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**Exploring widowhood practices and its effects among the Frafra,
Kusasis and Kasenas women in the Upper East Region (UE/R) of
Ghana.**

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies. The views stated therein are those of the author and not necessarily those of the institute.

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List Of Acronyms

ATR: African Traditional Religion

CSOs: Civil Society Organizations

CEDAW: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women

DOVVSU: Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit

GSS: Ghana Statistical Service

GVSSN: Gender Violence Survivors Support Network

MGCSP: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

NCWD: National Council on Women Development

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

PNDC: Provisional National defence Council

PHC: Population and Housing Census

SDGs: Sustainable Development Goals

UDHR: Universal Declaration on Human Rights

UE/R: Upper East Region

UN: United Nations

WISE: Women Initiative for Self-Employment

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Dedications

This writing is dedicated to:

Mother Mary (The Immaculate)

Abstract

This study explored widowhood practices on widowed women in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The paper examines what widowhood practices are, the context at which the widowhood practices are performed. The effects of the practices on the widowed women in relation to their experiences and opinions to the widowhood practices and how the practices violate widows' rights as an aspect of concern of the research. The study followed a qualitative approach.

Using intersectionality and gender power relation concepts, the research carried out semi-structured interviews with nine (9) widows and twelve (12) other stakeholders through snow balling and purposive sampling respectively. The data were collected through in-depth interviews and data gathered were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that widowhood practices are culturally constructed practice that serves the interest of each ethnic group, and their meanings attached to them after the death of one's husband. Strikingly, these practices include, shaving of the widow's head, confinement of widow, holding of calabash, stripped naked, and sitting on the floor or mat. Inherently, these widowhood practices exposed the widowed women to various embarrassing and harmful experiences.

Amidst the recommendations of this research, widowhood practices need social transformation, right from the local actors, institutional actions to the national level for widows to receives justice in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Relevance of the Study to Development Studies

The paper contributes to the revelation of abuse of human rights, particularly vulnerable women which is needed in every development. Cognizance of women's human rights and mutually reinforcing them are essential for developmental agendas. The debate against harmful customs and traditional practices to women constitutes the world's struggle against gender-based violence on women. Hence the call for gender equity and development in all sectors. The research centered on the plight of widowed women in the Upper East Region of Ghana, which openly discussed the experiences of the widows in relation to the effects that the practices expose them to.

Focusing on widows' plight in addressing the culturally constructed practices that degrade women is important on the development of societal welfare, and the legit position of widows in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The findings add up to already existed empirical knowledge on widowhood practices and can be helpful to policymakers in designing policies and program geared towards women rights. Also, studying the phenomenon serves relevant in the development of widowhood practices in upper East Region of Ghana for a better understanding of fundamental human rights. Considering these, the research is evidently relevant to development studies.

Keywords

widowhood practices, cultural practices, gender, violation of women's rights, Upper East Region of Ghana (Frafra, Kassenas and Kusasi)

CHAPTER ONE (1)

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Origin of Widowhood Practices

Historically, widowhood practices can be traced back to the ancient days and across the entire regions of the world. Especially at the well-structured patriarchal societies where women were marginalized as subordinate to the men. In the western world like Europe, widowhood practices such as medieval practices limited or restricted widows to only property rights and some were compelled to go to convents or rely on male relatives for support. Also, in Asia, widowhood practices such as the sati in India, in which widows were immolated during their husband's pyre, portraying their complete devotion of belief and life after death (Atwal, 2022, p.18). Similarly, in ancient African civilizations, such as Egypt, widows were coerced to observe strict cultural rituals to demonstrate their loyalty to their deceased husbands. Widowhood practice has its foundation from the patriarchal structures, where men wielded authority in both the community and family settings, in which widows were seen as unclean with potential bad omen after the husband death (Sossou, 2002). Widows were considered as been vulnerable and were blamed for any misfortunate and stigmatized in the event of the husband's death.

In Africa, widowhood has a historical antecedence ranging from traditional customs, values, norms and beliefs that had been rooted across the various cultural systems in the entire Africa (Shoko and Danke, 2024). According to Magudu and Mohlakoana-Motopi (2013) as cited in Shoko and Danke, (2024, p.2) widowhood is a social position connected to social construct such as taboos, societal laws and attitudes towards women who happened to have lost their husbands.

However, widowhood practices differ widely across the whole of African continent as well as the sub-regions and the ethnic groups. In some context these practices serve to honor the deceased spouse, reinforce order in society, ensure widow's compliance to the culture and traditions of that ethnic group as argued by (Afari-Twumasi, 2016). In most parts of Sub-Saharan Africa there is a belief that the spirit of the deceased (ghost) lives with the widow and plays conjugal duties with her, hence the performance of the widowhood practices serves to end the relationship between the dead and the living (Shoko and Danke, 2024). An established social construct that drives widows to perform certain practices after the death of their husbands to show change in their status of married to widow. Following societal beliefs about marriages, stigma of unclean, gender roles and bad omen attached to

widows as well as life after death, the widowhood practices were introduced to handle the social and spiritual implication associated with widows (Idialu, 2012). This thesis, therefore, focuses on exploring the widowhood practices with an in-depth investigation on how the practices affect widowed women in the Upper East Region (UE/R) of Ghana.

1.2 Contextual Background to Widowhood Practices

Globally, women continue to struggle for space in terms of gender parity and violations against women. According to the World Bank report (2015) as cited in Shoko and Dank, (2024, p.3), there are about 258 million widows worldwide. These widows' range across various categories of ages. They are often subjected to discrimination, subjugation, cultural oppression and psychological abuses (Owen, 1994) as cited in Sossou, (2002, p.9). Although, recent developments such as the national constitutions, African Charter on Human and People's Rights as well as Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) have made significant progress in promoting and protecting human rights, yet more need to be done to protect widows and women (Wanitzek, 2008 & Merry, 2006).

Besides, Ghana has made significant effort and progress at international, regional and national levels on legal instrument to protect and improve the status of women. Ghana's efforts to implement gender equality through its legal system, adopted several treaties and ratified multiple conventions as a member state of the United Nations. For instance, Ghana ratified The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, including the recent Maputo Protocol. These ratifications and compliances to international and regional legal instrument places Ghana as if men and women have equal rights, but a critical observation reveals reality of stark prevalent state of gender inequality in all sections. Despite these efforts, there are salient weaponries such as the structural forces and cultural practices that violates the rights of widows and women. According to Dowuona-Hammond et al., (2020, p.2), most African countries in which Ghana is not an exception ratifies most of the UN conventions, enact human rights laws but do not show any commitment to enforce them. According to United Nation Report as cited in Sossou, (2002) widows represent a good ratio of the female population in most parts of the developing countries, but their predicament has not been adequately given the needed attention.

Widowhood practice on women who have lost their husbands and by far extension innocent orphans, has not been given the needed attention as serious issue that widows face in the UE/R of Ghana. Understanding and appreciating the plight and experiences as well as the implications of those cultural practices that widows in UE/R of Ghana go through, will help chat a better path for the future

generation. The focus on the consequences of widowhood practices on widows bears a single but multiple negative questions, by probing on the effects of widowhood practices, widows' experiences during and after the death of the husband. The study, therefore, dwelled on the less focused or the neglected portion of the women faction, by looking at how traditions and cultural practices that affect widows' lives and experiences, despites global fight to stage women at the center of affairs.

1:3 Problem Statement

Naturally, the death of a relative or friend brings grief and despair to relatives and closed associates. According to Fasoranti et al., (2007), cited in Azumah and Nichnaab, (2018) death regarding any of the spouse, passes serious problems especially economic adversity on both sexes. But as to the one who gets hurt more is unanswered. In most African cultural settings, the death of a husband pronounces or attracts punishment to the surviving widow, it starts with serious traditional mourning, confinement of widow, burial rites couple with widowhood practices, in which the widow is ill-treated and dehumanized (UNDAW, 2001), cited in (Azumah and Nichnaab, 2018). In this 21st century we still have practices that are cruel, backward and violation of human rights of the vulnerable.

However, there is an impression created that there exists massive support from both international and national governments to streamline human rights tools that addresses any form of discrimination and inhumane treatment. The concept of widowhood practices and how it affects widows has been there over centuries in the UE/R of Ghana. Widowhood practices such as widow confinement with the corpse, widows' inheritance and forced marriages persist in the UE/R of Ghana. A practice that infringes upon the basic human rights of women contrary to the 1992 constitution of Ghana (MacDougall, 2011). Besides, the practices extend to inheritances system within the UE/R of Ghana, in which widows and female orphans accepts patrilineal system of inheritance against their will and wishes. This patrilinear system of inheritance permits only male children or relatives to inherit the property of the deceased. The most disdain treatment that windows suffer is the traditional norm of the late husband's family forcing the widow to remarry one of the bothers of the late husband or any family member without her consent. In effect, cultural tenets in the region undermine the agency of women's rights, in the sense that, the widow cannot decide for herself, but the family determines who would marry her.

Contemporarily, some of these cultural practices have possibility of emitting preferential, dehumanizes and ill-treatment to category of widows in the UE/R of Ghana. The widowhood practices are relaxed for widows who are educated, have influence in the community, widows that are financially sound,

widows who are more glued to their faith and religious beliefs resist the practices as they go against their worships and beliefs. These factors therefore positioned some widows differently to the context of the widowhood practices within the same ethnic group.

Apparently, Widows in UE/R of Ghana at all categories of ages, faces series of discrimination, dehumanizing, psychological oppression, abuses and neglect (Ba-an et al., 2022, p.8) especially the less privileged widows often do not have choice than to adhere to the usual practices within the community. This presupposes that the practices are more hooked on socio-economic influencers that intersect with identity and the position of the widows involved. As it has become a common practice in Africa in which Ghana is not an exception. Even though studies such as (Ba-an et al., (2022) and Azumah & Nichnaab, (2018) were conducted within the Upper East Region, they were skewed to just specific communities. But this study sought to solicit more from the victims from three largest ethnic groups within the region to develop a comprehensive recommendation for policy formulation to tackle widowhood practices that violate the rights of women in UE/R of Ghana.

1.4 Objective of The Study

The Main Objective of The Study Was:

To understand widowhood practices and its effects on widowed women, living in Upper East Region of Ghana.

1.4.1 Sub-objectives/Specific Objectives

1. To identify the socio-cultural practices that affects the widows after the death of the husbands.
2. To critically examine the experiences and opinions of widows relating to widowhood practices after the death of the husbands.
3. To identify existing policies and support systems to protect or stop the widowhood practices.

1.5 Main Research Question

The main research question focused on; what is widowhood practice and its effects on widowed women in the UE/R of Ghana?

1.5.1 Sub-questions/Specific Questions

1. What are the social and cultural practices that affect widows after the death of the husbands?
2. What are the experiences and opinions of widows about widowhood practices?

3. What policies and support systems are available to protect or stop the widowhood practices?

1.6 Structure of The Study

The study was structured as follows.

Chapter 1: Introduction. This covered the origin and overview of the widowhood practices, the problem statement, the research objectives and questions, structure of the study and the backroad of the study area.

Chapter 2: This chapter explored discourses on the concepts of intersectionality, gender and power and the concept of masculinity. The study further explore literature on widowhood practices in Africa and Ghana and concluded with some of the policy interventions at international and national governments level.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology. The chapter covered the methods for data collection, sample techniques, sampling size, sources of data and how the data was analyzed. It also covered ethical consideration and positionality as well as the challenges of the research.

