a summary of the study's main findings, its limitations, suggestions for future studies as well as a few recommendations that the study has brought to light.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This research set out to examine how black people within a particular community perform certain rituals as part of dealing with the loss of their loved ones. The primary question that the study proposed was: what is the phenomenological experience of the people in the community of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province in relation to grieving and mourning rituals? To investigate the answers to this research question, a qualitative research study was conducted to explore traditional mourning rituals of the African people of Bethal community, a small town in the Govan Mbeki District of the Mpumalanga Province, South Africa. Informed by critical phenomenology, participants were selected through purposive sampling technique to recruit eight (8) respondents/residents from the Bethal community of the Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. An in-depth, semi structured, face to face interviews were conducted, and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Subsequent to the detailed discussion of the findings in Chapter 4 with Thematic Analysis used as a tool of analysis, this final chapter is representative of a summary of the main findings. This section also highlights the study's contribution to the field of African studies as well as to the mental healthcare of African people. And lastly, the limitations of the study are considered to observe which research gaps emanate specifically from this study, the recommendations for future studies are outlined and concluding remarks from which the basis of recommendations can be developed.

5.2 Summary of the study

For research purposes, the researcher had an interest in exploring the concepts of grief and mourning, and how they relate to the grieving processes of African people in particular. The findings from this research study have provided an explanatory lens from which the conceptualisation of the overall concept of death- which is inclusive of those specific factors surrounding the process of mourning and grieving, can be broadened. In this case, the focus was on the subjective narratives foretold by a particular group of people who are of indigenous African descent living in one of the more underdeveloped communities in South Africa. The intention of this research endeavour was to find the link between those imminent traditional mourning rituals and the effects they have on both the personal and social aspects of human functionality. In so doing, the study was then able to examine these concepts initially from an

individualistic point of view and then gradually moved towards a more psychosocial sphere so that it could also include some holistic aspects to the findings as well.
Drawing a conclusion from the research findings, the study has found that the concepts of grief and mourning within African communities can be linked to some of the effects that they have within an individual's and social scale of human functionality. Such findings directly correlate to how African people will inherently ascribe to certain traditional mourning rituals to deal with the loss of a loved one. During the conduction of the study, all the participants expressed that performing these rituals provided a form of healing from loss which kept them emotionally and spiritually connected to their loved one: "*feels as if they haven't lost the person"*.

Another important objective for this type of research was to redress the notion of the Eurocentric epistemological approach when dealing with critical psychological and psychosocial issues affecting people who are of African descent, and to effectively redirect the attention onto a more Afrocentric approach instead. The result from the study further postulate that this initiative is also important within the field of practicing psychologists and the way in which they engage with their African patients within therapy as a part of grief or bereavement counselling. When conducting this study, it was evident that the Afrocentric approach was the most effective in the attempt to view and describe African practices from their own cultural context. Furthermore, the findings from this study have made provision for a specific kind of explanatory lens from which the current existing gap of knowledge systems can be addressed, as there are indeed prevalent inadequacies and shortcomings in the present models that try to define the process of mourning of African people by using western philosophies. Through this research, it is hoped that the potential to remedy the way western societies view and conceptualise the whole idea behind African mourning practices has been foregrounded. In addition, since this phenomenon is considered one of the least explored areas of studies within the African community itself, being a part of the African community myself, I felt it was necessary and compelling to showcase some of the realities of Africans through an African lens. Providing research from this particular frame of reference can rationalise some aspects related to grief and mourning as the entire process is relative to the context. As a result, since the African belief system has an automatic influence on how black people conceptualise and express their emotions and behaviours towards the mourning rituals from the Afrocentric worldview, the researcher has deemed it necessary to conduct such a study in the hopes that it has brought on a frame of reference that advances the authentic cultural inclusion and representation of this cohort of people in literature.

And finally, although many historic events like the pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, Covid-19, colonialism and industrialism continue to pose a threat to these mourning traditions, they somehow remain sustainable to be transferred through generations. For instance, the HIV/AIDS pandemic has left a lot of children orphaned at a very young age and has thus created many child-headed households within black communities. As a result, this is the backdrop on the issue of how nowadays there is a lack of traditional knowledge in modern households, and how the absence of elders within most of these family structures usually exasperates this problem as their absence does affect the transference of cultural knowledge towards the younger generation. Although this may be the case for some households, most communities (especially in the more rural/township areas) have residents who usually ascribe to the Ubuntu way of life which instils a moral attribute that allows them to step in and fulfil some basic roles, one of which includes the traditional teachings of these African practices. Additionally, as previously discussed, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the essence of these mourning rituals regarding how they should be practiced. However, the aftermath of this pandemic has been ineffective in deterring the sacred teachings of these traditions from reaching the younger generation. Furthermore, since colonisation and capitalism also had an impact on how most black families were able to finance such rituals - with colonisation and apartheid, black people were dispossessed of their cattle and land, whereas they previously did not need to buy cows or meat for the burial of their loved ones. Such actions subsequently increased the financial component of planning such funerals. Also, the financial struggles faced by black people were further perpetuated by the unequal dispersal of capital, opportunities and other political/economic resources among the different races. Although such issues are prevalent, these traditional African practices remain sustainable amongst African people as it does not deter them from practicing their cultures, and they continue to be passed down from one generation to the next.

5.3 Recommendations

In line with the first and second objectives of the study, its rationale, as well as the findings, recommendations for the mental healthcare and cultural preservation of the mourning rituals are recommendations for future studies. Such recommendation also considers the contribution of traditional knowledge on African mourning practices to the existing studies.

5.3.1. For the mental healthcare of African people

Findings from this study have highlighted the importance of maintaining the emotional and psychological well-being of African people both during and after the mourning period. A few of the participants have brought to light the issue of the lack of proper or professional psychological counselling during and after the grieving period. It is postulated that many black people fail to get professional help from a mental healthcare practitioner to assist in dealing with the pain that naturally comes after experiencing a loss, and they would rather receive counselling from church members, priests or even other community members instead. This is a prevalent issue within the black community, and this study recommends that instead of receiving counselling only from the abovementioned members of the community, as well as solely relying on just paying homage to the bereaved, black people are also encouraged to get professional psychological counselling from a mental healthcare worker as well after losing a loved one.

5.3.2. For the Cultural preservation of traditional mourning rituals

Cultural preservation is an important component of this research study. Maintaining the traditional practices of mourning rituals provides an explanatory lens of the meaning-making behind these rituals and solidifies why they even exists in the first place. The study has also found that the main function of mourning within a socio-cultural system subsequently maintains the preservation of cultural heritage and people's traditions, and as such, these mourning rituals enable people to form a group identity and organise themselves as a collective whole, a theory which was postulated by Ademiluka (2009). Furthermore, the findings from the study have also shown that traditional mourning rituals are not practiced the same way in different geographical regions; proving that the more urbanised the location is, the less inclined the people are to fully adhere to these practices. Therefore, this study recommends that one way for the people in these areas to receive such traditional cultural knowledge would be to host workshops or seminars that would provide such knowledge systems to them. People who are interested would attend these events and acquire the necessary knowledge pertaining to mourning rituals or even other African cultural practices as well.

5.3.3. For the contribution to existing studies

When attempting to acquire the relevant information pertaining to the traditional mourning practices within the different African communities, the researcher found that this wasn't an easy thing to do as there was an obvious gap in the current knowledge systems. These prevalent inadequacies made it that much harder to gather the necessary information in order to complete this research study. The study recommends that one way to bridge this gap would be for more academic scholars (especially African scholars) to do more research about the African culture and to compose more research about this phenomenon.

5.3.4 Recommendations for future studies

The findings and the recommendations that have been outlined in this study provide the scope for future research in this topic and for other studies of the same nature. The use of the Afrocentric framework in other academic and social studies within the multicultural South African context exploring these indigenous African cultural values is recommended. Those relative studies which examine endemic African research are important in aiding in the comprehension of the critical psychological and social issue of mourning and bereavement rituals among the people of African descent. Furthermore, future studies can make use of a larger sample size than the one that was used for this study to increase generalisation.
Additionally, these studies can also improve the validity of the results by expanding their geographical locations to a few other provinces within South Africa. Lastly, to address the issue of the level of truthfulness from the participants, some of the interview questions could be more personalised/individualised to accommodate the comfort levels of each participant respectively, thus ensuring more positive and truthful responses.

5.4 Limitations of this study

The findings from this research are founded on just one community and will not be generalised to other communities in and around the Govan Mbeki District. The study's limited generalisation is due to the relatively small sample size as well as the geographical location. Additionally, some of the research questions which focus on certain aspects of grieving/mourning may have been too personal or sensitive for the participants to share, which could have made them uncomfortable and thus affected the truthfulness of their responses.

