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An Investigation of Therapeutic Value of the Batsotso Mourning Rituals in Kakamega County, Kenya.

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Abstract*: Every community in the world responds to death and loss in unique ways. Funeral customs and ceremonies vary across different cultures worldwide. The study aimed at establishing how these rituals contribute to the psychological well-being of the bereaved. It also sought to establish the strengths and weaknesses of these rituals on the bereaved. The study focused on establishing and understanding the effects of the Batsotso mourning rituals and ascertaining their applicability in grief and bereavement counseling. The research narrowed down to the different rituals performed during the mourning period among the Batsotso people with the aim of generalizing the results to other Kenyan communities. Batsotso is one of the Luhya dialects, a tribe that inhabits Kakamega County in Kenya. The study used descriptive research design. The data was collected by the use of questionnaires, interview and observation. The target population for this study was 400 families from Butsotso who had experienced death in the last three years. The sample size of 80 participants was selected through simple random sampling. The questionnaires were given to adults and children while the interview guide was administered on adults who had attained at least fifty years of age. The researchers conducted a pilot study where 20 respondents who were not part of the main sample were given the research instruments. This was meant to establish the validity and reliability of the instruments. Results from the study were analyzed using quantitative and qualitative techniques and interpretation presented in form of charts and tables. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences was used in the analysis of quantitative data. The research was guided by three theories. The theories include Bowlbys theory of attachment, Kubler Ross grief theory and Rondos' theory on grief process. The study concluded that there is relationship between the Batsotso mourning rituals and the psychological well-being of the mourners. The study recommends that Batsotso people should practice mourning rituals which have therapeutic and psychological purpose as they help them to cope with death. Batsotso people should further shun the mourning practices which do not have psychological importance as they do not help them to cope with death. The study finally recommends the continuation of therapeutic Batsotso mourning rituals as they lead to psychological well-being of the mourners.*

Keywords: Rituals, grief, Batsotso, Mourning.

1. Introduction

Over a long period of time, different people from different cultures have gone over the mourning process by use of different strategies. Different communities worldwide have unique ways of meeting the emotional needs of the bereaved. For instance, in the Jewish culture people could take several days after burial, at the burial site. In this culture the dead bodies were wrapped in clothes before burial as documented in the Holy Bible (John11:39). It is also clear that burying the dead was an important part of mourning rituals. In the Far East specifically in India, unique rituals include cremation where the body of the dead is burnt to ashes. The Indians do this to separate the spirit and the bodies of the dead, to allow the spirit go to the spirit world (Clark, 2000). Silverman & Prigerson (2001) discusses how different cultures in Europe conducted funerals. For instance, in Poland a door and windows of the house where someone died were left opened to allow the soul of the deceased to leave. Mirrors were covered with some cloth. Clocks were stopped. Further, a woman, kind of a professional, was called to wash and dress the dead. After washing, the body of the deceased was placed on boards between two chairs or two tables. The body was put in the coffin on the day of burial. There was always someone with the body. The family members and neighbors kept vigil during the night. Traditionally the body was kept in the house for three days. The funeral was held on the third day after the death (Abduljalil, 2004).

African communities too had their own mourning styles. Cottle (2006) examines how the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe mourn their people. He found out that when a person is so close to dying the family makes effort to revive the person by pouring cold water on him or making him inhale smoke from certain herbs. Roos & Toit (2002) examined the rituals used in Ethiopia. They established that an edir is a traditional community organization in which the members assist each other during the mourning process. Members make monthly financial contributions forming the Edir's fund.

In her study, Gichinga (2005) found out that some Kenyan communities for example the Kikuyu responded to death with great fear. In an attempt to be brave, they wear a mask that portrays emotional strength or false front. The feelings are buried beneath the surface and are not allowed expression. With the infiltration of western culture most of the traditional African mourning rituals were abandoned. Those rituals still practiced have often been condemned blindly without any theoretical support.

This research aimed at establishing a theoretical background to explain both the negative and positive effects of these rituals to the bereaved and their immediate society. The research concentrated in Butsotso south and Butsotso north locations in Kakamega county, which are the two areas dominated by the Batsotso people clans.

Batsotso are believed to have migrated to Kenya from Egypt through Uganda. Batsotso is one of the Luhya dialects inhabiting Kakamega County in Kenya. The Batsotso currently live in Lurambi division. The neighboring Luhya dialects of the Batsotso are Abetakho, Abesukha, Abamarama, Abawanga, Abakabrasi and Abanyala.