Chapter 4: Observation of Widowhood Practices. This chapter focused on findings and analysis, in which the study teased out themes from collected data and link the concepts in chapter 2 to widowhood practices as violation of women rights in the UE/R of Ghana.

Chapter 5: Burgeoning Of Gender Inequality: Summary of Findings and Recommendations. The research brought back research question and identified the actual findings of the study and conclude with four recommendations.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

1.7 Background to Study Area

Upper East Region (UE/R) was created in 1960 from the Upper region and is located at the north-eastern part of Ghana with the total landmass of 8,842 square kilometers. It borders Burkina Faso to north and Togo to the east and internally to the south with Northern region and to the west with Upper West region. It is the third smallest of the 16 administrative regions in Ghana. Bolgatanga is the administrative capital of the region. According to the (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021) Population and Housing Census (PHC), the region has a total population of 1,301,221. Out of this population 48.5% represent male whiles 51.5% represent female, demonstrating a female dominated region. The region is made up of 15 districts, with each district headed by district Chief Executive with about 7

different ethnic groups. Some of these ethnic groups and their major towns include, Talensi (Tongo), Kassena-Nankani (Navrongo, Sirigu), Frafra or Gurene (Bolgatanga), Kusasi (Bawku).

Traditional leaders, elders, chiefs and queen mothers remain influential in ethnic groups governance and cultural norms preservation. These actors serve as custodians of the traditions and the cultures hence making the customs deeply rooted in ensuring social ties and family's bonds within the region. The people in the region are shaped by this traditional governance, the traditional spirituality, festivals and marital customs that they have lived and practiced for a very long time.

In the 1901 the people in the Upper Volta now Upper East region were only asked to join the then Gold Coast now Ghana. Despite the region was colonized and some of the traditional settings were altered through the indirect rule system. The traditional governances were restructured, and western system introduced. Colonialism did not have significant influence on the culture and traditions of the region as compared to southern Ghana. The fact remains that, the Upper East region did not attract the colonial authorities due to its remoteness, rugged terrain and less endowed economic resources as compared to the southern Ghana.

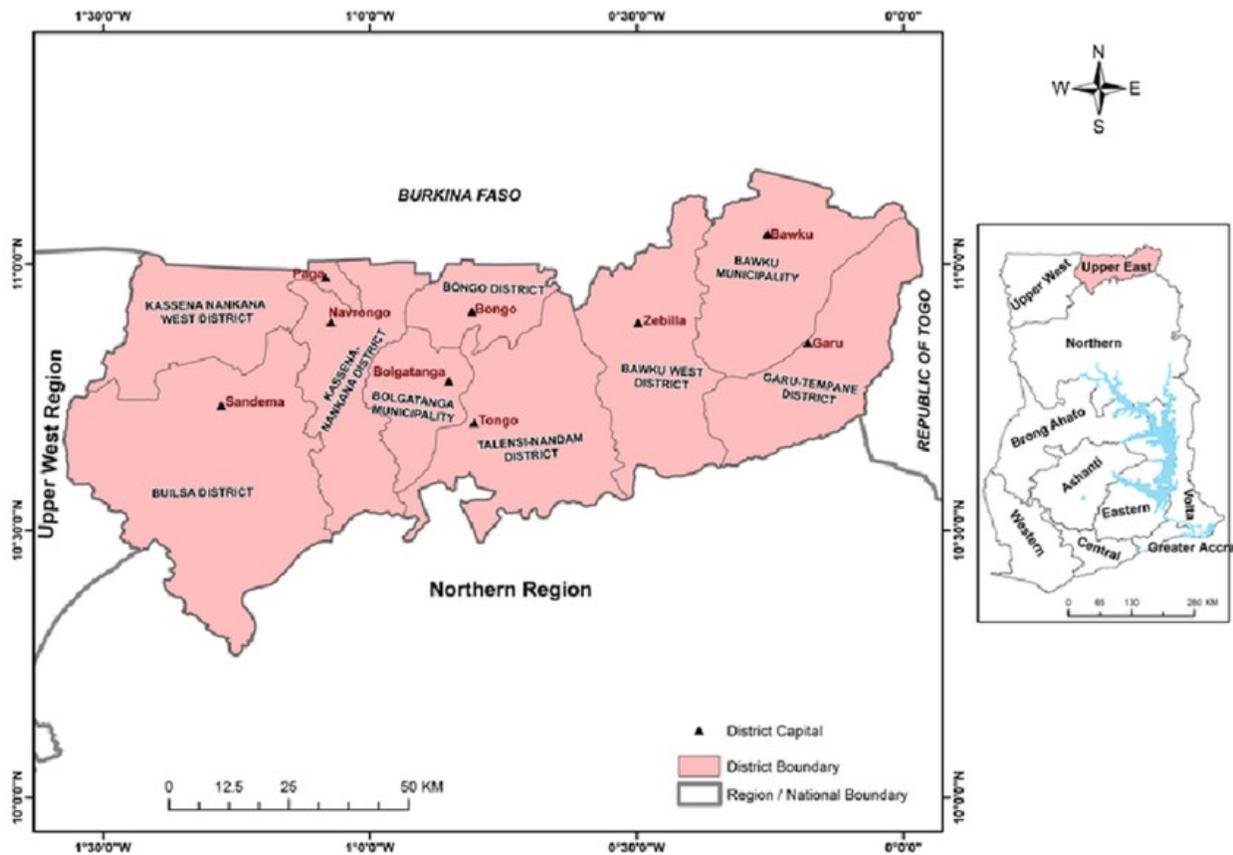
However, the region had a strong traditional and social resistance system which the colonizers could not simply penetrate with their western culture. Though indirect rule made use of the traditional leaders who were custodian of the traditions and culture, most of them subtly promoted and protected the customs to avoid it been eroded entirely. Efforts were made to stick to indigenous beliefs, values, customs through festivals, rituals and languages. The practices of oral traditions such as storytelling and arts were some of the practices that the traditional leaders held onto.

The region has rich historical and cultural heritage with it diverse ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has unique traditional values and beliefs, but there are communalities in their cultural practices. For instance, the culture of reinforcing social cohesion, preserving history and traditions through ethnic festivals such as the Foo, Adakoya, Samanpiid are common among these ethnic groups in the region. These festivals are all characterized with rituals/sacrifices, traditional music and dance. The region is known for its linguistic diversity, approximately 7 to 10 languages are spoken across the region. The largely spoken ones are the Kusal, Gurene (fafra), Buli, Nankani and kassem and others, reflecting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region.

The region predominantly practices extended family system, with strong ties across generations. Marriages within the region are considered as families affairs rather than a union between man and

woman. Most at times the families decide for marriages through negotiations, friendships, awards or honour and follow by bride price, mostly livestock. The bride price serves as a form of respect or value for the woman and her family. Once married the woman is supposed to fully integrate with the family, clan, community and the ethnic group of the husband, sometimes better than her natal family. Widowhood practices are performed with regards to marriage, meaning by that the practices falls directly under marriage rites and ceremonies. It is an orally generational practices that have been passed down over time. It serves as a strong cultural attachment for the community or the ethnic group and their ancestral world. It is belief that, the widowhood practices are intended to pave way for a smooth transition of the deceased husband to the ancestral world, prevent curses, and to also prove the loyalty of the widow. It is a common belief in the region that, death does not terminate the marriage. Hence the widowhood practices are organised to serve as a ceremony to terminate and separate the dead and the living. The map below shows the area and location of the study area.

1.1: Map of Upper East Region.



(source: Owusu et al. 2013)

CHAPTER TWO (2)

DEBATING INTERSECTIONALITY, GENDER AND POWER AND THE POLITICS OF MASCULINITY

2.1 Introduction

This chapter entails relevant literature on theoretical approaches to the study. Intersectionality, power and politics of gender as well as masculinity are the concepts adopted in the study. These concepts serve as tools in terms of analyses and for answering the research question. The study delves on intersections of circumstances and the existence of unequal power relations, it was appropriate to elaborate these concepts to comprehend varying perspectives and how different researchers conceptualized them in relation to widowhood practices. The research delved into some of the policy interventions at international, regional and national levels to curb human rights violations, specifically on women. The study explored literature on widowhood practices in Africa and Ghana. Below are the extensive discussions of the concepts along the research path.

2.2 Definitions of Terms

1. 2.1 Widow

Widow is a woman who has been married but has lost the husband through death and has not remarried, which aligns with Idialu, (2012) assertion on widowhood practices. With regards to the study, this implies to only women in heterosexual marriages, but excludes women in long-term relationships, non-heterosexual or same-sex and non-marital relationships. This does not mean that other marriages are not relevant, but to suit the study location context in conducting widowhood practices. Women are pronounced widows immediately the husband dies. These widows range from all categories of ages, but this research set the age range of (20 - 50 years), widows have different identities, and support systems. While the research explored widowhood practices in different ethnicities, it further delved into how young widows are treated as compared to the aged widows and to explore the intricacies involved within these ethnic groups.

1.2.2 Widowhood

Widowhood refers to a status of a married woman who has lost the husband through death (Shoko and Danke, 2024). A state at which the widow is expected to act, behave and the conduct of the society towards the widow. It is the period that society expects the widow to grieve and mourn the lost husband (Foranti et al., 2007) as cited in Azumah and Nichnaab, (2018). The widow's reactions towards the

death of the husband can lead to how society establishes the rationale behind the death of the husband before the commencement of the ceremonial customs.

1.2.3 Widowhood Practices

Widowhood practices are socially constructed practices that are carried out for the surviving widow following the death of the husband and they are often harsh, dehumanizing and violation of women rights. The widowhood practices are carried out by the widows the moment the husbands die. However, these practices differ with ethnic groups, tribes, and communities based on the socio-cultural norms and beliefs that prevails in those settings.

2.3 The Concept of Intersectionality

The concept “intersectionality” which sprung from the black feminist activism, coined by Kimberle Williams Crenshaw in the 1989 as posited by (Crenshaw, 2013). The concept is a critical framework that highlights the interrelationship of social categories of class, age, race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and host of other identities, considering the individual experience intersecting other forms of privileges or oppressions Cerezo et al, (2020), it intersects and shapes individual’s lived experiences. Contextualizing widowhood practices in the UE/R of Ghana, intersectionality helps to uncover the complex ways in which widowhood practices extremely impact on widows, especially those within the marginalized situations.

Intersectionality is important in understanding how widowhood practices in Upper East Region affects women differently depending on their economic status, social location, educational background and age of the widow (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018). For instance, widows who are less educated and poor are more vulnerable to strict and harsh forms of widowhood practices, because the lack needed capacity to challenge these practices. These widows are compelled to adhered to these harmful practices and remain loyalty to the mercy of the community values and norms. In contrast, widows who are wealthier or have better educational backgrounds can challenge and resist these harmful practices via legal means or other social networks, but then this may attract societal consequences (Samuels and Ross-Sherif, 2008).

Also, the intersection of ethnicity and gender are crucial features in the Upper East Region. Widowhood practices differ in different ethnic groups like the Kassena, Kusasi and the Frafra, Ba-an et al, (2022) argued that some ethnic groups within the UE/R have different widowhood practices, whereas some are very rigid and exploitative, others are flexible in nature. This means that widows

from socially marginalized ethnic groups stand to receive extreme and stricter widowhood practices as compared to other colleagues' widows. This serves as another layer of complexity of experience to the widowhood practices, invariably double marginalization. Primarily, as a woman and second, a widow from ethnic minority within the larger cultural setup.