Furthermore, another important research gap that emanates from the findings of this study includes the lack of understanding and scholastic research of these traditional African mourning rituals in mainstream psychological professions as well as by many people who are not of African descent. Therefore, the lack of adequate information regarding such research topics limits the ability of reviewers and other academic professionals to reach a conclusion about the nature and relevance of such research topics.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of the study postulate that the African people of Bethal community enact various forms of traditional Afrocentric mourning rituals to deal with the loss of a loved one. The objective of the study was to highlight indigenous African cultural values and draw upon the Afrocentric approach/framework and worldview to understand the critical psychological and social issues of mourning and bereavement rituals among this cohort of people of African descent. These rituals affect the functionality of the people both positively and negatively in a significant number of ways. In order to better understand why such rituals exist, the study found that the anecdotes derived from the subjective/personal accounts of the participants were crucial in signifying which existing bereavement practices were considered to be most important within traditional African perspectives. Lastly, the results of the study further demonstrate the conception of previous studies which highlights how mourning, especially in the field of professional psychology, is understood from a Eurocentric point of view. This informs how practicing psychologists also engage with their patients within therapy as part of grief/bereavement counselling. Many psychologists rely on the work of Kubler-Ross as a point of reference or framework in assisting their clients process their loss. The current thesis wished to offer an alternative perspective to this dominant view, which is Afro-centric in nature.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Information Sheet

Department of Psychology
University of The Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
Private Bag x3, Wits
2050
22/09/2021

Dear Sir/ Madam

My name is Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi, and I am a student in the Master of Arts by Coursework and Research Report course within the Psychology Department at the University of The Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research study with the title: **An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal in the Mpumalanga Province of South Africa**, under the supervision of Dr Simangele Mayisela. I wish to conduct a research study by interviewing different members within a family context in the area of Bethal, regarding mourning rituals that they practice when faced with the death of a loved one.

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview discussion. This activity will involve a 30min to an hour conversation. Here, you will be asked various open-ended questions about your own personal experiences regarding the mourning processes that you have undergone as a way to deal with the grieving process. With your permission, I would also like to record our sessions by using a digital device. Please be advised that participating in this study is completely voluntary**,** and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any given point in time.

Please keep in mind that there will be no personal costs to you if you choose to participate in this project. Also be aware that you will not receive any direct benefits from participating. There will be no disadvantages or penalties if you choose not to participate, or even if you withdraw from the study. Please take note that you may choose to withdraw at any point in time, or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential as no identifying information will be revealed if you do not wish so. The

information that you will provide will be securely stored in a password protected computer, and will not be disclosed to anyone else, as only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The data will also be stored for future secondary analysis. I will then use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any sort of distress or discomfort at any point in time during this process, please be aware that we will stop the interview, or even resume at another time.

If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, a counselling service is available free of charge at Bethal Hospital. The name of the Social Worker who is currently providing counselling services is Rosie Xaba, and her contact details for the counselling services are: 082 228 1122.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, please feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, it will be available per request. With your permission, the data collected from this research study may be used by other researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408

Thanking you in anticipation.
Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi
2175763@wits.students.ac.za
Cell no: 0769644087

Supervisor:

Dr Simangele Mayisele
simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za
Cell no: 0833636107

……. (signature)

……. (signature)

…… (date)

…… (date)

Appendix A (1): Zulu translated Participant Information Sheet

Department of Psychology
University of The Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
Private Bag x3, Wits
2050
22/09/2021

Mnumzane/ nkosikazi othandekayo

Igama lami nguKedeboni Precious Mamosadi ngingumfundi weMasters of Arts by Coursework and Research Report phakathi kwigumbi lePsychology eNuvesi yase Witwatersrand, eGoli. Ingxenye yezifundo zami ukwenza ucwaningo ngesihloko esithi: ukuhlola amasiko okuzila wabantu base Bethal, Mpumalanga Province, ngaphansi kokugadwa ngu Dokotela Simangele Mayisela. Ngifisa ukuqhuba ucwaningo lwesifundo ngoku xoxisana namalunga ahlukahlukene ngaphakathi kwemindeni endaweni yase Bethal mayelana namasiko okuzila abawasebenzisayo umabebekene nokushona kothandiweyo wabo.

Ngizothanda ukunimema nibeyingxenye yalengxoxo yocwaningo. Lomsebenzi uzobandakanya imizuzu engamashumi amathathu kuya ehoreni ukuyixoxisa. Lapha uzobuzawa imibuzo evulelekile ngokuhlukahlukana mayelana nokuhlangene nespiliyoni sesiqu sakho mayelana ngenqubo yokuzila odlule kuyo njengendlela yokumelana nequbo yokuzila. Ngemvumo yakho, ngizothanda ukucopha lesisigaba ngokusebenzisa idijithali. Ngicela wazi ukuthi ukuba yinxenye yalesifundo kungokuthanda kwakho, awuphoxelekile, nokuthi unamalungelo okuhoxa ukubanyinxenye nanoma ngabe yisiphi isikahthi.

Engicela ukwazi ukuthi akunazindleko zemali ezilindeleke kuwe uma ukhetha ukubayinxenye yalocwaningo. Nokunye okmele ukwazi ukuthi ngeke uthole nzuzo ngokuba yinxenye yalocwaningo. Ngeke kube nokuntula noma izinhlawulo uma ukhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo.

Yazi ukuthi ungakhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo nanomayinini nokunga phenduli imibuzo uma ungathandi. Lengxoxo izoba yimfihlakalo ngeke kube nokuveza imininingwane ngawe uma ungafuni. Imininingwane ozonginika yona izovikeleka ngokugcinwa ngephasiwedi evikelelekile kwi khompyutha, angeke isthlwe nanomangubani ngoba umcwaniningi nomgadi wakhe kuphela abazofinyelela kudatha. Ledatha izogcinwa futhi ukusetshenziselwa ucwaningo lwakusasa. Ngizosebenzisa igama mbumbulu ukubonisa inxenye yakho kucwaningo lokudcina. Uma uzizwa ungakhululekile noma ukucindezeleka nanoma ngayisiphi isikhathi kulocwaningo, ngicela wazi ukuthi sizolumisa ucwaningo noma siluqhube ngesikhathi esizayo.

Uma udinga ukusekwa noma ukwelulekwa ngemva kwalengxoxo, uphiko lwensiza yokululeka luyatholakala ngaphandle kwembadalo eBethal Hospital. Igama leSocial Worker okuyiyona elulekayo okwamanje ngu Rosie Xaba, futhi utholakala kulezi nombolo: 082 228 1122.

Uma unemibuzo ngesikhathi salocwaningo noma ngemva kwalocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukungithinta kulemininingwane engenzanzi. Lemfundiso izobalwa njengombiko wocwaningo oluzotholakala kumqulu zincwadi wase Nuvesi. Uma ufisa ukuthola isfinyezo salombiko, ungasithola uma usicela. Ngemvumo yakho, ledatha etholakele kulolucwaningo lungasetshenziswa ngabanye abcwaningi. Uma unokukhathazeka noma ukukhononda mayelana nezinqubo zokuziphatha kulocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukuthinta the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408

Ngikubonga kusengaphambili.

Imina ozithobayo,

Umcwaningi:

Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi

2175763@wits.students.ac.za

Cell no: 0769644087

Umqondisi:

Dr Simangele Mayisele

simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za

Cell no: 0833636107

…….

(signature)

…….

(signature)

……

(date)

……

(date)

Appendix B: Letter of informed consent for Interview and Recording

Department of Psychology
University of The Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
Private Bag x3, Wits
2050
22/09/2021

Tile: An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province

Name of researcher: Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi

I, ……., hereby give permission to (Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi) to use my information and responses in her study as I have agreed to be a participant in her research project. The research procedure has been explained thoroughly to me and I understand what my participation will involve. I agree to the following:

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous	YES	NO
I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report	YES	NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES	NO
I agree that the information I provide may be used anonymously after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance being obtained	YES	NO
I request that this form be translated into another language	YES	NO

Dear Sir/Madam

The interview will be completely confidential as no identifying information will be revealed. The information that you will provide will be securely stored in a password protected computer, and will not be disclosed to anyone else, as only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The data will also be stored for future secondary analysis. I will then use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. I will then use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any sort of distress or discomfort at any point in time during this process, please be aware that we will stop the interview, or even resume at another time. Please keep in mind that there will be no personal costs to you if you choose to participate in this project. Also be aware that you will not receive any direct benefits from participating. There will be no disadvantages or penalties if you choose to participate, or even if you withdraw from the study. Please take note that you may choose to withdraw at any point in time, or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential as no identifying information will be revealed if you do not wish so. Please be advised that participating in this study is completely voluntary**,** and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any given point in time.