The Batsotso had an established system of government. They were ruled by a king called Omwami. Each clan was ruled by a clan head or elder. The function of the king was to protect his people and maintain peace in the country. The King presided over cases assisted by the clan heads. The King had power over the military and he was the one with the responsibility of declaration and cessation of war. The King himself never participated in war. The king wore a cloak of skins of different animals, a cap, cow hide shoes and a copper bracelet. He had a shrub staff a fly whisk and a traditional stool. The Batsotso used to install their Kings at dawn and kingship was hereditary.The king was buried in a sitting position on a fresh cow hide. The head was covered with a pot which protruded above the grave. After seven days, when the head began to decay, it was pressed into the grave. In the grave was also a small pot of beer with a drinking straw going to the king’s mouth. The straw was

removed on the seventh day (Were, 1967).This study tested whether the Batsotso mourning rituals had therapeutic value or not.

2. Methodology

Research design is the plan that is used to generate answers to the research problem (Mugenda, O & Mugenda, A., 2003). The study adopted descriptive research design in order to provide a framework to examine current conditions, trends and status of the study phenomenon. Descriptive research design is more investigative and focuses on a particular variable factor. It is analytical and often singles out a variable factor or individual subject and goes into details and describing them. This research studied the different mourning rituals practised by the Batsotso. The research singled out each ritual, studying how it is practised, the meaning attached to it by the bereaved and whether the bereaved considered it therapeutic or not.

This study targeted 400 families from Butsotso. This is the number of estimated number of families that had experienced death in Butsotso in the past three years (Butsotso South and North locations burial records, 2013). The target population included men, women, girls and boys drawn from five Batsotso clans. A sample size of 80 Participants was targeted. This represents 20% of the target population. The Participants were selected from five Batsotso clans. This is 25% of the total number of Batsotso clans and is therefore assumed to be a representative of the twenty targeted clans. The clans were selected from the twenty Batsotso clans by use random sampling technique. The ages of the Participants ranged from at least 13 years and they were to have experienced death of their loved one within the last three years. This is the longest time it takes to complete all the funeral rituals among the Batsotso people. They included men and women, boys and girls. The older generation above 50 years was used to explain the rationale of these rituals. The clans sampled were Abamweche, Abashisiru, Abamatioli, Abashiibo and Abamwende. The Participants from these clans were obtained from the following areas respectively: Ibinzo, Eshisiru, Ematetie, Eshiamboko and Esumeiya.

2.1. Data Analysis

The study used quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis. Secondary data was also used to support the findings. Tables, graphs and charts were used.

3. Results and Discussion

The study established that 47.27% of the participants had primary level of education, 30.90% had Secondary level of education and only 21.81% were Tertiary education holders. This indicates moderate literacy level of Batsotso people. Thus, the respondents well understood the questionnaires and their responses were assumed to be reliable.

3.1. Description of Various Batsotso Mourning Rituals

3.1.1: Lichienga

Thus is a big fire which is lit in the compound and keep burning continuously pro and after burial. The participants indicated that bonfire is performed so as to unite those who remain behind; to show that they are in good standing with the deceased; to keep the bereaved intact, to keep mourners warm, and to hold funeral discussions around the fire. It can only be lit when the body of the deceased is in the compound of his or her home.

3.1.2: Washing the corpse

The body is taken behind the house, away from the public and a piece of cloth is used to wipe the body, and then the body is anointed and dressed. Washing of corpse is done to remove any dirt so as to send the deceased off when he or she is clean; to confirm that the body was in good condition;' to honour the dead, to prove to him or her that though dead, you still value him.

3.1.3: Burial at night

It is a normal burial done at night and is done when one is murdered or when the death is not natural so as to curse the killers; it is done to send the spirit of murder away.

3.1.4: Oluveko (shaving)

All the close relatives of the departed gather a day or two after burial. The shaving is not done by a special person but each person shaves another. Hair is part of one's body that you can remove to represent personal loss. It is done as an identity for the bereaved members; for warriors it is done to separate the dead and his brevity; to show others that the mourners had a funeral and to separate the dead from the living.

3.1.5: Burial outside compound

It is burying the dead outside the home compound mainly behind the house for those people who have divorced or unwed women. It is done to send the spirit of being unmarried away.

3.1.6: Obukoko

After the burial, the women of the clan of the dead who are married agree on a day they come for this event. Abakoko are part of the family who stay away from home. It is kind of reunion in which an animal is slaughtered. It is done to review what was done in the funeral, pay debts and share the property of the deceased.

3.1.7: Lisabo

The close relatives come back to meet at home of the deceased and an animal is slaughtered. It is done to close the chapter with the deceased; it is the final cerebration to remember the dead. It is usually done one year after burial.

3.1.8: Shinini

This is a small group of relatives who come three to four days after burial. It is an overnight event. It is done to bring the spirits of a person who died away from home back home. It involves visiting the actual place where the person died.