Another intersecting factor that shapes widowhood practices within the Upper East Region of Ghana is religion. African Traditional Religion (ATR) which is rooted in the cultural values are widely practiced within the region, it dictates the widowhood practices. But the recent influx of Islamic and Christianity religions has influence on the widowhood practices within the region. According to Azumah and Nachinaab, (2018), Widows who worship with these religious bodies may have their widowhood practices differently from widows who belong to the (ATR). Widows within the Islamic and Christianity may resist and challenge the practices unlike their peers. But the conflicting tension is created between cultural values and religious doctrines. Religious intersection generates a complex diabolic discussion of identity for widows who should balance their traditions and cultural practices in their communities and their faith.

Lastly, the intersection of the age of the widow and the widowhood practices is significant in this context. According to Atewologun, (2018) older widows, particularly those that cannot bear children again, may undergo more relaxed and flexible widowhood practices than the younger ones. Younger widows may be considered as threat to social order and cultural values, hence being subjected to strict and harsh widowhood practices that will help tamed them down as opposed Avraamidou (2020), assertions of equal rights that should be applied to all women.

Understanding the widowhood practices within the UE/R of Ghana with the intersectional lens gives chance for a clearer and deeper understanding of different social identities such as class, gender, religion, ethnicity, age and educational background sums up to shape widows' experiences as highlighted by Kuran et al, (2020) in terms of control or dominance. Appreciations of these intersections make it clearer to the researcher that widowhood practices do not have a unique experience, but deeply influence by the widow's position in a multiple social system. The intersectionality concept further offers lens that fosters respect, empathy and equitable policies that retains decent cultural practices and traditional values whiles ensuring fairness to everyone.

2.4 The Concept of Power and the politics of Gender

According to Foucault's theory of power, power is exercise in every facet of societies and institutions. Where he theorized that, power has been fairly distributed across many institutions and rooted in everyday practices, interpreting power as diffused and not centered on specific authorities or individuals since power is produce at every level of social interaction (Foucault, 1990:10). In Foucault's analysis of power 'bottom-up' analysis shows "how power relation at the micro level of society makes possible certain global effects of domination, such as power, and patriarchy" (Sawiwcki, 1986:23). Foucault's concept of power is suitable for analysing how power is used in widowhood practices. It further strengthens intersectionality which geared towards showing the intersections of multiple factors of power that positions differences of experiences of various women in widowhood practices.

Widowhood approach to power in terms of Foucault conceptualization of hidden power of truth dwells on how power is exercised in a hidden form yet permeates to the later (Gaventa, 2003). However, the feminist critique, Michel Foucault did not consider the details in which power operates within patriarchal societies, especially through systematic gender oppression. He overlooks the important aspect of gendered power dynamics and did not distinctly capture how power impacts women. Feminists' theorists argued that Foucault did not look at how patriarchy and gender inequality are sustained and enforced by structural power relation, particularly community and family level.

Politics of gender plays a crucial role with regards to widowhood practices as it reveals the intersections of power and gender, where traditional practices, values and beliefs puts burden on women, whiles orchestrating an entrenched patriarchal value. Women are subjected to practices intended to prove their innocence, confirm their loyalty and adhere to what community expect when their husbands die (Ba-an et al, 2022, p.9). Conversely, men in the similar situation are not expected to go through the same practices when their wives die. Men are rather given social support when the lose their spouse, highlighting gender inequality in social power. These discriminatory practices put women to marginalized positions and reinforces power structures that are dominated by men as the true reflection of the widowhood practices.

In UE/R of Ghana, widowhood practices are enforced through power dynamics which are embedded in their traditions, gender roles and social structures. Women are marginalized through customary practices that reflects their diminished social power after the death of their husbands Sossou and Yogtiba, (2015). Widows are denied access to their late husbands' properties, especially those without

male children as inheritance follows patrilineal system, given control of assets to male kin as argued by (Sossou and Yogtiba, 2015). A system that highlights the gendered nature of power, in which men largely dominate in decision making, thus, elders, community leaders wield authority to decide the fate of the widows. Leaving widows with limited agency as a context the reflect a wider social norm that prioritized male authority.

2.4.1 Understanding Gender and Power Relation on Widowhood Practices

In the cultural setting of the UE/R of Ghana, widows are often considered as vulnerable and are exposed to harmful cultural practices that reflects the power structures within those ethnic groups (Nartey et al, 2023). These practices are constructed to ensure that women are submissive to their husbands and even loyal to their dead bodies. These practices are usually influence by power dynamics and constructed gender roles with men wielding acclaimed authority, what denotes to societal interest (Gaventa, 2003). This assumed power by men are often used to control and marginalized widows thereby perpetuating injustices and discrimination. This hidden power of the men becomes pronounced particularly when the women are widowed. The concept helps unearth the dynamics that governs how widows are treated, by demonstrating the unequal power distribution between men and women, therefore influencing the cultural, social and economic dimensions of the widowhood practices within the study region.

In UE/R of Ghana, traditional gender norms and customary laws do not allow women to own lands. Land ownership is through patrilineal, thus through male line, while female is excluded from inheritance. Apparently, the men own the lands and controls other economic resources, so the woman only have limited access to them once the man is alive (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018). A socially constructed belief that put men as protectors of family wealth, whiles the women are expected to play supportive role. An uphold custom that reinforces male dominance. When the man dies, the widow automatically losses the assets of the deceased husband, which is usually inherited by the deceased brother(s) or male relatives as indicated in Ba-an et al, (2022) making the widow dependent on the men. This economic dependency on men further reinforces the unequal power dynamics, leaving widows vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization.

Also, in Upper East Region cultural norms has been constructed based on gender power relations which often paint widows as “unclean” or as potential sources of bad omen, particularly young widows

(Sossou and Yogtiba, 2015). The impression that a woman must go through purification process to get rid of her deceased husband's evil spirit reflects a perceived cultural system that women sexuality is inherently dangerous without male control. Societal beliefs which ruin widow's low status in the community, as society see widows to have both social and spiritual burden until they agree to go through the widowhood practice.

Widows' inheritance or levirate marriage is another clear display of gender power dynamics in the UE/R of Ghana. According to Ba-an et al, (2022), a practice in which the widows are obliged to re-marry the late husband's brother or male relative of the late husband. In this practice, the widow does not have choice but to tone to the dictates of the elders of the community, which are mostly male relatives. Widows who resist or refused to accept the imposed man on her stand to face societal exclusion, stigma and even economic deprivation since the customs do not allow her to inherit any of the deceased husband's property (Sossou and Yogtiba, 2015). Foucault contested that the repressive nature of power compels people to obey societal structures and acts (Sawiwcki, 1986:23). A clear manifestation of constructed male dominance, that highlights limited agency of the widow within a patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, power is also contested, as advocacy groups, human rights activists, NGOs and progressing movement within Ghana and the region are challenging these practices. By advocating for legal reforms, seeking to economically empower widows, ensure proper and full implementations of the human right laws geared towards balancing power that offers widows social and economic equity (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020).

Widowhood practices in the region are fully intertwined with gender power relation which inherently reinforces patriarchal values and control over women. Through male constructed customary practices like levirate marriages, unequal power distribution, deliberate economic dispossession which places widows in a dependency position and susceptible to marginalization.

2.5 Masculinity and Widowhood Practices

Masculinity is an important concept in conducting a study on widowhood practices, particularly "hegemonic masculinity" which is a culturally dominated type of masculinity that formalize male control and highlights men as superiors in society (Connell, 2005). The concept reveals certain types of masculinity that gives privileges over others, orchestrating gender inequality and male dominance. Masculinity is illustrated within the study area through leadership, male as family and community

heads, male as providers or breadwinners of the household and protectors of the entire community. In UE/R of Ghana, widowhood practices are usually controlled and supervised by, traditional leaders, clans' heads, community leaders, elders and family heads who are mostly men. These leaders hold on to patriarchal values and view women as subordinates (Nartey et al, 2023). This becomes pronounced in ethnic group or community in which women adheres to customs and traditional practices as measure of meeting societal expectations or loyalty to the deceased husband. A perspective that reflects hegemonic masculinity and prioritizes men over women. The hegemonic power is established for men the moment the women and society as institution correspond to it.

Men in UE/R of Ghana have claimed and sustained leading position in their communities and ethnic group, hence hold on to determine the accepted practices and behaviour of women. For instance, the shaving of the widow's head and sitting on the floor are practices that shows the power that men hold in defining the acceptable practices that women should undergo after the death of a spouse. Besides, the system of inheritance which customarily allows only male to inherit the lands and other economic resources serves as complicit masculinity in which all the men benefit from the gender inequality maintained by the hegemonic practices as posited by (Connell, 2005:79). For instance, the male family members who inherit the deceased property benefit from the power structure.

Masculinity is highly illustrated by male-dominated structures, where they reinforce cultural norms such as widowhood practices as politics of gender. Male elders, who wield power and authority ensures the set the agenda that sabotage women and play the central role to protect and sustained their masculine power through the social system. The widowhood practices do not only serve as cultural practices to the people of UE/R of Ghana, but a mechanism of maintaining the male centric power structures, in which decision- making, property ownership and social leadership are under male control. The concept masculinity, especially 'hegemonic masculinity' is useful in analysing widowhood practices in UE/R of Ghana where traditional values and practices concerning women are entrenched in masculine order.

2.6 Widowhood practices in Africa

Africa has diverse traditions and culture in which widowhood practices are embedded in the traditional beliefs, local customs and cultural values of the people in each community. These practices differs because every community has its own values, beliefs, and objective of the practices. Despite the differences there are many communalities with regards to widowhood practices such as the mourning and wearing of black cloths.

According to Tasie, (2013) African widowhood practices were instituted for positive impact to the surviving widow and the larger community as whole. In Isiokpo of Nigeria, he broadly categorized the motive behind the widowhood practices into two; that's to separate the dead from the living and to strengthen the widow to cope with real life situations following the death of her husband (Tasie, 2013).

A study by Manala (2015) on widowhood practices indicates that, many African societies believe that the deceased (ghost) still lives around and posses' dangers to the surviving wife, children and even relatives, hence the institution of certain practices to the widow to expunge any misfortune. The institution of the widowhood practices had positive objective. For instances, research conducted in Uganda argues that the practice of confinement of widow for several days, weeks and months to mourn was meant to safeguard the widow from committing suicide out of the pain and grief over the death of the husband (Limann, 2003). However, research have demonstrated the consequences of widowhood practices in African context Baloyi, (2017) as cited in (Adonis, 2020, p.24) assertion of violation of human dignity through cultural practices. For instance, mourning as the beginning of the widowhood practices in African setting. The surviving widow is obliged to wail or cry loudly as an immediate reaction to the husband's death demonstrating a deeper sense of loss and the health implications associated (Sossou, 2002).

2.7 Widowhood practices in Ghana

In the context of Ghana, widowhood practices have attracted many scholars notably are they, (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020, Tei-Ahontu, 2008; and Korang-Okrah, 2011, Korang-Okrah &Haight, 2014, Azumah & Nachinaab, 2018 and Ba-an et al, 2022). Ghanaians have a traditional belief that when someone dies especially at a certain age category, the prime suspect is the closes person which in this case is the wife, hence the need to establish her innocence (Ba-an et al, 2022). But the established cultural practices to determine the widow's innocence about the death of the deceased husband differs in most Ghanaian societies. For instance, the Ga widows in the southern Ghana are supposed to wear black or red clothes and cry aloud for a year to demonstrate that they are not responsible for the death of their husbands (Tei-Ahontu, 2008).