If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, a counselling service is available free of charge at Bethal Hospital. The name of the Social Worker who is also currently providing counselling services is Rosie Xaba, and her contact details for the counselling services are: 082 228 1122.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, please feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, it will be available per request.

With your permission, the data collected from this research study may be used by other researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408.

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:

Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi
2175763@wits.students.ac.za
Cell no: 0769644087

…… (signature)
…… (name of participant)
…… (date)

…… (signature)
……... (name of person seeking consent)
…….. (date)

Appendix B (1): Translated Letter of informed consent for Interview and Recording

Department of Psychology
University of The Witwatersrand
Johannesburg
Private Bag x3, Wits
2050
22/09/2021

Isihloko: An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province

Igama la mcwaningi : Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi

Mina, …… nginika imvumo ku Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi ukthi asebenzise imininingwane nezimphendulo zami kulesfundo sakhe njengoba ngivumile ukuba yinxenye kulocwaningo lwakhe. Ingqubo yalo cwaningo ngilucazelwe kabanzi ngaqonda ukuthi ukuba yinxenye kuphathelene ngani.
Ngivumile kuloku okulandelayo:

Ngiyavuma ukuthi ukuba yinxenye kuzoba yimfihlo YEBO QHA

Ngyiyavuma ukuthi umcwaningi asebenzise okucashuniwe
Okfihlakele kuziphumo zocwaningo lwakhe YEBO QHA
Ngyavuma ukuthi ingxoxo ingaqoshwa ngenkulumo YEBO QHA

Ngiyavuma ukuthi imininingwane engiyinikezile
Ingasethsenziswa ngokufihlakele ngemva kokucedwa
Kwalo cwaningo, kuzwi nhloso zezemfundo ngabanye
Ama cwaningi abazo sebenzisa ezabo izinqubo
Zokuziphatha YEBO QHA

Ngicela ukuthi leli fomu licazwe nangolunye
Ulimi YEBO QHA

Mnumzane/ nkosikazi othandekayo

Ngizothanda ukunimema nibeyingxenye yalengxoxo yocwaningo. Lomsebenzi uzobandakanya imizuzu engamashumi amathathu kuya ehoreni ukuyixoxisa. Lapha uzobuzawa imibuzo evulelekile ngokuhlukahlukana mayelana nokuhlangene nespiliyoni sesiqu sakho mayelana ngenqubo yokuzila odlule kuyo njengendlela yokumelana nequbo yokuzila. Ngemvumo yakho, ngizothanda ukucopha lesisigaba ngokusebenzisa idijithali. Ngicela wazi ukuthi ukuba yinxenye yalesifundo kungokuthanda kwakho, awuphoxelekile, nokuthi unamalungelo okuhoxa ukubanyinxenye nanoma ngabe yisiphi isikahthi.

Engicela ukwazi ukuthi akunazindleko zemali ezilindeleke kuwe uma ukhetha ukubayinxenye yalocwaningo. Nokunye okmele ukwazi ukuthi ngeke uthole nzuzo ngokuba yinxenye yalocwaningo. Ngeke kube nokuntula noma izinhlawulo uma ukhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo.

Yazi ukuthi ungakhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo nanomayinini nokunga phenduli imibuzo uma ungathandi. Lengxoxo izoba yimfihlakalo ngeke kube nokuveza imininingwane ngawe uma ungafuni. Imininingwane ozonginika yona izovikeleka ngokugcinwa ngephasiwedi evikelelekile kwi khompyutha, angeke isthlwe nanomangubani ngoba umcwaniningi nomgadi wakhe kuphela abazofinyelela kudatha. Ledatha izogcinwa futhi ukusetshenziselwa ucwaningo lwakusasa. Ngizosebenzisa igama mbumbulu ukubonisa inxenye yakho kucwaningo lokudcina. Uma uzizwa ungakhululekile noma ukucindezeleka nanoma ngayisiphi isikhathi kulocwaningo, ngicela wazi ukuthi sizolumisa ucwaningo noma siluqhube ngesikhathi esizayo.

Uma udinga ukusekwa noma ukwelulekwa ngemva kwalengxoxo, uphiko lwensiza yokululeka luyatholakala ngaphandle kwembadalo eBethal Hospital. Igama leSocial Worker okuyiyona elulekayo okwamanje ngu Rosie Xaba, futhi utholakala kulezi nombolo: 082 228 1122.

Uma unemibuzo ngesikhathi salocwaningo noma ngemva kwalocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukungithinta kulemininingwane engenzanzi. Lemfundiso izobalwa njengombiko wocwaningo oluzotholakala kumqulu zincwadi wase Nuvesi. Uma ufisa ukuthola isfinyezo salombiko, ungasithola uma usicela. Ngemvumo yakho, ledatha etholakele kulolucwaningo lungasetshenziswa ngabanye abcwaningi. Uma unokukhathazeka noma ukukhononda mayelana nezinqubo zokuziphatha kulocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukuthinta the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408

Ngikubonga kusengaphambili.

Imina ozithobayo,

Umcwaningi:	Umqondisi:
Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi	Dr Simangele Mayisele
2175763@wits.students.ac.za	simangele.mayisela@wits.ac.za
Cell no: 0769644087	Cell no: 0833636107
…….	…….
(signature)	(signature)
……	……
(date)	(date)

Appendix C: Virtual Interviews Consent Form

Dear Sir/Madam

This form is to request permission for our interviews to be virtually recorded by a digital device:

I would like to invite you to take part in an interview discussion. This activity will involve a 30min to an hour conversation. Here, you will be asked various open-ended questions about your own personal experiences regarding the mourning processes that you have undergone as a way to deal with the grieving process. With your permission, I would also like to visually record our sessions by using a digital device. Please be advised that participating in this study is completely voluntary**,** and that you have the right to withdraw your participation at any given point in time.

Please keep in mind that there will be no personal costs to you if you choose to participate in this project. Also be aware that you will not receive any direct benefits from participating. There will be no disadvantages or penalties if you choose to participate, or even if you withdraw from the study. Please take note that you may choose to withdraw at any point in time, or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential as no identifying information will be revealed if you do not wish so. The information that you will provide will be securely stored in a password protected computer, and will not be disclosed to anyone else, as only the researcher and her supervisor will have access to the data. The data will be stored for future secondary analysis. I will then use a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If you experience any sort of distress or discomfort at any point in time during this process, please be aware that we will stop the virtual interview, or even resume at another time.

If you need some support or counselling services following the interview, a counselling service is available free of charge at Bethal Hospital. The name of the Social Worker who is also currently providing counselling services is Rosie Xaba, and her contact details for the counselling services are: 082 228 1122.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, please feel free to contact me on the details listed below. The study will be written up as a research report which will be

available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, it will be available per request. With your permission, the data collected from this research study may be used by other researchers. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408.
Your participation in this research is very important. Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,
AUTHOR:

Masters Student	(DATE)
…….	……..
PARTICIPANT	(DATE)
……	**……**

Appendix C (1): Translated virtual interviews Consent Form

Leli formu elokucela ukuthi ingxoxo yethu iqoshwe ngedijithali:
Mnumzane/ nkosikazi othandekayo

Ngizothanda ukunimema nibeyingxenye yalengxoxo yocwaningo. Lomsebenzi uzobandakanya imizuzu engamashumi amathathu kuya ehoreni ukuyixoxisa. Lapha uzobuzawa imibuzo evulelekile ngokuhlukahlukana mayelana nokuhlangene nespiliyoni sesiqu sakho mayelana ngenqubo yokuzila odlule kuyo njengendlela yokumelana nequbo yokuzila. Ngemvumo yakho, ngizothanda ukucopha lesisigaba ngokusebenzisa idijithali. Ngicela wazi ukuthi ukuba yinxenye yalesifundo kungokuthanda kwakho, awuphoxelekile, nokuthi unamalungelo okuhoxa ukubanyinxenye nanoma ngabe yisiphi isikahthi.

Engicela ukwazi ukuthi akunazindleko zemali ezilindeleke kuwe uma ukhetha ukubayinxenye yalocwaningo. Nokunye okmele ukwazi ukuthi ngeke uthole nzuzo ngokuba yinxenye yalocwaningo. Ngeke kube nokuntula noma izinhlawulo uma ukhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo.

