

**NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY**

**Stigmatization of Widows in Mutomo  
Village in Gatundu District**

**BY**

**Esther Waithira Mwaura**

*A THESIS SUBMITTED TO GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION*

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2010

**July, 2010**

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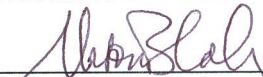
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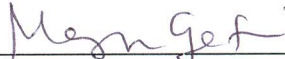
**Dr. Alice Mambo**

**Second Reader:**



**Prof. Victor Cole**

**External Reader:**



**Prof. Mary Getui**

**July, 2010**

Student's Declaration

STIGMATIZATION OF WIDOWS IN MUTOMO VILLAGE IN  
GATUNDU DISTRICT

I declare that this is my original work and has not been  
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

The views submitted herein are not necessarily those of Nairobi Evangelical  
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners.

(Signed)



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Esther Waithira Mwaura

**July, 2010**

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand the factors leading to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village of Gatundu District in Kenya. Data for this study was collected through face to face interviews with twelve respondents. The responses were recorded, transcribed and later analyzed.

The outcome of this study shows that the family, church and the government have all failed in addressing the socio-economic problems faced by widows in the village. Kikuyu culture has also contributed to their tribulations.

The study reveals that the stigmatized widows face challenges with issues such as social interaction, economic challenges, parenting and low regard by society; they are torn between remarriage and remaining in their initial marriage as traditions dictate.

Based on these findings, recommendations which were made included that the government should have a desk to address issues relating to widows. The church should help the needy ones materially and counsel them to overcome trauma. Relatives should allow widows to remarry if they wish and leading women groups and other non-governmental organizations like Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) should be empowered by the government in the area. The government, through the Ministry of Education should consider putting widowhood as a topic in the school curriculum of Kenya. The church should also include it in the teaching program so that people get sensitized on the need to appreciate widows.

**TO**

My late father Sospeter Mwaura Thirikwa and mother Peninah Nyakirimi for their selfless dedication, encouragement and prayers throughout my academic journey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge the support given by my family; husband Njoroge and children Ngigi, Wangoko, Nyakirimi and Wamuhu for the assistance they offered in computing my assignments and projects throughout this course. I appreciate their encouragement without which I would not have completed my studies.

Rev. Grace Itegi and her family for their encouragement and hospitality, without which I would have dropped the course. God bless them abundantly.

Dr. Alice Mambo, my supervisor and mentor for prayers, patience, advice and encouragement, when I almost gave up in my studies. God bless you.

To my second reader, Prof. Victor Cole for his wise counsel and patience. I appreciate your effort in making my study a success.

My late dad Sospeter Thirikwa and mum Peninah Nyakirimi for their understanding, moral and financial support throughout my academic journey that has taken me to the graduate level.

My parents-in-law Francis Ngigi and Lillian Wangoko for prayers, encouragement and understanding when I missed family gatherings to attend to my study.

To my lecturers, Mrs. Rosemary Mbogo and Dr. Ngewa for their moral support and unending understanding when my health deteriorated during the study.

Vincent Njuguna and Kung'u's family for accommodating me while at NEGST. I sincerely thank them for their hospitality and generosity.

Above all, I would like to thank the Almighty God for His faithfulness and goodness without which this project would not have been a success

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The seriousness of stigmatization of widows should not be underestimated in Mutomo village. More than ever before, the problems facing this group of women have become pressing. Widow headed families are a common characteristic in the said village which has a rural setting. This is the case in most developing societies where women have greater life expectancy than men (Messinger 1995, 75). They have a good chance of ending their lives as widows.

There are two types of stigmatization; intrinsic or self-imposed and external or so-called environmental stigmatization (Ifeoma 2008, 4). Some of the reasons for internal stigmatization in widowhood include living as though widowhood may never come while still married; there is no contingency plan. Over-reliance on the spouse and lack of self esteem contributes to this type of stigmatization. Lack of knowledge of sources of financial empowerment and an over consciousness of the societal and external stigmatization also impact on widows negatively.

External stigmatization finds its roots in the fact that widows are blamed for their husbands' deaths. Some widows are denied their otherwise rightful entitlement to their deceased husbands' estates. Others lack financial support for their family upkeep and children's upbringing from either their family or from secular society. Included too are mental and physical ostracization by family and friends, who consider poor widows as a liability. In the absence of protective male figures, women encounter annoying, irritating and clearly unwarranted male advances which have

only one goal; sexual favors from them. Children, particularly male, develop withdrawal symptoms, that then leads to withdrawal, which eventually leads to personal and societal misdemeanor. This weighs down heavily on this group of women. Widows are viewed suspiciously by society in general and their workmates rarely console them.