According to Rose Korang-Okrah's (2012) doctoral thesis on "Widowhood & Resilience: Akan Widows Experience of Challenges &Survival" she posited that there are variations in the widowhood practices across the whole country but the common once are (1) public crying and grieving (2) one meal a day (3) bathing with concocted water (4) sleeping on the floor or mat (5) wearing of black/red

cloths. Whiles, Tei-Ahontu (2008), highlighted on wearing of black/red cloths for mourning by widows appears common in most of the Ghanaian settings. Whereas research conducted in the UE/R of Ghana by Ba-an et al. (2022), contested that the defacement is the widows crowning glory, where the widow is made to shave the head, wear black gown, and appear unkempt demonstrating the extent of grieving following the death of the husband.

Dowuona-Hammond, (2020) posited that, widowhood practices were introduced to hold on to patriarchal structures and to retain family respect. The belief in protecting the family and inheritance was another key reason for the introduction of the widowhood practices (Limann, 2003). He argued that the practices of remarrying within the family was to ensure that the wealth of the deceased stay within the family. Sossou, (2002) contested that, the introduction of widowhood practices was to control women sexuality and to have autonomy over them, hence the introduction of spiritual cleansing, shaving of heads to demonstrate the loyalty of the widow to the deceased husband. A clear indication of maintaining the rigid social structure and reinforcing male dominance.

2.8 Widowhood Practices in the Upper East Region of Ghana

Undoubtedly, several authors have researched into the widowhood practices in the Upper East Region of Ghana and their findings point to the fact that there exist slight differences in the practices among clans, communities, tribes as well as ethnic groups within the region. The custodians of the traditions and the cultures of the region perceived widowhood practices as ceremonies to purify, protect and heal the widow and the entire family and well as a rite-of -passage for the death (Korang-Okrah & Haight, 2014).

Women within the Kassenas ethnic group go through widowhood practices in two different ways Tonah (2009) as cited in Ba-an et al (2022). Customarily, widows quickly convene at the kitchen after the death of the husbands, where the widow is given a stalks (reed) mat to sit on with a calabash of millet flour. The kitchen becomes the only place the widow stay and does her everything and can only receive food and water from the back of the kitchen from another widow until the deceased husband is buried Tonah (2009) as cited in Ba-an et al (2022). The author indicated that, there are some parts of the Kassenas, Frafras and Kusasi area where the widows are stripped naked, are made to undertake spiritual bathing on refuse dump with cold or lukewarm water by throwing the water on them.

The common widowhood practices in the Upper East Region according to (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018) pertains, public crying/wailing immediately the husband dies but more focus on the widow, by

considering the extent to which she wails following the death of the husband. Whiles, everyone dresses red or black cloths, the widow is made to wear three pieces of rope on her waist, chest, and head, given a calabash containing millet flour and is made to sit on the floor, other instances on a mat made with millet stocks as posited by (Ba-an et al, 2022). These practices have been linked to the various challenges in the form of economic, social, psychological, emotional as well as physical effects on widows and orphans in every corner of the region leading to the formation of Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) in region (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018, p.47).

2.9 Ghana's Effort to Stop the Widowhood Practices

Reflecting on the effect that widowhood practices was impacting on both widows and orphans, the government of Ghana instituted steps to either eliminate it or support the vulnerable widows who were in the mercy of harmful cultural practices. The country therefore introduced legal instruments such as the 1992/60 constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the Interstate Succession Law (PNDC Law 111) of 1985. The 1992 constitution of Ghana enshrined the fundamental human rights of all Ghanaians in Article 21 of the 1992 constitution. It was framed to align with international and regional human rights standard. The constitution made provisions such as the Article 17 (1) equality and freedom from discrimination, Article 26 (1&2) cultural rights, Article 15 (1&2) respect for human dignity and finally, Article 22 which dwells on the property of the spouses as state laws that protects the widow and women (Republic of Ghana: Acts of Ghana, 2003).

Also, Legal institutions such as the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ), the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU) and the recent establishment of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MGCSP) as well as gender-based institutions such as the National Council on Women and Development (NCWD) as argued by (Afari-Twumasi, 2016). These institutions were formed to focus on women well-beings in the form of coordinating, initiating and monitoring gender matters to ensure equal rights for women and other vulnerable groups. For instance, DOVVSU is unit under Ghana police service mandated to investigate and redress issues related to domestic violence. However, these institutions are often starved with needed resources making them incapable to live to expectation or enforce the laws (UNDP, 2007) as cited in Dowuona-Hammond, (2020). They are merely formal, but non-functional, lip service and to lull the interest of gender activists and to score political points

2.10 Women's Rights Protections Under International and Regional laws

Considering the adverse effects of the widowhood practices discussed above and the exposed human rights violations of widows in Africa in which Ghana is not an exception. This section highlights women rights in the settings of international and regional conventions targeted at combating the conflicting infringements generated by widowhood practice. Some of the frameworks of the main international human rights laws and guidelines enacted to address violation and discrimination against women internationally as indicated in Afari-Twumasi (2016) thesis includes:

- I. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- II. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- III. The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW)
- IV. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples's Rights on Rights of Women in Africa (African Women's Protocol)
- V. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- VI. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CO-CEDAW).

2.10.1 The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

The CEDAW is an important international human rights instrument that explicitly focuses on dealing with discrimination against women. It provided clear prohibitions of all discriminatory acts against women in Articles 1,2,5 and 18. CEDAW certifies that everyone is treated equally and protected against all forms of discriminations by either the state or private actors in every aspect of life (Byrnes, 2002). This resonates with CEDAW Article 1, which captures gender-specific and larger human rights protection against sex-based discrimination and further reiterates on states guarantees of women rights on social, political, cultural and any other field. This presupposes that Article 1 of the CEDAW establishes the framework of non-discriminatory act against women worldwide. Implying all the countries that have ratified/signed the convention are expected to find tune their cultural and traditional practices that go contrary to the international human rights standard. The Article 2 tasked states to establish institutions and appropriate legislations that serves to protect women's rights and harmful oriented cultural practices that violates women's rights.

2.10.2 The African Women's Protocol

This regional human rights convention was adopted in Mozambique in 2003, referred to as Maputo Protocol (WACOL, 2008) as cited in (Olsson, 2022). It was skewed towards Africa, with multiple and relevant details in the side of women's rights, specifically widows' rights and harmful cultural practices as encapsulated in African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights of women in Africa. The Maputo protocol is relevant to this research because, it highlights fundamental issues about women such as harmful practices, discrimination and violence in all forms. This convention targeted complete elimination of discrimination and harmful cultural practices in the Sub-Saharan region and Africa as a whole. Notably, are the widows' human rights violation, harmful cultural practices and the patriarchal orchestrated practices have been spelt out as violations of human right in Ghana's' constitutions.

2.11 Activities of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) And Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) To Ensure Gender Equality and Protect Women Rights

Absolutely, gender equality, protections against detrimental cultural practices and the advancement of women and widows' rights have slowly gained prominence in the current situation with the activities of NGOs, CSOs, networks and other coalitions working to curb the mess. According to Dowuona-Hammond et al., (2020), these organizations and networks includes International Federation of women Lawyers (FIDA-Ghana), the media (radio stations, Tv stations, the publishing houses, independent journalists), social media, Women Initiative for Self-Empowerment (WISE), Gender Violence Survivors' Support Network (GVSSN) and the Network for Women Rights (NETRIGHT).

These organizations and networks offer legal assistances, financial supports, shelter, and mounts pressures on government and society for the implementations and enforcement of certain legal provisions and policies that protects the widows and women (Dowuona-Hammond et al., 2020). Surprisingly, these actions and efforts made by these organizations and the networks are sometimes not enough to cause a change, not coordinated and some may even be informal to societies and government hence making their impact minimal (Amoakohene, 2004).

2.12 Concluding Remarks

The chapter looked at intersectionality, power and politics of gender as well as masculinity which provided critical frameworks in studying widowhood practices, particularly in the UE/R of Ghana. The concept of intersectionality unraveled the interrelations of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic condition, age and cultural practices that have influence on individual widow's experiences. The researcher is able apprehend that widowhood practices do not have a unique experience, but rather

influence by multiple factors surrounding the widow through the lens that the concept offered. Whereas the concept of power was useful to the researcher in exploring who wields authority in enforcing the widowhood practices within the UE/R of Ghana. By delving on politics of gender, the study was able to ascertain how traditional customs restrict women autonomy but reinforces men authority through societal expectations of widows to conform to traditions that are even harmful to their well-being. Whiles men in the region illustrates their masculinity as custodians of the customs, breadwinners of the families and the protectors of the community which have influence on widows.

Collectively, these concepts and theories highlights how cultural values and practices such as widowhood practices intersect to perpetuate injustices and gender inequalities suffered by widows in the UE/R of Ghana. Hence highlighting the need to fine a lasting solution to gender-based power dynamics and socio-cultural practices.

CHAPTER THREE (3)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter centers on the research approach that was used in the entire study. Research methodology refers to the strategies that the researcher adopts aimed at achieving the intended objective of the study (Mouton, 2000). The chapter discusses various strategies employed in the quest to get answers to the research problem of the study. The strategies such as the procedures, techniques, and methods used in applying the research design as well as outlining the principles that support their use constitutes the research methodology of a study (Babbie, Mouton, Vorster & Prozesky, 2006; Babbie, 2011) as cited in Afari-Twumasi, (2016). The study adopted a qualitative approach. Qualitative research entails getting to understand the values, beliefs, customs, traditions, emotions and behaviour of the participants as an assertion of Goodman, (2011). A research paradigm that helps to explore and understand people's behaviour, experiences and the real situation of widowhood practices being studied (O'Leary, 2021). This research design deemed appropriate due to the complex phenomena of the widowhood practice and its associated women rights violations.

3.2 Sample Size, Sampling Technique and Selection of participants

The study employed purposive sampling and snowballing techniques to engage 21 Participants, comprising 9 widows, 3 community leaders (1 from each ethnic group), 3 Human rights and administrative justice (CHRAJ) officials (1 from each ethnic group), 3 officials from the department of social welfare (1 from each District under each ethnic group) and 3 officials from the gender unit in the respective Assemblies as participants. The data was collected using interviews in the UE/R of Ghana. The participants (widows) were selected by applying the snowball method. In other words, if someone meets the requirement as a participant, then she also recommends other people who also meet the requirements. The requirement for the study was, (1) widows who have gone through widowhood practices for the past 6 years as indicated in (Adonis, 2020) on psychological experience of widowed mothers. This requirement was necessitated, because it is believed that widows who have gone through the practice for long before might have assumed their normal duties and role and were in a better position to narrate their story than those who have their quite recent. (2) widows within the age brackets of (20-50 years). (3) the selected widows who are willing to partake in the study. Whereas the rests of the participants were selected through the purposive technique.

The two sampling techniques were appropriate because they helped the study to select participants that provided the needed information for the research. Purposive because, the research chose participants who have certain features, knowledge or experience that aligned with the research objectives. Participants who have an in-depth insight and specific information of the phenomenon under study. For instance, the traditional leaders of the various ethnic groups were able to narrate the history and the rationale behind the widowhood practice in their respective ethnic groups. The possibility of getting deeper and contextual meaning of the concept from these participants are high because they serve as the custodians of the traditions, customs, values and beliefs of their ethnic groups. Whereas the human rights commissioner elaborated on certain legal action taken against the perpetrators of the practices, some initiatives and interventions introduced to help curb the practice.

Table 1: The table below was a summary version of selected ethnic groups and the participants in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Sample category	Sample size		
	Kassenas Ethnic group	Frafras Ethnic group	Kusasis Ethnic group
Widows	3	3	3
Traditional leaders	1	1	1
Social welfare Department	1	1	1
CHRAJ	1	1	1
Gender Unit	1	1	1
Sub Total	7	7	7
Total	21		

Source: Author's table, August 2024.