Yazi ukuthi ungakhetha ukuphuma kulocwaningo nanomayinini nokunga phenduli imibuzo uma ungathandi. Lengxoxo izoba yimfihlakalo ngeke kube nokuveza imininingwane ngawe uma ungafuni. Imininingwane ozonginika yona izovikeleka ngokugcinwa ngephasiwedi evikelelekile kwi khompyutha, angeke isthlwe nanomangubani ngoba umcwaniningi nomgadi wakhe kuphela abazofinyelela kudatha. Ledatha izogcinwa futhi ukusetshenziselwa ucwaningo lwakusasa. Ngizosebenzisa igama mbumbulu ukubonisa inxenye yakho kucwaningo lokudcina. Uma uzizwa ungakhululekile noma ukucindezeleka nanoma ngayisiphi isikhathi kulocwaningo, ngicela wazi ukuthi sizolumisa ucwaningo noma siluqhube ngesikhathi esizayo.

Uma udinga ukusekwa noma ukwelulekwa ngemva kwalengxoxo, uphiko lwensiza yokululeka luyatholakala ngaphandle kwembadalo eBethal Hospital. Igama leSocial Worker okuyiyona elulekayo okwamanje ngu Rosie Xaba, futhi utholakala kulezi nombolo: 082 228 1122.

Uma unemibuzo ngesikhathi salocwaningo noma ngemva kwalocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukungithinta kulemininingwane engenzanzi. Lemfundiso izobalwa njengombiko wocwaningo oluzotholakala kumqulu zincwadi wase Nuvesi. Uma ufisa ukuthola isfinyezo salombiko, ungasithola uma usicela. Ngemvumo yakho, ledatha etholakele kulolucwaningo lungasetshenziswa ngabanye abcwaningi. Uma unokukhathazeka noma ukukhononda mayelana nezinqubo zokuziphatha kulocwaningo, uvumelelekile ukuthinta the University Human Research Ethics Committee, telephone: 011 717 1408

Ngikubonga kusengaphambili.

Imina ozithobayo,

Umcwaningi:	umhlanganyeli:
…….	……..
(DATE)	(DATE)
…….	……..

Appendix D: Interview Guide:

Introductory Questions: *(Please be aware that these introductory questions and biographical information will be translated back into the participant's mother tongue if deemed necessary)*

1. Do you understand your rights as a research participant with regards to confidentiality, anonymity, and withdrawal from the study?
2. Do you understand the limits to confidentiality?
3. Are you aware of your right to receive counselling services should you need it?
4. Do you understand what to do should you require these counselling services?

Biographical Information:

	Between 18-28	Between 29-39	Between 60+
How old are you? (age in years)			

	isiZulu	isiNdebele	Other
What is your home language?			

	Male	Female	Other
What is your gender?			

	1-10	10-20	20+
How long have you been a resident of Bethal? (in years)			

	2-5	5-10	10 +
How many members are in your family/ household?			

	YES	NO	SOMETIMES
Are you affiliated with any religious organisation?			

	Christianity	Islam	Other
What is your religious affiliation?			

	Grade 12	Certificate/Diploma	Degree

What is your highest educational level?			

	Entry-level	Intermediate/ mid-level	Senior/executive level
What is your current occupation level?			

Interview Questions:

Introduction**:**

(Please be aware that these interview questions will be translated back into the participant's mother tongue if deemed necessary)

As you may already know, this study is about the different mourning rituals that people practice as a way of not only dealing with the grief that comes with the loss of a loved one, but also as a traditional cultural practice.

1. Could you please share your opinion about why mourning rituals are so important within the African context, and for the African people as a whole?

2. How do you think these mourning rituals may have an influence on your affiliation to the African culture?

i) If you do not think it does, could you please share your ideas or other reasons as to why this may not necessarily be the case.

3. In your experience, who do you think plays the most important role in terms of these mourning rituals?

i) why do you think this is the case?

ii) what kind of role does each person play exactly?

iii) why are these people so significant in carrying out these mourning rituals?

iv) why are these particular mourning rituals considered important?

…….....

4. What happens in your family/community whenever certain community members offer their support to the grieving families during these mourning periods?

i) also, in what ways do these people offer their assistance?

---

5. Please tell me about your experience of the entire funeral process in terms of the different aspects relating to:

i) financial aspects of planning the funeral?

ii) social aspects of planning the funeral?

---

6. Tell me about your experience of the duration of the grieving process from start to finish?

i) when does the mourning process officially come to an end?

ii) if the mourning process does continue, why is this the case?

iii) are there any other rituals that occur after the burial process has been completed?

iv) if there are, what are these rituals? Also, how and where do they take place?

7. In your experience, how do u think you have personally offered your assistance to other people in their time of grief?

i) if you have, how did this action make you feel thereafter?

ii) who is the person you consider to have helped the most during this time?

iii) do you believe that you would have done more for this individual if it were possible?

iv) if so, why do you feel this way?

---

8. How has the Covid-19 pandemic affected these traditional mourning practices?

i) in your experience, who do you believe has been affected the most by the Covid-19 and lockdown restrictions during these mourning periods?

ii) also, how do you think these restrictions have affected the bereaved family and the community as a whole?

---

9. What is your opinion about the practice of these traditional mourning rituals in relation to those people who reside in rural/township areas compared to those in more urban areas?

i) would you say that these rituals are still practiced in the same way?

ii) if not, why do you say so?

……

10. Following the experiences you have had with traditional mourning rituals, would you say that over the years, such customs are still practiced the same way as before?

i) if not, in what ways do you believe these practices have changed?

ii) in your opinion, do you think such traditions should remain the same? Or should they change with the times?

iii) and lastly, how would you recommend that mourning rituals should be preserved for future generations?

…….