3.1.9: Beating the Corpse

It is beating of dead body of a person who has committed suicide; they are beaten to drive the spirit of suicide away. This is done before the body is removed from the spot where the person died.

3.1.10: Remarrying ceremony

Relatives of the deceased gather and the widow chooses from among the brothers of her late husband. It is done so as to get comfort from the new partner. It is also done to give the widow and children of the deceased support and security.

3.1.11: Speaking to the corpse

This is usually done to someone who is believed to have been killed so that he or she can revenge. Also it is done if someone who dies away from home and complicates his journey back home. It is done to ask the dead person when being dressed to flex his or her joints. It is done also to mourn the dead; to curse the people who killed the dead person; to ask for forgiveness from one who was the enemy. It is also a common practise done my mourners as they wail or as they give tribute to the deceased.

3.1.12: Piercing the Corpse

A man who die at an advanced age but has never married could be pierced at the back or at his manhood with thorn. It is done to encourage men to get married.

3.1.13: Wailing (Okhwikhula)

People cry aloud immediately after death and continue in the entire funeral. It is done to announce the death; to show that one was not responsible for the death; to say good bye to the dead and also to release emotions.

3.1.14: Obuloli

These are tributes said to acknowledge the good things done by the departed. It is done to pay tribute, to show gratitude and to remember his good deeds.

3.1.15: Burial of Banana Stem

It is doing a funeral~~;~~ service of a person who died and his body cannot be traced. It is done to end searching of the dead and bring the searching to a conclusion.

Table 1: Ways in which the Rituals are Helpful

Ritual	*It helped me to:*							
	Release emotions		Feel Supported		Accept the Death		Move on With life	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Washing the dead	55	100.00	5	9.09	9	16.36	13	23.64
Wailing	55	100.00	23	41.82	55	100.00	28	50.91
Obuloli(Testimony)	54	98.18	36	65.45	55	100.00	53	96.36
Burial of banana stem	53	96.36	27	49.09	53	96.36	46	83.64
Beating the corpse	42	76.36	25	45.45	22	40.00	20	36.36
Speaking to the corpse	38	69.09	0	0.00	29	52.73	40	72.73
Burial at night	36	65.45	0	0.00	17	30.91	0	0.00
Born fire(Lichienga)	32	58.18	23	41.82	34	61.82	8	14.55
Obukoko	22	40.00	53	96.36	42	76.36	11	20.00
Remarrying ceremony	21	38.18	50	90.91	31	56.36	49	89.09
Lisabo	19	34.55	48	87.27	38	69.09	15	27.27
Piercing the corpse	16	29.09	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	1.82
Shaving	14	25.45	20	36.36	33	60.00	25	45.45
Shinini	11	20.00	3	5.45	40	72.73	16	29.09
Burial outside compound	6	10.91	0	0.00	1	1.82	0	0.00

The study results in Table 1 indicate that majority of rituals that the participants considered helpful such as born fire (Lichienga), washing the dead, shaving, burial of banana stem, Obukoko, Lisabo, remarrying ceremony, speaking to the corpse, piercing the corpse, and wailing, Obuloli (testimony) to great extent helped the Batsotso people release emotions; feel supported; accept the death; move on with life. The rituals that the participants considered not helpful such as burial at night, burial outside the compound, Shinini, and beating the corpse to less extent helped the Batsotso people release emotions; feel supported; accept the death; move on with life. In review of Kubler Ross grief theory, Miller (2000) found out that if denial is processed it allows the bereaved to transit into other stages of grief. These rituals that are validated by the bereaved as being helpful can be used to confront denial, allow the client to experience pain resulting from the death. Since this study shows that majority of the participants understand the meaning of these rituals, psychologists can encourage their clients to practice the rituals in order to process and accept death and begin to adjust to life without the deceased.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that most of the Batsotso mourning rituals have therapeutic value. The psychological benefits of these rituals include helping the bereaved to release and process their emotions, to feel supported and to move beyond denial by accepting the death and readjust to live life where the deceased is absent. These benefits could be of great

impact in grief resolution. The study further concludes that that mourning rituals that the participants considered not helpful to less extent helped the Batsotso people release emotions; feel supported; accept the death; move on with life.

The study recommends that Batsotso people should practice mourning rituals which have therapeutic and psychological purpose as they help them to cope with death. This should not be generalized to all the mourners without considering their personal convictions about each ritual. The counsellors working with people from this community on grief should not impose these rituals to the mourners but work with what the clients personally consider therapeutic. Batsotso people should further shun the anti-therapeutic mourning practices which do not have psychological importance as they do not help them in any way to cope with death. Though different ethnic communities in Kenya practise different mourning rituals, they can be encouraged to continue practicing rituals which have therapeutic values.

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