3.3 Sources of Data

The main sources of data for the study came from primary (in-depth interviews) from the 21 participants. Also, secondary data was drawn from the relevant literature related to widowhood, Government and institutional policy briefs on women, reports, research journals, Ghana's constitution and United Nation Reports on Human rights. Finally, my little knowledge of widowhood practices and personal experience also served as an additional source for the study. For instance, I have observed

about three (3) widowhood practices in my community including the latest one in Navrongo, when my aunt's husband died. I personally observed how my aunt was obliged to wear black/red cloths and confined in a small room for over two weeks when the husband died. This implies I can bring my experiences to bear in certain context of widowhood practices.

3.4 Research Instruments

The study adopted semi-structured interviews with the aid of the interview guide to solicit information from the 21 participants. Semi-structured interviews made it flexible for the research to solicit and obtained in-depth and rich information from the participants as advocated by Drever, (1995). The interview guide covers predetermined questions for each category of the participants, these questions served as guideline for the study, while the researcher also explored new issues that emerged during the discussions. The questions were open-ended which gave chance for interviewees to express themselves like that of a natural conversation.

Even though the researcher moderated the discussions, the instrument made the participants felt more like experts, thus the need to allow them to share their experience adequately. The researcher demonstrated empathy where necessary to create a genuine welcomed environment to participants specially the widows, this brought a kind of relief to them. The researcher intermittently probed for clarity and emerging issue during the interview.

However, the interviews were carried out online via zoom and phone calls where the researcher arranged earlier with participants for their convenience and comfort before the interview's day. Besides, all the interviews were also recorded with the aid of an audio tape recorder with the permission from all the participants of the research and jotted notes during the interviews.

3.5 Data Analysis

This was the stage at which meanings were given to the data gathered at the field, fundamentally the interplay between the data gathered and the related theory. Data was analyzed qualitatively with the examination of related literature and the interpretation of narrations of participants. The qualitative method was appropriate as it allowed the researcher to understand how individual widow constructed meanings from the widowhood practices based on their beliefs, values and experiences as well as their sense of identity. The purpose was to identify emerging patterns and discover meanings from the responses that answered the questions of how and why. Thus, how the widowhood practices are

conducted? In line with Heikkila and Ekman (2003) as cited in Afari-Twumasi (2016), these questions establish common pattern within the data gathering processes.

Data was systematically planned and recorded with an audio tape recorder, while I took some notes down during the interviews to serve as back-up checks. During the interviews, unclear and overlapping information were clarified immediately after the interviews. Also, data was immediately cleaned after each day's work, which guaranteed consistency, accuracy and effect omissions during interviewing. Transcription was done immediately after the interviews, while the discussions were still fresh in my memory. After reading through the transcribed data to be familiarize myself with the details, data was then organized into various folders for analysis purposes and easier access.

Thematic headings and patterns were identified and generated from the dataset in relation to the objectives of the research. While the emerging themes were further categorized into major and sub-themes for actions, informed decisions and interpretations of meanings based on the data. That's meanings based on what is known and how it is known by the participants. The complexity of interpreting and processing dataset from widows, tradition leaders, CHRAJ official, social welfare officials and gender unit official geared towards widowhood practices was in a structured format.

3.6 Ethical Consideration and Positionality

The research obtained ethical clearance from the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) ethical committee as compliance to the established research guidelines of the institution. I obtained written consent from the participants whom I engaged as the interviewees for the needed information. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and further emphasized on their willingness to answer any question, decline to answer and could withdraw without any consequences.

Mindful of the sensitive and emotional period of widowhood the researcher ensured that the interviews were gender sensitive language and framed with empathy to avoid retraumatizing the participants. Resource person (female psychologist) who work with Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) and with some of the widows were always present during the interviews to offer emotional support during and after the interviews in case a participant breaks down during the interviews.

Also, before I began the interviews, I verbally sought their consent again and further explain the main purpose of the research to the participants (study in fulfillment of my MA program). While I assured them of confidentiality of any information that I solicited from them, I further resorted pseudo to maintain anonymity of the participants.

In one breath, my positionality played a significant role in the research work. To begin with, I was 5 years old when my father died leaving the whole family especially my mum in traumatized state. For that young age I had the firsthand experience of the terrifying bizarre and excruciating pain she passed through leading to and after the burial of my father. This traumatizing experience for my beloved mum, which was the complete opposite when my father was alive, remains with me and has motivated me to search for more answers regarding widowhood practices. So, I developed the interest to research into widowhood practices during my undergraduate but could not carry it out because I was paired with colleagues to undertake the research work. I have lived my whole life staying in the region, I speak three 3 different languages (frafra, kasem and kusam). I am familiar with the cultural practices and have some experience of the widowhood practices which I think may have potential influence on the research. With this strong background I had chance to gather the needed information and even discussed on nuance and the real insight of their experiences. Conversely, some participants might have held some vital information back with the assumption that I knew them or not feeling comfortable discussing with a native. Hence, my familiarity may negatively affect the research if not managed properly.

Also, participants especially the widows anticipated, and some asked for support both in cash and policy reforms that will favour them, especially those who knew my mum has been a victim. The only mitigation strategy I adopted to this notion, was reechoing that the research was strictly for academic purposes, and I do not have the capacity to help in any way but can assure them of translating my findings to their various languages and share with them.

3.7 Challenges Encountered During the Research

One of the major challenge encountered during the data collection was poor communication network. Most of the participants, particularly the widows were located at places that were not having good network, so there were intermittent disruptions during the interviews. This, therefore prolonged some of the interviews than the stipulated time.

Also, getting the gender desk representatives at the various assemblies was difficult, because it's an election year and getting them to speak on issues that were not bringing them votes was not their concern, but I managed to interview them.

Despite I understood all the three languages used in the research, it was very difficult interpreting some of the technical terms, while maintain their true meanings. Finally, I was also constrained with the needed funds, because I must buy enough airtime to communicate with the research participants.

CHAPTER FOUR (4)

THE PLIGHT OF WIDOWS

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents and further analysis the raw information provided by the research participants. According to Schurink et al., (2011, p.397) information becomes valuable in “reducing the volume of raw information, shifting significance from trivial, identifying significant patterns and constructing framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” thus the process of making sense out of the raw data. At this phase the researcher employed intersectionality, gender and power as well as masculinity lens as the analytical frames in discussing the findings from the interviews on the field. The findings of the study were presented according to the three (3) research objectives and the emerging themes from the data. The analysis was done by quoting verbatim from participants, while reflecting and integrating literature on widowhood, widows’ experiences and opinions on the practices, an iterative form of discussion.

Table 2: The table below shows the socio-demographic characteristics of participants (widows).

No.	Pseudonym	Age	Ethnic	Years as widow	Level of edu.	Occupation	Religion
1	Apoka	50	Frafra	7	Diploma	nurse	Christian
2	Agongo	45	Frafra	6	Non	Farmer	traditionalist
3	Serwa	47	Frafra	8	degree	Teacher	Non
4	Esi	50	Kasena	7	Non	Housewife	Christian
5	Ayaa	46	Kasena	9	Non	Trader	Non
6	Aprislla	37	Kasena	7	Jsh	Trader	Christian
7	Azaaka	50	Kusasi	6	Non	Farmer	Christian
8	Amira	49	Kusasi	8	Non	Trader	Islam
9	Apaaza	50	kusasi	7	Non	Farmer	Traditionalist

Source: Author’s table, September 2024.

The research initially examined the socio-demographic characteristics of the widows who participated in the study. An assumed names were used to represent the participants for the sake of anonymity. The lowest and highest ages were 37 and 50 respectively, which fell within the sample criteria of

selection of (20-50). This age category was set in other to establish whether there was variation in the practices considering the age differences.

All the nine (9) participants were widows who had been widowed for longer than six years as indicated as part of the sample criteria. This was with the assumption that, after the six years, those widows might have journeyed through their pains and the trauma they went through and might have adjusted to normal life and societal roles as been adopted by (Adonis, 2020) on psychological experience of widowed mothers in South Africa. With regards to the occupation, which has to do with economic activities only one participant said she was a housewife. Besides, educational level has influence in one's agency as to take part in the widowhood practice or not. Also, religious affiliation was an important determinant on practices relating to cultural and traditional practices such as the widowhood practice.

4.2 Identified Cultural Practices

UE/R of Ghana is endowed with rich cultural heritage ranging from their festivals to their marital ceremonies which have historical significance to them and sometimes worth witnessing their performance. However, some of these cultural practices may be outdated as they violate human rights. The study findings indicated various forms of socio-cultural practices that widows go through after the death of the husbands, by mentioning some. Apoka mentioned "*shaving of the widow's hair, stripping of the widow naked, bathing at the refuse dump publicly and indoor confinement*". Similarly, Agongo from the frafra ethnic group added, "*holding of calabash and wearing of black or red cloths*". Finally, Serwa stated: "*I was expected to cry/wail or scream to the hearing of nearby house in every dawn to confirm my mourning of the late husband*" which resonates with Durojaye, (2013) as cited in (Ba-an et al, 2022, p.8) which examined various harmful practices that are inflicted on widows after the death of their husbands. These practices inflict pain on individual widow which constitutes violence.

4.2.1 Understanding of Widowhood Practices

Widowhood practices have been there over time and there is a notion that the widow must perform several rites after the death of the husband. The research investigated from the participating widows about what widowhood practices meant to them. The participants shared their understanding about what was meant to them as widowhood practice. Azaaka narrated her understanding of widowhood practice as "*a practice which serves as rites to pave way for my deceased husband's smooth transition to the next world and for a good stay of the relatives and me, the wife and children and all the widows have to perform when our husband dies*" Amira shared her understanding, "*widowhood practices are just generational ritual that has been inherited to*

perform in other to clear the way for our deceased husbands and to also allow we the widows, children and the entire family stay peacefully". Similarly, Aprisla shares: *"widowhood practices are practices meant for we the women who have lost our husbands through death to help them reach our ancestors smoothly and to also show love him"*. The excerpts from the widows demonstrate their understanding of widowhood practices within their ethnic groups, which have the similar characteristics. Their understanding of widowhood practices aligns with Silverman, (1972) as cited in (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018, p.46) assertion that widowhood is a social category in which all married women should perform when their husbands die. The widows understand the practices as integral cultural custom that they should observe as a responsibility not that is amusing to them.

4.2.2 Widowhood Practices Among the Frafra Ethnic Group

Widowhood practices within the Frafra ethnic group involved a well-structure cultural belief and practices that the people on to. The study explored from participants regarding how widowhood practices are conducted or carried out in the Frafra ethnic group. A participant (community leader 1) stated: *"Our ethnic group has either 2 or 3 phases, depending on the age of the deceased"*. A widow participant Agongo narrates: *"Immediately my husband dead, the fresh funeral (kum maahre), after the burial sub-funeral (bugro) and the final funeral rites (kuure) I was tasked with a role to play. However, most of the widowhood process are done during the fresh funeral or during the burial point.*

Similarly, Apoka explained: *"In the Frafra land, widowhood practices take 3 days for the fresh funeral (kum-maahre)"*. She continued to narrate: *"When my husband died, I was so confused and was crying all over, immediately the women came to our house. They asked me to dress proper as a widow in the making (to wrap my private with a slim piece of smoke-like cloth called 'voaniga' and then strip naked) as the first sign/beginning of widowhood practice. And unfortunately, it was my attire throughout the whole process. An elderly woman who was also a widow, was immediately appointed by the elders to supervise me as I continued the widowhood process. I was made to sit on the floor, then after further consultation grass-stocks mat was brought to me to sit on"*.