Widows in Mutomo village have suffered the two types of stigmatization mentioned above. Society occasionally tends to forget that all human beings have a need to be accepted and appreciated for what they are, as indicated by Peterson (1991, 49). Society at large is not sensitive to the fact that widows really need company, association, acceptance and assistance for their families.

### Problem Statement

Both African traditions and the Bible have clear guidelines on how widows ought to be treated. Widows in Mutomo village have their feet in two worlds, Christianity and African traditions. Surprisingly, neither of the two fully addresses their concerns. They are subjected to either internal, external or both types of stigmatization. Additionally, they are overwhelmed by the parental responsibility of raising their children single handedly. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that lead to the stigmatization of widows and recommend ways in which the stigmatization of widows and their children may be effectively addressed.

### Research Questions

- 1) What are some of the factors contributing to the stigmatization of widows?

- 2) What is the widows' biblical knowledge on widowhood?
- 3) What roles are the family, church and government playing in intervention of widows' lives?

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to investigate the causes for the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village.

### Significance of the Study

No form of literature has ever been written on widows in the locality. The findings of the study are intended to benefit the widows' relatives. These relatives will desire to be role models and mentors to the public on the appreciation of widows and orphans. The local community too will wish to associate and identify with widows as Jesus did: it will try to cater for their needs when necessary. The local church will also benefit from the study; it will come up with educational programmes to sensitize the public on the essence of good treatment for widows and orphans. It will try to offer material help to the needy widows and educate them on how to live positively in the absence of their spouses.

Local government agents will benefit from the study as they will be informed about the tribulations of widows. They will intensify their civic education and allocate substantial funds to widows in their annual budget and organize counseling sessions for them. The government through the Ministry of Education will include 'widowhood' as a topic in the school curriculum in Kenya. This study will help the society have a positive attitude towards widows. If well-implemented, stigmatization, isolation and exploitation of widows in the locality will be looked into.

### Limitations

The study was constrained by poor responses from widows who had not overcome the grief of losing their spouses. They lacked the courage to narrate their problems fully.

### Delimitations

The study was localized to widows in Mutomo village in Gatundu District. The area is vast thus making it hard for the researcher to effectively interact with all widows. The study was limited to twelve interviewees. They were grouped according to their age. Young widows were aged eighteen to thirty-four; mid-age, thirty-five to forty-nine, while the old age were above fifty years of age.

### Definition of Terms

**Widow:** A woman who has lost her husband by death and has not re-married.

**Widower:** A man who has lost his wife by death and has not re-married.

**Widowhood:** This is the state of being a widow and sometimes a widower.

**Stigmatization:** This is to characterize or to brand as disgraceful or ignominious. It also means setting some marks of disgrace.

**Levirate marriage:** A form of marriage by a widow to her late husband's brother or male relative. It was common among the Kikuyu and Luo traditional societies; the Israelites practiced it.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **African Traditional Perspective on Widows**

“Everyone knows who a widow is, but almost no one knows much about the social situation of widows” (Bequaert 1977, 39). Widowhood is a topic no one wants to discuss. Fortunately, a few African professional researchers of human behavior have investigated the topic and some of their findings have been highlighted in this study.

Traditional values, norms and morals as practiced within the framework of the family unit had the significant role of holding the society together. These legal requirements provided the fabric that maintained the solidarity of the family unit. The laws provided means of taking care of widows by integrating them into the larger society and assuring them of a hope and a future. It is therefore in this context that this study intends to proceed; it looks for principles that would be used to ensure that widows have a secure future without any form of stigmatization.

In the contemporary situation, there is high death toll and many young people die before settling in marriage. The increasing number of young widows is a common feature in Kenya today. Death without procreation is of great concern to African communities. Mbiti (1969, 132) explains that such a predicament means that the person is forever dead. Such deaths, which had negative repercussions on the continuity of clans, had prescribed remedies. The loss of a husband meant that the widow would be engaged in a levirate union with a brother- in -law. African traditions

have a room and hope for widows. These unions have been affected by a number of issues: technological inventions, AIDS, modernization, education and religious influences like Christianity and Islam.

According to African traditions, there are defined ways of taking care of the widow. Widows and orphans are not supposed to be exploited. Among the Luo of Kenya, a woman is considered not married to the husband alone but to the whole clan. Upon the death of her husband, the marriage remains intact; a brother-in-law or one of her husband's male relatives steps in to carry on with the deceased brother's marital obligations (Kirwen 1979, 30). She is only united to such people in a levirate marriage upon her consent. Thus, the widow can continue her marriage with her late husband through the ministrations of co-operate kinship group (Kirwen 1979, 208). This set up ensured that the widows' place within the society was secured and she could therefore continue normally with her life. Similar views are expressed by Wachege (2003, 97), he says that the society insisted that if a widow died before being inherited; her corpse had still to be inherited by one of her husbands close relatives.