DATA ANALYSIS APPENDICES

Appendix E: Phase 3- mapping for themes and sub-themes



Figure 2: Sub-themes 1 and 2

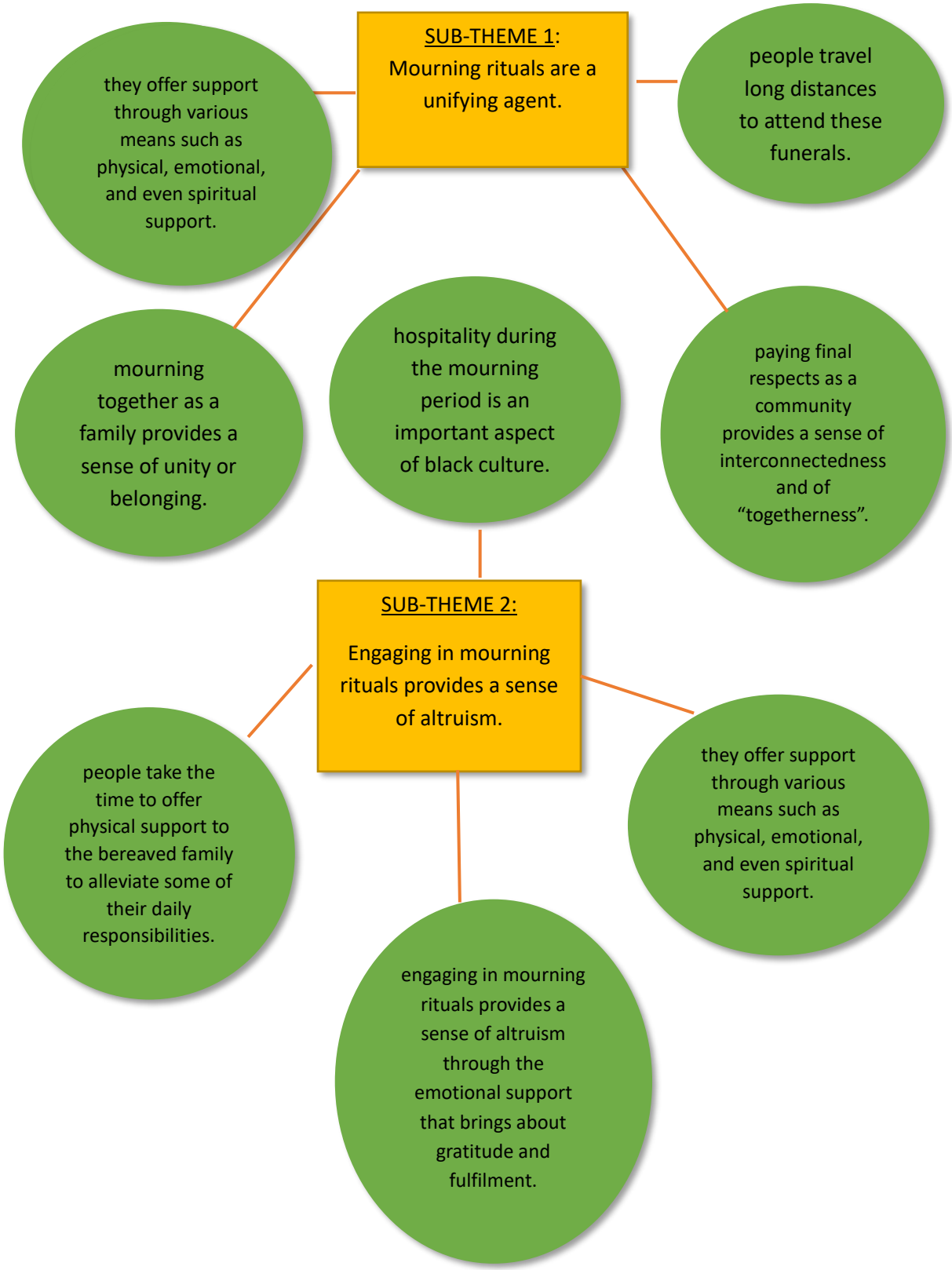


Figure 3: Sub-themes 3 and 4

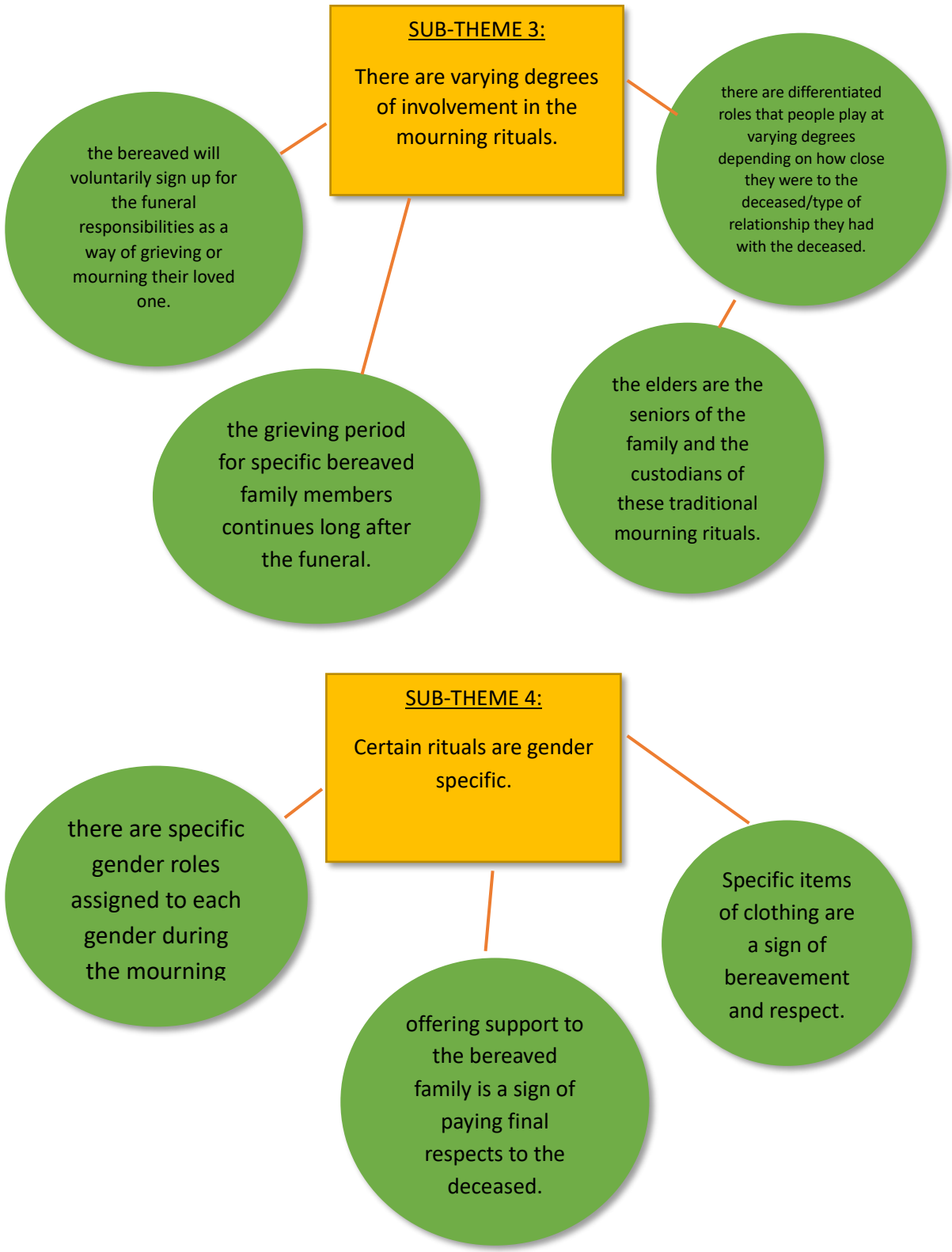


Figure 4: Sub-themes 5 and 6



Figure 5: Sub-themes 7 and Theme 3& 4

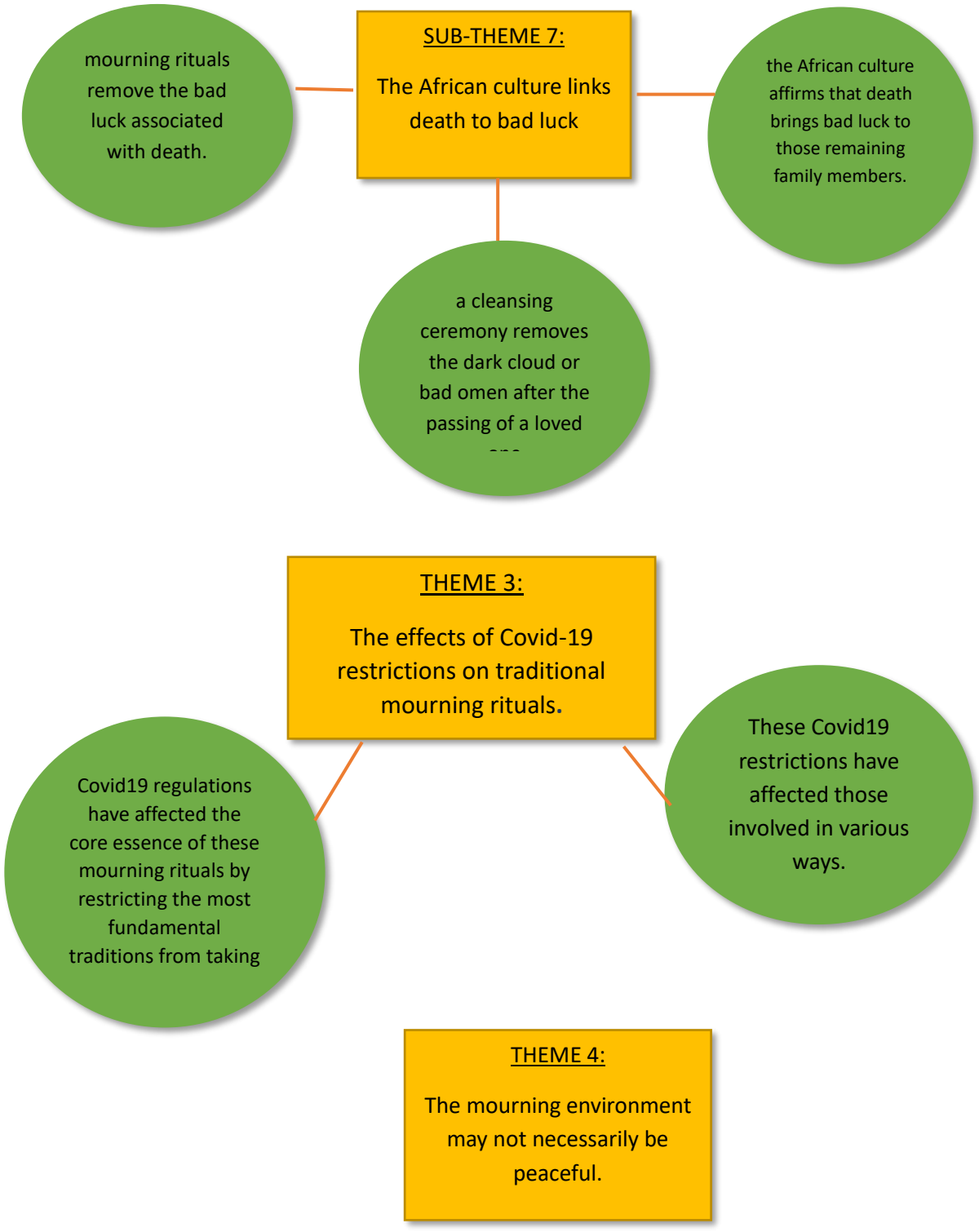
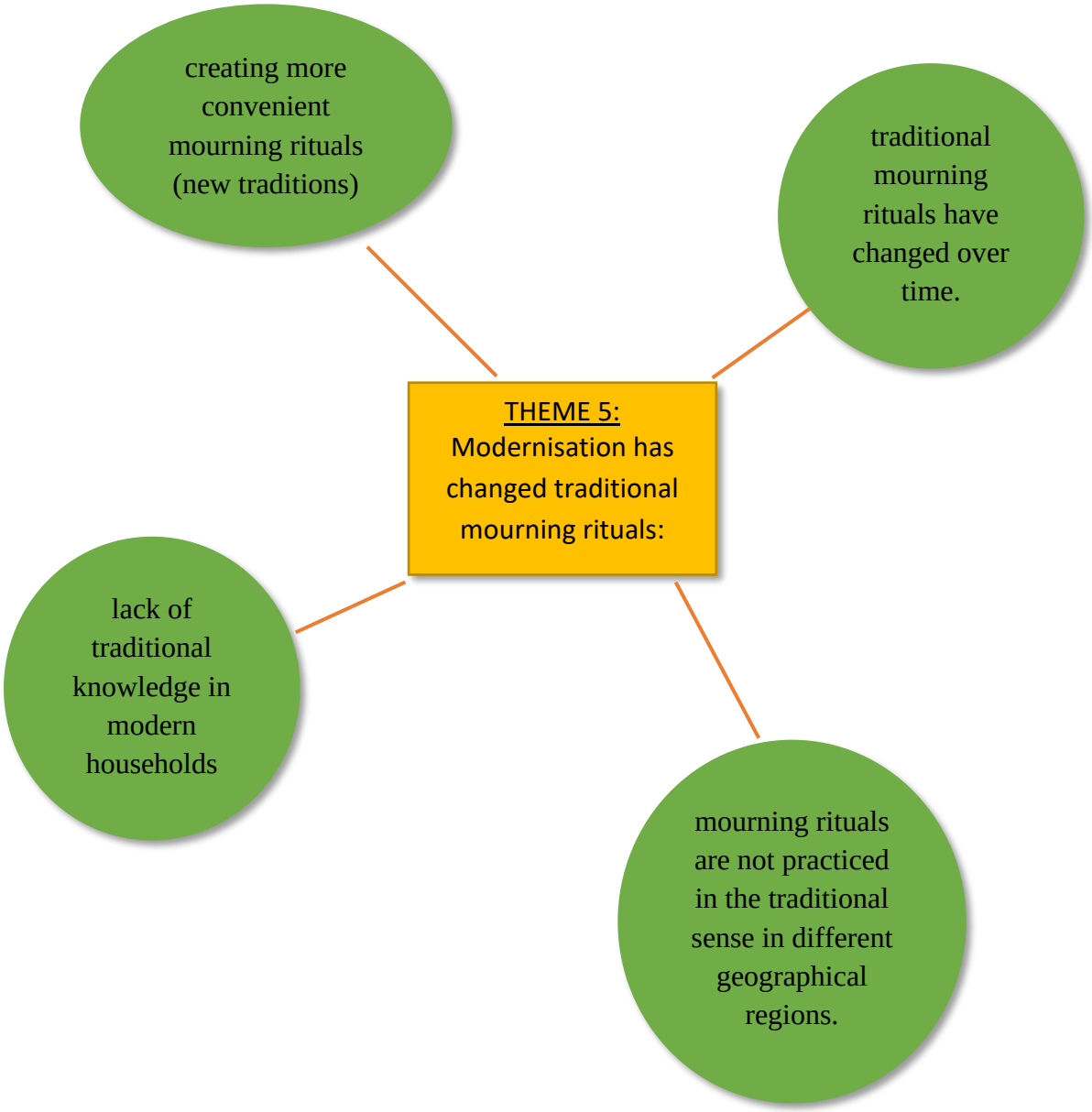