Also, Serwa shared: *"An elderly widow (my supervisor) prepares lukewarm water and accompanied with the undertaker (bayaaga) to a round room called 'detinenne' where the corpse had been kept. I was invited to the room to help bath my late husband, so I was ordered to fetch the water three times and pour on the corpse, and I did. Hmmm! She exclaimed but continued...then comes the dressing of my husband. I was made to appear publicly naked before all the elders, community members and the family members to claim a ram with my first son. The ram was then slaughtered, and part of the skin cut to cover the private part of my late husband known as 'lebire' before wearing it traditionally*

woven smock. While all were ongoing I was given a calabash containing grinded millet flour water (zoo-kom) which served as my meal throughout the whole process” (Serwa).

The research asked a participant to highlight the consultation she mentioned in her previous narrations. Agongo explained: *“whenever there are suspicions with regards to death, the processes differ as intricacies such as the widow must sleep with the corpse, drink the lukewarm water used to bath the corpse and ants’ bites issues are all incorporated into the process as widowhood practices in the frafra ethnic group in terms of the fresh funeral (kum-maabre)”*.

4.2.3 Widowhood Practice Among the Kassena Ethnic Group

The study investigated from the participants regarding how widowhood practices are carried out within their ethnic group. Esi narrated: *“there were two funerals when my husband died, that’s the fresh and the dry funeral. And both funerals I played a crucial role for my late husbands’ transitions, separation of our marriage and for peace to prevail within our family”*. Ayaa shares: *“firstly, I moved straight to the kitchen immediately my late husband passed-on. I was wailing in the kitchen before people gathered in the house”*. She added. *“My attire was black cloths throughout the process, and I received water and food from the back of the kitchen. It was a taboo for me to step my foot in the yard until the whole process had completed, especially the establishment of innocence”*

Further inquiry revealed that, *“there is no specific days fixed for either fresh or dry funeral, but usually a divination is made to consult the deceased to find out whether to bury him immediately or allow him to fish out his enemies before he is buried”* (community leader 2). *“However, this process is exempted from people who are aged before they die”*, he added.

The study enquired from a widow to narrate the widowhood practice she went through when the husband died. Esi narrates: *“I was only sent to the soothsayer’s house to undergo a spiritual consultation through divination to prove my innocence. During the divination if it proves that I was the cause or contributed to the death of my husband. Then the burial would have to be delayed for the elders to follow a spiritual purification process before the remains taken to the grave”*. The study asked if she could throw more light on that. She indicated that, *in instances like that, the widow is released from the kitchen to go to her father’s house and bring black fowl for a purification libation for her. The widow gives the fowl to the middleman during her marriage, and he (middleman) intends to do the libation on the widow’s behalf and that ends it before the burial takes place”* (Esi).

Similarly, a participant recounted that, “in my clan within the Kasena’s land, the moment my husband died I was stripped naked and lukewarm water poured on me by the elders to establish my innocence (Ayaa). “If the water happens to have burned my skin, then it would have been confirmed that I was the cause of my husband death. But then nothing happened to me, so they proceeded and prepared him for burial,” she added.

I investigated further with regards to the dry funeral. Aprisla, *“the Christianity in our section has ruin the tradition and the culture making it difficult to narrate the right widowhood practice when it come to the dry funeral”*. She added that, *“during my time, I just appeared in red clothes on the day of the climax, and I was prayed for by elders and chief priest and that ended it”*.

4.2.4 Widowhood Practice Among the Kusasi Ethnic Group

Similarly, findings from the Kusasi ethnic group regarding how widowhood practice is conducted. Azaaka narrated that: *“the Kusasi has two phases of widowhood practices, which depends on whether the funeral was fresh (kum- Maab) or dry funeral (Kum-ƙpagre). But in both situations the severity of the practice depends on the age of the man”*. A community leader stated that, “death of young men raises lots of suspicions, hence the widowhood processes are usually in a rush but very strict to the rules and every step. Whereas the death of the aged attracts soft processes even though in a systematic manner” (Community leader³).

Azaaka narrates: “Widowhood practice ranges between 3 and 12 days for fresh and dry funerals. As custom demands when my husband died, it was my duty to invite the neighboring household members through crying aloud or wailing for the people to hear and come to my aid” (Azaaka narrates). She continued “Immediately my neighboring people rush to our house, an elderly woman and a sister of my late husband took me into the room where the corpse was laid. I was then given a calabash containing millet flour soaked with water. I was stripped naked, with a piece of cloth used to wrap my private (genital) and a white tail tied at my buttocks. After dressing me, I was made to sit on a mat made with stocks. One old lady told me I was expected to be in that dress code until the remains are buried” (Azaaka).

In Amira’s case, she recounts that, “an old lady came to whisper into my ears that I was expected to bath the corpse, which I did with the assistance of two undertakers. During the bathing of the corpse, establishment of innocence was conducted for me, I was made to kiss the corpse with a smile, and it was expected that the face of the corpse changed to be appealing or otherwise. After kissing the corpse, two elders and the head of the family came into the room and inspected the corpse in other to

pronounce my innocence or otherwise (Amira). The participants indicated that, for this, it was because my husband died young, but mostly most cases, these practices are exempted for the age. If it is proven otherwise, the elders would ask me to taste the water that was used to bath the corpse and swear to the death of the husband, while the commands the corpse to react within three days to prove my innocence” (Amira). The research investigated what was her outcome, she indicated that, “I was innocent of my husband’s death” (Amira).

Apaaza narrates: “Immediately after the burial, I had my head shaved at the refuse dump by another widow appointed by the elders. I was given some water that contains root and leaves of the tallest tree in the cemetery to bath and drink on the refuse dump, which I did exactly as my spiritual bath for purification as the end of the process”.

4.2.5 Excerpts from Widowhood Practices Within the Three Ethnic Groups

The research findings from the three ethnic groups within the Upper East of Ghana shows that, widowhood practices among the ethnic groups are almost the same, even though there are slight differences. Evident from the research findings revealed that, widowhood practices infringe on the human rights of these widows. Yet they are obliged to religiously adhere to the practices, else they stand to face the consequences which resonates with (Sossou, 2002) assertions that there is serious weaponry against women through widowhood practices. It is obvious that widowhood is associated with silence difficulties such as oppressions, force marriages and inheritance deprivations as confirmed by Francis (2016) as cited in (Ifeanacho, 2023, p.188) on “widows suffer untold oppressions”. The excerpts above demonstrate how deep-rooted culture and traditions subject women to inferior status culminating their physical and emotional torture. Apart from suffering of losing their husbands in the events of death, they are compelled to undergo some excruciating socio-cultural practices to justify their innocence and to show respect to the death.

The illustration of masculinity and male dominance in the UE/R Ghana through the constructed cultural practices such as the widowhood practices compels the woman to be a servant during the man’s life and even submissive to him at death. This is in contrast with the Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for the abolitions of all forms of violence against women and harmful cultural practice such as the widowhood practices. Considering the oral narrations of the widows, widowhood practices the study area expressly infringes upon their human rights, unjust and deepens inequalities.

4.3 Widows Experiences and Opinions on Widowhood

Experiences of widowhood may vary for widows due to factors such as age, social connections, cultural values, location and others as evidenced in (Shoko and Danke, 2024, p.4). Findings on widows' experiences and opinions regarding the practices were not far different from their narrations in their respective ethnic groups' way of widowhood practices. The experiences of the widows were further categorized into emerging themes as experiences of social restriction of widows, experiences of physical and economic exploitation of widows and experiences on social and emotional abuse of widows.

4.3.1 Experiences of Social Restrictions of Widows

The study found that the widowhood practice exacerbated injustices from the participants (widows) as they shared their experiences with the researcher. Aprisla shares: *"When my husband died, I was only limited to the mat within the corpse room for the past three days. After the burial I was now limited to only the compound of my house for almost a week. I had to frown my face and appear grieving or else I will be accused of killing him"*. The widow has been restricted from movement as a violation her rights due to the widowhood practice. Also, Agongo shares: *"I was only allowed to wear black or red for almost 1 year... they elders said once I was mourning, those were my mandatory cloths for the whole year. So even after 6 months I was not going for any function, because all the time I must be in red or black which I did not like at all"*.

The widow was not able to freely attend certain functions because she had been restricted. Similarly, Ayaa lamented: *"I preferred to stay indoors than to have someone accompanied me to the market and any place I want to go, I really wish that part is expunged from the practice"*. This indicates how widows' freedom of movement has been limited and inconveniences to them leading to the expression of her dissatisfaction about the practice.

The findings also revealed that, the death of once husband disregards the surviving wife's businesses, job or employment. Ayaa lamented: *"When my husband died and I was restricted from communicating or talking to anyone, I lost all my customers. Because they could not reach me and others thought, I had absconded their monies, so my business collapsed... it really affected me badly, but I had no choice"*. Also, Agongo who is a nurse shared her experience, *"I usually sneak to the washroom to change to my nursing uniform or wears it on top of the black or red attire for 6 months"*. These experiences demonstrate how difficult the widowhood practices were to widows who were working. Serious interference of the practices to the widow's work and the employer as well.

Owing to the dictates and the conventions of cultures, women are artificially shaped, constrained and are normally disproportionately affected by social and movement restrictions. The unique community norms that restrict the widow's movement because of the practice may differ in societies and its enforcement may be stricter or not due to the cultural believe of such ethnic group. The challenges rendered to the widows because of restrictions from social interactions, movement and isolations deepens the existing sense of loss which resonates with Sossou, (2002) as cited in (Azumah and Nachinaab, 2018, p.51) on how cultural practices exacerbate widows' vulnerability. Friends and family members who would have interacted with her as a form emotionally support is denied. It is, however, prudent to note that, the cascading effects of these widows are highly different, because individual widow may respond to the same treatment differently due their intersectional identities.

The perpetual tormenting of widows shows that, they have nobody to share the restrictive movement due widowhood practices following their husband death. Community and family members disassociate themselves with widows owing to the tag on the widowhood practices. This implies that the widow losses her acquaintances and connections with some members of the society. Making the widow more isolated which can result to depression as confirmed by (The London School of Economics and Political Science, 2021) as cited in (Shoko and Danke, 2024). Arguably, it is important to look at the interactions between women's rights and the traditional cultural practices.

4.3.2 Experiences of Physical and Economic exploitation of widows

The research discovered that widows were coerced to participate in the widowhood practices out of fear. Serwa shares: *"The way I struggled to grow my hair, in fact I wept when they were shaving my long hair...it was an order from the elders to have my hair shaved. I did not have option than to accept and bath on the refuse dump before all the community member who were present. I was told the ghost spirit would stay with me if I did not shave and bath at the refuse dump publicly with the concoction"*.

(Apoka). Similarly, Apaaza shared: "I was terrified when the asked me to drink the concoctions that was given to me by one of the elders that I have seen before. I was made to sit on the floor, I was stripped naked and was made to always cry aloud every dawn. I know with time this practice will stop". The widow expresses her bad feeling about the practice and how she wished the practices discontinued. Also, Aprisla, a 37-year-old widow shared her experiences: *"My late husband's properties were all confiscated. They took my husband car, the house and even the lands he bought. Then one of the brothers was imposed on me as my next husband I did have a choice than to accept, because that was the only way I could benefit from my late husband's property."*

The widow's excerpts demonstrate the context at which a woman have legal access to economic rights which aligns with the World Bank report, (2018) as cited in Shoko and Danke (2024, p.2), asserts that marriages in Africa serves as the legal grounds for a woman to social and economic rights. It is therefore not surprise that the widow accepted the levirate husband as against her wish. Apart from physically forcing to carried out some degrading and harmful task, the widows are push to a situation in which they can not be economically sound after the death of their husbands.

Apaaza shares her experiences: *"my two kids were both female, so when my husband died, I knew I was not going to get anything from his property, so when it was time for the sharing of his property, I left the house. I had nothing for my two small girls. Yet the elders were very good to me...this our tradition must stop"*. The practices have been going on with custodians such as the community elders, traditional chiefs, and family heads who serves to keep the traditions and the cultural norms of the society. Their dominance and oppressions burdens widows experience of multiple marginalizations which echoes like Crenshaw intersectionality of "being a woman, a widow and a poor widow without any support system" these vulnerable widows are forced to observe these practices against their will as pure violation of the widow's rights.

4.3.3 Experiences of Social and Emotional abuse of Widows

The research uncovered the humiliated and degraded experiences that widows felt through the widowhood practices. The narrations of some participants demonstrated how dehumanizing the widowhood practices were. Agongo shares: *"When my husband died, I was stripped naked before the public immediately. A very slim smoke cloth was used to pass through my under to cover my womanhood. I was further made to wear ropes around my neck and sit on the floor. And calabash was handed over to me as my bowl and drinking cup till the remains were taken to the grave...They elders said that it was how I was supposed to appear as a widow for a smooth transition of my late husband to the next world, it was a disgrace to me as a young woman by then"*. The widow felt so embarrassed and dehumanized to have gone through that practice. She felt she was degraded before her peers and acquaintances making her loss herself-worth. Also, Ayaa shares: *"the bathing at the refuse dump, shaving of my long hair was what killed me with the widowhood practice"*

Widows' losses their dignity and self-worth after the performance of the widowhood practice. They feel so humiliated that interactions in societies becomes challenging. The widows shared their experiences of oppressions in the perspective of intersectionality because, they were humiliated because they are less human. Due to society's expectations and gender biases towards women orchestrated by harmful cultural practices and norms as confirmed by (Korang-Okrah &Haight, 2014).

Also, Amira shares her experiences: *“It was only the widows who associated with me, even my closer friend despised me, I was shocked. All the assistance I had were from colleagues’ widows. But then I was made to understand that it lingers in most of family and community members minds that I was the cause of the death of my husband. Apart from the ridiculed, being associated as bewitching my husband, I felt so embarrassed when I was stripped naked. My opinion on this practice is that the elders should stop it.”* The widow in the extract was viewed by the community and family members as a killer. She indicates the pains of enduring all the atrocities associated with the death of the husband. And the attitudes of family and community members gets worse towards the widow as soon as the husband passed-on. The widowhood practice creates some animosity among people within the community and hatred among themselves.

The widows who were interviewed pointed on the health implications in the form of mental violence (psychological problems), physical and sometimes sexual abuses which aligns with (Sossou, 2002) assertions of health implication of the widowhood practices. The practices of stripped naked exposes widows to respiratory infections. Apaaza shares: *“I had pneumonia after I was stripped naked to the mercy of weather for 5 days. I was shivering on the fourth day and nearly collapsed, hmmm!...this practice will one day end”*. Situation where widows are expected to cry aloud or wailed irrespective of her underlying health conditions. The implications of the constant crying till the remains are buried and some instances, every dawn and evening as the neighbours attention that something bad had happened to her. It was revealed from the findings that some of the health implications that widowhood practices results included headache, swollen feet, back pain, pneumonia, fever, and trauma as confirmed by (Sossou, 2002) assertion on widow’s health and psychological state. Also, the use of slim piece of smoke-like cloth to wrap the genital of the widow, if personal hygiene is ignored, the widow can contract vaginal infections through widowhood practice.

Interestingly, traditions and cultural practices applied to widows was different from the widowers (men who losses their wives), the study sought to find out whether men strictly undergo the same cultural practices when their wives die. Approximately 90% of the participants indicated no, implying the practices was only meant for widows. A very clear discriminatory practices towards women which shifts their status downwards upon the death of their husbands whiles the men remained relevant. The downward shift of the widow’s social status has the consequences of affecting the widow’s economic status hence increasing their vulnerability to gender-based violence and other discriminatory abuses.

Nevertheless, others believed that the practices continued, because it was passed onto them from generations and there was essence in adhering to the practice as widows. They pointed to the fact that, the practices bring them satisfactions that their deceased husbands would be well received in the next world, while the entire family can stay in good health and in peace without any catastrophe. This assertion aligns with Antwi, (2015) as cited in (Ba-an et al, 2022, p.10) position that widowhood practice has become part of the people, serves as cultural requirement as well as psychological support mechanisms for the widows to adopt to the death of the husband.

3.3.4 Widows Resistance to Widowhood Practices

Based on the widows' opinions during the interviews, the research deduced that, widows within the three ethnic groups vehemently rejected and resisted the widowhood practices, despite its ingrained in their customs and traditions. Widows have resisted the widowhood practice overtime insisting that, the practices cast snare on their women dignity and violates their human rights. Rejection of the practices can be associated with the changes in developmental issues, educational and religious dynamics within each ethnic group. The findings revealed that, while all the community leaders were insisting for the practices to continue, about 90% of the widows, especially those that are exposed to urban life or had formal education strongly rejected the widowhood practice, considering it as oppressive custom within their ethnic groups.

Among the Kessenas and the Kusasis ethnic groups, opposition to widowhood practices emanating from the religious dynamics (Islam and Christianity). Where we have almost all the women been in the church or mosque in which they teach and emphasizes the dignity of every individual and equality before God. This has discouraged and influence the rejection of the widowhood practices by the widows. Also, most of the women within the frafra ethnic group are exposed to city or urban life and are more educated, hence vehemently resist the practice based on their own agency.

4.4 Existing Support and Legal Protections to Eliminate Widowhood practices

The study sought to unearth the existing support systems from either the community leaders or members, NGOs, government in terms of policy interventions, legal instruments and any other system that serves to support the widows in one way or the other.

4.4.1 Community Based Support Systems

The research findings uncovered that at the community level, there exist some support to the widows. Esi stated: "oh! when my husband died, the external family and the community members did very well for me, especially the widows. Some of them gave me money, food stuff and some virtually left their

homes and were taking care of my kids and doing everything for me, yeah! I had a good support from my community”. Similarly, Apoka indicated that, *“some of the community leaders were very mile and sympathized with me when my husband died, some gave me money to take of the children, food stuff, especially those that attended the same church with me. But other community leaders were very rude and even behaved as if I was the cause of my husband’s death”*. This demonstrated a communal living, even with some mixed reactions of good intend for the widowhood practices which aligns with (Boaheng, 2022) assertion that some aspects of the widowhood practices are intended for the well-being of the widow.

The study also inquired form the community leaders some of the support that they offered to the widows during the widowhood practices. Findings from the field revealed that; *“the marital bond that had existed between the widow and late husband are immeasurable that by death of one brings pains to the surviving partner. To curb this pain and the unfortunate breakdown of their bond, cultures such as indoor confinement, shaving of the widow’s head, re-marrying of the late husband relatives, and spiritual baths were instituted as existing support systems to support the widow”* a (community leader 3). This was not different from the views of the other community leaders, without taking into consideration the effect of losing their jobs or collapse of their business as a double jeopardy/agonny (Sossou, 2002).

However, over 90% of the widows interviewed were against the culturally constructed support system and the widowhood practice. Azaaka lamented: *“I was just part of my husband’s properties for inheritance, any time I think of this my levirate husband that was imposed on me l don’t feel okay. But I must obey”*. A feeling of a reduced status of her identity as human to a mere property, yet the community leaders see that widowhood practices as not oppressive and abuse of the widow’s rights. It is evident that the community leaders focus more on the properties acquired by the deceased than caring for the widow and the orphans as argued in (Brown, 2016).

Nevertheless, a participant indicated that, “I was advised by some educated community members to run to the district court in other to get some of my late husband’s properties, so I went to the court to complain. The court made the issue so simple by sharing the properties according to the law. In fact, I was happy, but most of the elders and the external family members were not pleased with the action I took”. The findings further revealed that; *“some human rights people and NGOs usually come to meet we the widows and talk to us about our rights, which to me is helping and our community leaders are to entertain some fear”* (Ayaa).

Making stringent analysis of the oppressions and in the view of intersectionality. The widows are afraid of they been excluded in the society or the community. The widows are scared and are unable to express their dissatisfaction about the practices, despite their exclusions in decision to undertake the practice. This is where gender dynamics come to play in establishing fear, because widows are represented as women. The anxiety in the widow is the aftermath of the intersection of the cultural values that have shaped the practices but appears to them as a support system.

4.4.2 Laws, Policies and Interventions as Support System

The study inquired from Human Rights institution, gender desk unit and the social welfare on available support systems for the widows. A participant from the human right commission stated that, *“Ghana’s constitution contains laws that covers respect for human dignity, cultural rights, properties rights of spouses as well as equality and freedom from discrimination in the various articles of the constitution. ...[paused]hmm! observing the laws of Ghana, men and women seem to have equal rights, but far beyond that, because the harsh reality that widows pass through in this region does not speak to the enacted laws of this country”* (participant: Commissioner CHRAJ). Similarly, *“the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) Law 111 was an intestate succession law enacted to guarantee the widows and the orphans some assets after the death of the husband, so as CHRAJ work went I hear of any widow denied of her husband properties, I do my own investigation and hand over the matter to court to dispense justices to the victim”* (participant: Commissioner CHRAJ). He added *“I have been struggling for these widows every time, but hmm... our courts, you know the system”*. The really is that these laws are just rubber stamp as they are easily disregarded which confirms with (Francis, 2016) assertions that *“a poor widow, there alone, with no one to defend her, might be ignored, might even be denied justice”* at that situation the widow might not be assertive to take certain decisions and action.

Also, findings from the field further revealed that, *“I work with all the women in the district particularly the vulnerable women like the widows, to take their concerns for a redress and sometimes assist them in diverse ways, like advises, support their children school fees and lastly channel their views to gender ministry, (participant. Gender unit). She indicated that, “recently I shared some mattresses, rice & oil. Soap and other items, but the politicize it”*. Similarly, a participant from the social welfare stated that, *“apart from the physical support we offer to marginalize widows and orphans, our department collaborates with Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Widows and Orphans Movement, Action Aid Ghana, Legal Aid Ghana to introduce some interventions such as the scholarships for the orphans and free legal assistance to widows whose rights*

are been violated. For instance, “we organized ‘*voices of the widows’ program*’ in Radio Upper East, URA fm and Gurune fm just to discourage some practices mitted to our widows”. “I have become a full-time human rights teacher in most of the communities, just to enlighten some the perpetrators and victims about basic rights and how to seek for redress” (participant: CHRAJ commissioner).

However, the effort of these NGOs and private legal practitioners are sometimes thwarted by strong traditional leaders and politicians. The study discovered that most of these abuses and violations of the widow’s rights are orchestrated through the shaped patriarchal system as well as the unequally power relation that has existed between the men and the women for a very long time in the region.

CHAPTER FIVE (5)

BURGEONING OF GENDER INEQUALITY

5.1 Introduction

The chapter provides the summary of the study findings, suggest recommendations and draw conclusions based on the research objective of the study.