Figure 6: Theme 5



Appendix F: Horizontal and vertical analysis ensuring rigor of results *(table 1)*

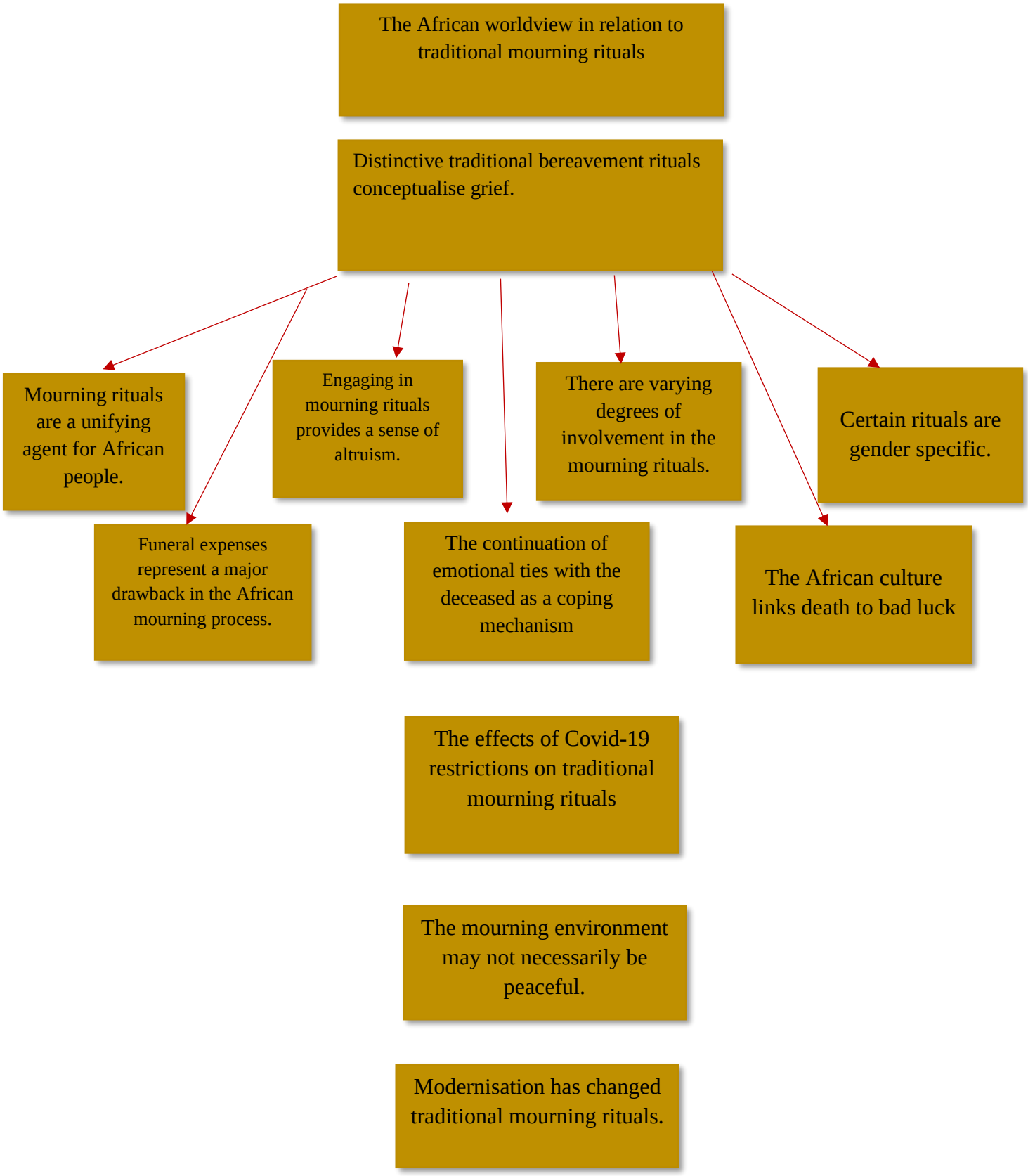
Themes	Code numbers (1-46)	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8
7	1	x	x		x			x	x
7	2	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
7	3		x		x	x	x	x	
7	4				x	x		x	x
8	5	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
8	6	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	7		x	x	x	x	x		x
5	8	x	x		x	x	x		x
5	9	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	10		x		x	x	x		x
3	11		x		x	x	x		x
2	12		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
3	13		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
1	14		x		x	x	x		x
1	15	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
11	16	x	x			x	x		x
11	17		x		x	x	x	x	x
4	18		x	x	x	x	x		x
11	19	x					x		
2	20	x						x	x
1	21	x	x		x	x		x	
1	22		x	x	x	x	x	x	
8	23	x		x				x	
2	24	x	x		x		x		x
2	25	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
4	26	x	x		x				
4	27	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
5	28	x						x	
3	29	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
7	30	x	x		x	x	x	x	x

7	31	x	x		x	x	x		
7	32	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
5	33	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
10	34	x		x	x	x		x	x
10	35	x				x			x
10	36	x	x			x		x	x
2	37	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
12	38	x	x		x	x	x		x
12	39	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8	40	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9	41		x	x				x	
5	42	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9	43		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9	44		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
9	45				x	x		x	
6	46		x	x		x	x		x

Table 1: Horizontal and vertical analysis ensuring rigor of results.