5.2 Summary of Findings

5.2.1 Objective 1: To Identify Cultural Practices That Affects Widows.

The participants took turns to narrate and explained their understanding of widowhood practices. “A generational ritual that we the survived spouse has to religiously fellow in other to pave way for our deceased husbands” as stated by a participant. The narrations of participants revealed their understanding of widowhood practices, and the research deduced that, widowhood practice was culturally constructed practice that serves the interest of each ethnic group, and their meanings attached to them after the death of one’s husband.

Despite the research findings established that widowhood practices within UE/R were almost the same, there existed difference to individual widow’s experiences based on influential factors that intersect one’s identity. The overarching revelations from the various ethnic groups included shaving of the widow’s head, confinement of widow, holding of calabash, stripped naked, the use of traditional piece of cloth to cover the private part of the widow and ropes around the neck, sitting on the floor or mat, bathing at the refuse dump publicly and a host of others. The research finally deduced that, widows were subjected to these harmful widowhood practices as against their wishes and it affected their physical and psychological well-being.

5.2.2 Objective 2: Widows Experiences and Opinions on Widowhood Practices.

It is prudent that after understanding what widowhood practices were, the research finds out the insight of the widows’ experiences and opinions on the widowhood practices. Windows experiences and opinions were sub-themed into

(1) Experiences of social restrictions of widows: thus, regarding confinement, widows expressed their experiences of been socially restricted, they were not allowed to move above the walls of their compound, were restricted to wear only red or black cloths within a period. About 90% of the widows expressed their dissatisfactions and the inconvenience about the widowhood practice.

(2) Experiences of physical and economical exploitation of widows: it was uncovered that widows were forced to undertake the widowhood practice out of fear. The fear that spiritually their deceased husband may harm the family, the children and the fear of rejections by community and family members. Also, widows were denied from inheriting their late husband's property, hence exacerbating their economic vulnerability. However, most of the widows who were educated, aligned with the religious denominations and those who had urban life exposures strongly challenged this practices and demand for explanations and answers from their communities.

(3) Experiences of Social and emotional abuse of widows: the results revealed how widows were stigmatized and clearly discriminated. The widow is tagged or identified as the killer of the deceased husband unless proven otherwise. Also, the practices of stripped naked and bathing at the refuse dump publicly demonstrated how dehumanized the widows were subjected to. The widows expressed their experiences of losing their dignity or self-worth and embarrassments to their womanhood and wished the practice abolished completely. This is because widowhood practices were detrimental to the well-being of the widows.

5.2.3 Objective 3: Existing Support Systems and Legal Protections for Widows

It is crucial to note that widows receive money, food stuff and a host of assistance during the death of their husband from community and family members as a form of support systems. Counselling and advises from the community leaders and family elders also forms part of the support system to the widows. Also, community-based organizations and religious groups offered support in the form of prayers, skill trainings, soft loans for widows as startup that gave them economic independence.

Secondly, the legal protections were unique/same across all the ethnic groups. The excerpt demonstrated significant number of domestic laws in the constitution of the Republic of Ghana that protected the widows. The outstanding law was the PNDC law 111, the interstate succession law which sought to protect the widow and the children in the event of death of the man without a will. But these laws did little to protect the widows based on the findings from the field. Finally, the research captured the support from Widows and Orphans Movement (WOM) which advocates for widow's rights, legal assistance and vocational training and mentorship for widows within the region.

The study in the UE/R of Ghana reveal a complex intersection of gender and power and how the peoples bahviour are embedded in the politics of masculinity. The study was able to establish that widowhood practices are deeply ingrained in the customs and traditional values of the of the people

in the region. This has therefore led to the subjugation of widows to these harmful practices. The intersectional lens has helped to unpack how age, economic conditions, location and level of education jointly made widows vulnerable with the practices of widowhood.

The research uncovered that widowhood was more of personal loss or degrading status as widows revealed during the interviews. A shift in widows' social status, identity and power in the various ethnic groups was the outstanding revelation in the entire study, these factors exacerbated their vulnerability as widows. The masculine traits of the men in the region are reinforced through the gender norms and patriarchal structures that exist hence exerting significant control on the widowed women within the region. The striking revelation was that the status of the widows without husband decreases in their social values demonstrating the power imbalances that the widowed women manage to live with within the region. Yet, about 1% of the widows consent that the widowhood practices continue.

Widows are not only marginalized by the widowhood practice, but they are deprived of human dignity, showing how widowhood is politicized by masculinity and male dominance within the UE/R of Ghana. By employing intersectional lens to the harmful widowhood practices, the multiple and the magnitude of oppression are evident, demonstrating how social structures have disadvantaged the widowed women based on their intersections of their locations, ages, education and economic conditions.

5.3 Recommendations

The study findings have intensely demonstrated how widowhood practices are pure violations of women rights and every bit of efforts to eliminate have been futile in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The big question is, how do we then make progress in discontinuing the harmful practices in the region? This is a difficult task, yet I feel, it can be lessened by the concepts the research explored. I feel the proposed suggestions teased out from the study can offer help to eliminate or discontinue the widowhood practices in the Upper East Region of Ghana.

Bottom-up initiatives: Concerns of local actors and the vulnerable widows should be the bases to begin with as an appropriate legal framework. The laws, policies and responsible institutions should be driven by local actors and context. By engaging them to understand the angle at which they stand and the willingness of the vulnerable widows to make their claims clear and known for an effective policies and reinforcement. Law reforms that are driven by local actors in a more interactive dialogue manner have the potential to thrive.

Education and awareness creations: there is the need to mobilize vulnerable women, educate and train them to be aware of their fundamental rights. The evolving women's rights organizations such as the Widows and Orphan Movement, legal Aid and Asongtaaba Women are centered in the regional and district capitals leaving the rural folks. There is the need for the extension of services to these rural areas, to educate them, provide them free legal services in the form of advice, boost their confidence and demonstrate willingness to help them address their human right issues cognizance of the local context.

Also, as a researcher, I feel the widows in their effort should mobilize themselves to encourage and protect one another as a form of enhancing their capabilities which may offer them the opportunity to resist certain harmful cultural practices unanimously.

Finally, my personal experience of the widowhood practice, I recommend that married women should rely on the men for a change, clarion call and message should be made to demand their support for women's rights violations whiles they are still alive. Most men who normally observe or experience the practices would not wish their wives to go through such practices and may wish the practices are eliminated.

CHAPTER SIX (6)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the preceding discussions so far, the main conclusions of the research are as follows. Widowhood practices in the Upper East Region of Ghana are to be seen as mixture of discriminatory and clear oppressive practices orchestrated by patriarchal, socio-cultural, economic factors, religious factors and legal structures that are deeply rooted in the structure of unequal power relations that exist between the men and the women within the region. Theoretically, widowhood practices have deeper grounds in gender-based violence and gender relations with multiple understanding intersecting gender, ethnicity, economic and religion of the widowed women.

The research found that, widows were coerced to partake in the widowhood practices through the fear of community rejections, ostracized by families and friends, and fear of economic deprivation. Secondly, widows' health and psychological state were adversely affected by widowhood practices within the study area. Finally, the fundamental human rights of these widowed women in the study area were violated by the widowhood practices imposed on them.

There was glaring differences of reality with widowhood practices and only the vulnerable widows fall victims to the practices in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Efforts to salvage the circumstances at the international level, national and local NGOs have not been successful due to key actors with parochial interest (male dominant power relations) and global shaping of gendered regulations. Most of the provisions enacted are male driven plans, which are not relevant to the vulnerable widow.

Establishing the fate of widows in the Upper East Region of Ghana through the activities of the NGOs, efforts from the national government and other legal interventions to stop the harmful widowhood practices have been a herculean task. This is because of the political issues, traditional and cultural attachment of the people which serves as barriers to make appropriate laws and effectively enforce them to the later. Notwithstanding these tough barriers, the study has demonstrated that, there are contemporary progress and contributions from international bodies towards women's equality and violence against women such as the widowhood practices.

In short, given the region's strong cultural background and its entrenched patriarchal structures, addressing widowhood practices through local actors will be the most effective way to reshape these harmful practices mitted out to widowed women in the UE/R of Ghana. Nevertheless, I believe this issue extends beyond the scope of this research. Therefore, I feel the challenges posed by these

harmful widowhood practices cannot be resolved if left unattended to. therefore, further research is needed to find why some widows maintained that the widowhood practices continue even though the findings shows that about 90% of the widows are against the practices and wish it discontinuous.

Clearly, I feel that the transformation needs social change, right from the local actors, institutional actions to the national level for widows to receives justice in the Upper East Region of Ghana. It is pertinent to note that whether the framework stand or not, the actors, the required institutions and the system should function for the plight of the widows.

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APPENDIX

Biographical Data

- 1. Interview No -----
- 2. Place (ethnic group) -----
- 3. Date -----
- 4. Introduction of the researcher -----
- 5. How old are you? -----
- 6. Do you have children? If yes, are they (below or above 18)
- 8. Which religious denomination do you belong to? Christianity/Muslim/Traditional/Non-----
- 9. What is your highest educational qualification? -----
- 10. What do you do for a living? -----
- 11. How long have you been widowed?.....

IDENTIFY SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PRACTICES THAT WIDOWS GO THROUGH

- 1. What does widowhood mean for you?
- 2. What are some of the social/cultural practices you were compelled to go through during and after the death of your husband?
- 3. Kindly share some of the purification processes or ceremonies you went through when your husband died.
- 4. What are some of the taboos/restrictions you were obliged to observe during and after the death of your husband?

PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES OF WIDOWS

- 1. Narrate how the widowhood practices were carried out during and after the death of your husband?
- 2. Kindly share your experiences with the widowhood practices you went through during and after the death of your husband.
- 3. How were you affected by these widowhood practices?

4. Kindly share the experiences you had with your family and the community during and after the death of your husband.

SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE WIDOW AND TO ELEMIMATE THE PRACTICE

1. kindly share with me if there have been family and community support structures that have helped you during and after your husband's death?
2. Were there external support structures (Gov't, NGOs and professional bodies) that helped you during and after your husband's death?

RECOMMENDATION

1. Please share your suggestions or possible ways to eliminate or refine the widowhood practices in your community.
2. Kindly share your opinions on what could be done to improve the situation of the widows.

(INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE COMMUNITY LEADERS)

1. What do you know about widowhood practices in your community?
2. Can you tell me how the widowhood practices came about in your community and the processes involved?
3. Kindly share the reasons you uphold these widowhood practices in your community.
4. What is your role in preserving and enforcing the practice in your community?
5. Kindly explain the available support systems (family, community, governmental, or NGO) to the widows who have lost their husbands in your community?
6. If you are part/member of a community organisation, how have you or your org contributed

(INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICIAL)

1. What legal protection are there for human rights abuse and discriminatory practices against widows?
2. Please share with me your insight about widows' awareness of legal rights within your area.
3. How effective are the legal protections for these widows?
4. How do your commission handle cases of widows who are victims of human rights abuse?
5. What do you do when you have information about violation of widows' rights without it being reported officially?

6. Which human rights-based organizations have been assisting widows whose rights has been violated by widowhood practices? And in what form?

(INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE SOCIAL WELFARE DEPARTMENT & GENDER UNIT OFFICIALS)

1. Can you share with me the specific policies, laws, programs and services that your unit provides to widows?
2. Are there programmes aimed at addressing harmful widowhood practices? If yes, can you elaborate on some of the activities they undertake?
3. What support do your unit give to women especially widows within your catchment area?
4. How do your unit handle cases of abuse and violation of widow's rights?
5. What feedback mechanism are in place for widows to voice their concerns?