Appendix G: Phase 4- reviewing themes.

Figure 7: Final thematic map depicting all twelve main and sub- themes:



Appendix H: Process Reports

Process Report for Interview One:

On the morning of the interview, I woke up at around 8am and had my usual morning routine, which is coffee, shower, and then breakfast. Immediately after having breakfast, I had to rush out of the house and head to town as I had a few errands to run before meeting up with the participant. After completing all my errands, I then contacted the participant and she confirmed that she was ready to be interviewed and that I could come over to her residence. After confirming our session, I suddenly felt a bit nervous. I really had no idea why I felt this way, as I had conducted interviews in the past. So, this was definitely not my first attempt. However, I did manage to calm my nerves as I managed to make my way to the participant's homestead. When I arrived at her premises (about an hour later), I had to give her a call to let her know that I was outside the gate. She came and greeted me outside while leading me inside the house. Her home was beautiful- very neat and it looked like it had just been cleaned. She led me to the living room area and directed me to take a seat on one of the couches. She sat down across from me while simultaneously giving me a warm smile. We conversed for a few minutes about how the day was going, some issues we were currently facing in the Bethal community and about some plans for the future. She then offered me a beverage before we commenced with the interview. There was no one else at home, so there were no distractions. As the interview process began, my nerves came back again. I struggled a bit with how to start asking her questions. I think she could sense that I was having a bit of a hard time, so she reassured me that all is well and that I should feel at home. I then felt more and more comfortable to start the interview questions. However, before I could ask her the main interview questions, I wanted to build a sense of rapport with her. This wasn't too difficult to establish as she had already felt at ease with me and the entire process. Not only was she very welcoming, but she was kind-hearted and very patient with me. A sense of rapport was cemented as I continued to ask her about her family life, her work life, what her goals were and what her interests were. During the entire interview process, the participant had a calm demeanour. Although some questions did prove difficult to answer right away as she had to pause for a few minutes before she could give a response, she did manage to provide an appropriate response to each question. However, what was evident was that she clearly had a bit of a problem fully conceptualizing some of the questions asked. As a result, she would repeat the same answer to different questions. Whenever this would happen, I had to rephrase the question in order to make it easier for her

to understand. Most importantly, she appeared to be mentally present during this process as she wasn't easily distracted by anything else. She gave me her full and undivided attention. The entire interview process went smoothly, and the main aim of the entire process was achieved by the end of that session with this particular participant.

Process Report for Interview Two:

On the morning of the interview, I got up very early as I had a few errands to run before heading over to the participant's house. It was a very hot Wednesday afternoon as I made my way to where the interview would take place. The taxi ride from town to the participant's home was approximately 15 minutes long. Since it was a scorching hot afternoon, the taxi ride was a very uncomfortable one indeed. I was very nervous heading into this particular interview session as I had no idea what to expect. And although I knew the participant from around the Bethal area, I wasn't really acquainted with her. I had only just seen her around the neighbourhood. Also, since I didn't know the participant well enough, I wasn't sure how welcoming or receptive to being interviewed she would be. Upon arrival at her home, she greeted me with the warmest smile and welcomed me inside. The environment was a relatively calm one as the baby was fast asleep while her other son was at kindergarten. The rest of the family members were not at home either.

Process Report for Interview Three:

This particular interview took place on a chilly Tuesday morning. I had spoken to the participant a few weeks prior, and she was adamant that she would prefer to be interviewed early in the morning as she had online lectures to attend from as early as 9am each morning. She would not be available most weekends either as she had a part-time job that required her time and attention during those days. This participant also requested that we conduct the interview at my residence instead of hers as there would be many distractions where she stays. I actually respected her requests, and I didn't mind accommodating her at all. She was a local young student that I have known for many years prior, and her presence at my home wasn't concerning to me at all. Since we had already agreed upon an early time (7am to be exact) the participant arrived at my place at exactly 6:45am – which was a bit of a surprise to me as most young people her age aren't as punctual with time as this young woman was. I was very

impressed by her sense of professionalism, reliability and her respect for other people's time. Nevertheless, when she arrived, I welcomed her with open arms and led her into the living room where the interview would take place. We sat down and spoke for a few minutes about the weather, her taxi ride experience on her way here, and about life in general. I offered her a cup of coffee and we continued to talk as she shared with me some of her interests, hobbies, what she's currently studying and her work experience amongst other things. The more we spoke, I noticed that her demeanour seemed to slowly change as I noticed that she was becoming more and more comfortable with me as compared to when she first walked in the house. She even expressed her feelings of content when she revealed that she was a bit nervous as she had never done an interview such as this one before, and she didn't know what to expect. However, the ease through which we spoke and the content of what we spoke about made her more comfortable throughout the rest of the interview process.

Process Report for Interview Four:

On the morning of this particular interview, I had woken up a bit later than usual as I had slept very late the night before. At the time, I had had a very intense week of schoolwork and other personal responsibilities that I needed to prioritise each and every day. As a result, I was sleeping around 4am every night for 4 weeks straight. To say I was exhausted would have been the understatement of the century. When I woke up that morning, my body felt a bit sluggish, and my mind was a bit groggy. I definitely didn't even want to get out of bed that day, but in the back of my mind I knew that I had no other choice but to suck it up and get the day started. The participant, Mr Siluma and I had agreed to meet up on this particular day weeks prior, and I had absolutely no intention of postponing or delaying this interview. Besides, even if I wanted to postpone, it would have been next to impossible to meet up with Mr Siluma again for at least 2 months because he also had other obligations as he was a very busy man working as a teacher, being the Head of academic Department at the high school at which he works as well as being a master's student himself. So, it was now or never.

After plucking up the courage to drag myself out of bed, I made the bed and headed straight to take a shower. After a quick shower, I made my way to the kitchen only to be met with the delicious aroma of someone cooking bacon and eggs. The smell was so enticing that for a few minutes, I actually forgot all my troubles and how exhausted I actually was. My sister greeted me with a warm smile as I sat down next to her. Everyone was laughing and talking and in such

good spirits as we ate. We hadn't had a meal as a family in such a long time, and my morning got a little better through each conversation we shared. After finishing my breakfast, I immediately called the participant to find out what time we would meet up. He confirmed that the most suitable time would be later on in the afternoon, which gave me ample time to run a few errands and prepare for the interview. Later on in the day, the participant called to say that he was on his way to my place. When he arrived, he greeted everyone, sat down and had somewhat of a long conversation with my aunt as they were quite acquainted with each other. After a seemingly long "catching-up session" with my aunt, the participant was ready to begin with our interview. We sat down in the living room and began with interview.

Before we could begin though, I asked the participant to excuse me for a few minutes as I gathered my thoughts. I have no idea why, but for some reason I became anxious and nervous. My hands started sweating and my mouth was dry. However, I was able to calm myself down after drinking a glass of water. I then offered the participant a beverage as well, and then began the interview process. I began the interview by asking him questions about himself, his family and his occupation. I wanted to build a sense of rapport with him before the interview started. During this interview process, the participant seemed to convey a very calm demeanour. He appeared to be very at ease when giving his responses, so much so that the interview went a bit over the time limit. However, I did not mind this at all as I wanted the participant to feel comfortable enough to freely express their opinions and experiences in such a way that he did not need to feel like he was limited to a certain time frame. In this way, his experience would be captured in its entirety.

Process Report for Interview Five:

On the morning scheduled for this particular interview, I woke up really early in the morning and immediately got into my normal morning routine. I woke up, made my bed, took a shower and had breakfast with the family. I then went to town to run a few errands for my aunt before meeting up with the participant. Later in the afternoon, at around 2pm, the participant informed me that she was on her way to my place of residence. We had initially agreed to meet at our local coffee shop, however, we both made changes to this plan as we could run the risk of possibly being constantly interrupted and distracted at some point in time during the interview at this particular location. The participant arrived at my place of residence at exactly 14:30 for our scheduled afternoon meeting. As soon as we reached my gate, she called me. I went to

fetch her outside. As soon as I came out the house, she greeted me with a warm smile. I approached her and opened the gate. We embraced each other gently, although for a brief period of time. I then invited her into the house. As she followed me inside my home, she complimented the beauty of our small garden, which is situated right near outskirts of our front lawn. As soon as the participant entered the door, she greeted my aunt who was seated on the couch in the living room area. My aunt greeted her back, the participant sat down beside her, and they began to converse about any and everything. It was evident that my aunt and the participant were already acquainted with each other. They spoke about life in general, and I left the room in order to give them a bit of privacy. I came back a few minutes later with some refreshments for the both of them. After about 20 minutes of them catching up, the participant informed me that she was ready to begin with the interview. I then took her to a different living room in the house – one with a lot more privacy. We sat down and the participant began to ask me a few questions about myself, what I am currently studying and why I wasn't married yet. It was a light and humorous conversation in which she also stated how proud she was of me in that I was furthering my studies. Soon afterwards, the interview process began. As soon as the interview process began, the participant had a seemingly calm and relaxed demeanour. She seemed to be ready for the interview process and was absolutely thorough when answering the questions. She gave me precise responses, and she even told a few jokes here and there. Because this participant was of a certain age, she knew most of the traditional African mourning rituals, even those ones which were practiced a very long time ago. The overall interview process with this particular participant was concise, light-hearted and extremely informative. She was a pleasure to work with.

Process Report for Interview Six:

This particular participant has been my brother's old childhood friend. They have been friends since primary school, and even attended the same high school together. By that extension, I have also known the participant for many years as well as he has been a part of my brother's life, and in some regard, a part of my life too. So, asking him to be a part of this study was not a difficult task at all as he was eager and completely willing to help. After he had agreed to be a part of the study, I had spoken to the participant a few weeks prior to the interview and had explained to him what the study entailed and what the interview was about. We then were able to set a time and date that we were both happy about. On the day of the scheduled interview,

the participant had mentioned earlier on during the day that he was going to be a bit late for the interview, and if I didn't mind if we could move the time up. He wanted to meet later on that evening as he was going to get off work later than what he had anticipated. I had no problem with his request and agreed that he could come in the that was the most convenient for him. During the day, I continued to work on the rest of my report while setting up the interview room/space. At around 19:00pm, the participant called to confirm that he was on his way, and that he would be here shortly. Sure enough, at exactly 19:10pm, there was a knock on the door. I immediately got up from my seat and I answered the door. We greeted each other and I allowed him inside. He sat on one of the couches, after which I then proceeded to inform my brother (who was in his room at the time) that his friend had arrived. My brother immediately jumped from his bed and followed me into the living room. They greeted each other enthusiastically and my brother sat down to have a bit of a catch-up session with his old-time friend. I wasn't aware of this as I had been completely focused on my schoolwork, but the pair hadn't actually seen each other for a couple of months because of the participant's intense work schedule. So, needless to say, they were both ecstatic to see each other again. I decided to give them some time to have their moment together. After about 30 minutes or so, the participant decided that we should get on with the interview. I asked him to follow me into another room where we could have some privacy and quietness. Before we could sit down, I offered him a glass of juice and some refreshments. We then proceeded with the interview. The interview process was a smooth one as the participant and I were already acquainted with each other. Although at the start of the interview the participant did seem to be a bit nervous, however, as we continued, he seemed to be a lot calmer and confident in his responses.

Process Report for Interview Seven:

The scheduling process for this particular interview was by far the most difficult one. Since the participant is a newly appointed young Reverend at one of our local churches, this meant that he was busy most days of the week – including weekends. I had spoken to him weeks prior to the interview, and we had both agreed to a time and day that would work for the both of us. However, because of his hectic work schedule, our scheduled interview kept being pushed back. We would then have to agree to a new time and day, however, whenever that day came, the participant would call early in the morning and ask to reschedule yet gain. This happened three times. And every time I had to be understanding as I was the one who was asking for a

favour from him after all. Although I didn't mind, it did get a bit frustrating at some point as I began to worry about my own work progress since scheduling a solid day for the interview seemed nearly impossible. This subsequently caused a lot of delays for my report findings as well. However, on the fourth attempt to secure an interview with the participant, by that point, I had little to no hope of actually sitting down with the Reverend. Luckily enough, when he contacted me on the morning of yet another scheduled interview, he seemed pretty eager about his availability this time around. He insisted that I should be ready later on that afternoon, and that the meeting point would be at St Paul's church. After that phone call, I immediately got out of bed, took a shower and had some breakfast. Since I had some time to kill before heading to the interview, I decided to continue working on my report. At around 14:00pm that afternoon, the participant called to say that I could come to the church. I asked my aunt to drive me there. We got there at around 14:15pm, and the participant was already waiting for me. The participant and my aunt were already acquainted with each other since they both attended the same church. So, we all exchanged pleasantries, and afterwards, the participant and I made our way inside the church. It was a very quiet setting since it was just the two of us there. The participant then mentioned that there was going to be a small church members' meeting at around 17:pm that evening. We then sat down and had chatted a bit. We spoke about life in general and about the spiritual journey as well. Afterwards, the interview began. Although it wasn't too long of an interview, the participant is naturally a shy person. So, he did seem a bit nervous at first, but as the interview progressed, he gradually gained a sense of confidence in both him and his responses as well. Interviewing a Reverend provided a new perspective all round as his opinions were mostly spiritually motivated. All in all, the interview process was a very informative one.

Process Report for Interview Eight:

Interview no.8 was my final interview for my research report. Although this was the last interview, finding one more participant to partake in this study proved to be a bit more challenging than the others. After discussing with my supervisor about the number of participants I already had, I decided to add one more to the equation. However, I innately knew that finding said participant wouldn't be much of an easy task. I had to extensively do my research on the kind of participant I wanted to include in the study as I already had a number of participants who although shared some similarities, were uniquely different in their own

right as well. I again had to ask Sister Nora who was involved in a few of the NGOs in and around my area for some assistance in this regard. After about two weeks of searching, we eventually found someone. She was young and full of energy, and when I explained to her what the study was about, she was enthusiastic and willing to help. After meeting up with her and arranging a schedule that would work best for the both of us, I was overwhelmed with a sense of relief and excitement as I knew at that moment that I was nearing the end of the interview process. Unfortunately, since the scheduling of this particular interview was during the December holidays, there was lot of postponing and re-scheduling as the participant had family gatherings and other events that she wanted to attend, and understandably so. I had to be patient and understanding as she was still young and wanted to enjoy the holiday break. I then decided to move the interview to the first week of January. She eagerly agreed that that would be the best option for us to meet then. Surely enough, on the day of the scheduled interview, the participant called at around 11:00am to confirm that she was still coming later that afternoon. Later that afternoon, at around 15:30pm, the participant called to confirm that she was in the taxi on her way to my place of residence. She asked for a few directions, and I gave them to her. She then stated that she knew where the place was and that she would be there shortly. Ten minutes after that call, another call came through and she said that she was by the gate. I rushed out my room and made my way out of the house to greet her. She seemed friendly and quite talkative as well. I didn't mind that at all. We shared a brief hug and then made our way inside the house. When we got inside, I directed her towards the interview room, and we sat down on the strategically placed chairs. We chatted for some time about life in general and about some of the social issues we are faced with as a country these days – including loadshedding. While chatting, I offered her a beverage and some snacks. I then proceeded with the interview.

Appendix I: Ethical Clearance Certificate

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF HUMAN AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE:	**PROTOCOL NUMBER: MAPSYC/21/06**
PROJECT TITLE:	An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province.
INVESTIGATOR	Mamosadi Kedeboni (2175763)
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	SHCD/Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	19 October 2021
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	Minimal Risk
EXPIRY DATE	31 December 2023

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 25 October 2021 **CHAIRPERSON** _____
(Prof. Peace Kiguwa)

cc: Dr Simangele Mayisela (Supervisor)

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

_____ 14/03/2023
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

STUDENT SUBMISSION OF RESEARCH– please submit an electronic copy of your research to Faculty for examination

KEDEBONI PRECIOUS

Candidate's full names

MAMOSADI

Student number

2175763

Title of research: **An exploration of the mourning rituals of the people of Bethal, Mpumalanga Province.**

*Please note that if the title has changed from the previously approved title an amendment form must be completed before submission takes place.

I acknowledge that:

I hereby submit my research work (MA research report / MA dissertation / Doctor of Philosophy).

I have checked all of my manuscript and am satisfied that no pages are missing or poorly reproduced.

I declare that I have obtained an ethics protocol number from the Research Office, if my research used human subject, patient records, student data etc.

I confirm that my signed declaration is included in the research submission, in terms of rule G27.

I understand that I need to register as awaiting examiner with the Faculty Office on the day that I submit and that I will be charged tuition fees if I submit after the 15th March 2022.

I understand that I may not graduate unless my University fees have been paid in full.

I understand that I may not submit my research for examination nor graduate if research ethics requirements have been breached.

Ethical Clearance:

Did your research involve animals, human subjects, or medical institutions (medical or non-medical)?

YES	NO
X	

If yes, provide the ethics clearance number:

MAPSYC/21/06

Name of Supervisor:	Dr Simangele Mayisela

Student name and signature: Kedeboni Precious Mamosadi

Date: 08/03/2023