Traditional Luo culture offered a better solution to the care of widows in contrast to contemporary Luo society which is at the cross-roads having embraced the western culture and its trappings for more than a century. Mbiti indicates that:

The western culture brought with it the notion that all that was African was evil and should therefore be rejected by all who converted to the new faith as a sign of their commitment. The break in the cohesion of the society is apparent because of the influence of living in cities and preference to undivided existence to cooperate existence. (Mbiti 1969, 219)

Other communities such as the Kikuyu and Kuria used to reunite the widow in a levirate marriage. The Kikuyu had a traditional support system for such women; they were treated with much respect. Brothers of the dead husband had responsibility for the welfare of the widow and her children in collaboration with the *nyumba*



(household) and the *muhiriga* (clan); the care itself was a kind of slavery as the widow lost her freedom as indicated by Wachege (2003, 74). She was expected to be reunited with the brother of the deceased in a levirate marriage (Kirwen 1979, 62). This acted as security for the deceased man's family and perpetuation of his name.

The brother continued raising children for his deceased brother. Gitau (1966, 3) indicates that the widow became part of the family concerned and the same family made sure that she lacked nothing.

The Kuria of Kenya had defined customs for the care of widows. They had laws regulating remarriage of widows such that they are inherited by the brothers; if there were no brothers, the nearest relatives of the deceased took over, but only if the widow agreed (Kirwen 1979, 59). Humiliation followed if the widow refused to be inherited, and the dowry paid for her was reclaimed. Fortunately, widows had an option of returning home and remarrying. This explains why it is un-African to stigmatize widows; the same care offered then should continue.

Kirwen, in his study indicates that the Kwaya of Tanzania had legal laws for the care of widows (1979, 94). A widow was inherited either by her husband's male relatives, her own son or went back to her maternal home. This is another indication to show the great care Africans had for widows. The Sukuma from Tanzania do not leave the widow alone in her bereavement. She is given various options, to choose a man from the brothers- in -law or nearest kinsmen if there are no brothers. A childless widow could go back to her parents if she was not willing to be inherited. On agreeing to be inherited by relatives, she then had no right to choose lovers from outside as indicated by Kirwen (1979, 117).

Mugambi (1988, 151) points out that kinship is like a closely woven network which stretches in every direction. The Kgatla tribe of Central Africa have an option

of the widow being inherited by a relative. She would be hated and referred to as a 'dog' if she refused to be married by a relative; she is rejected and ill treated. This is proof that Africans felt bound to assist the bereaved women.

Among the Bakinga of South West Uganda, there was a support system for the widows. In case of the the woman's husband dying while she was still young, she could be married to one of her husband's sons; if she was very old she might be lucky in having an elder son to look after her. At any rate, she was supposed to be taken care of by the family of her deceased husband. She could not be married to another family until the father repaid to the dead man's family a portion of the dowry. The family of the girl preferred their daughter to stay in the original home into which she had married. This showed the great trust the woman's relatives had in their in-laws' care for their daughter. It also shows great concern for the widow by her husband's relatives. The importance of surrogate marriage is providing security in an otherwise insecure situation for the widow. It acted as an insurance policy covering both physical and metaphysical dimensions of human life (Rugyema 1983, 100).

All these customs have changed with modernity and the onset of Christianity. The practice has attracted a lot of debate on the right of the widow to choose another husband if she so desires. Paul supports this idea in his letter to the Corinthians, he advises widows to marry any man of their choice but only if they are Christians (1 Cor. 7:39). The African widow lives in a dilemma of a two-forked world, the gospel and traditional culture; she is torn between culture and Christianity (Musimbi 2002, 19).

## Loneliness and Solitude in Widowhood

Losing a mate brings with it loneliness. Dom (1984, 28) indicates that those who are widowed sleep alone and there is no comfort at night, perhaps worse: they wake alone and no added strength comes with the returning consciousness. If pain of mind or body takes sleep from them, they have no human recourse. The sexual gift hitherto so much a part of life must now suddenly be denied. Often they will have to eat alone and return to an empty house without a companion and with no one to welcome them.

Similar views are expressed by (Diehm 2008, 1) she says that after the death of her husband, the sun sets in the world of the widowed. She encourages widows by telling them to remember that they are not alone as God cares for them. People should take care of the bereaved to alleviate their loneliness. Young (1976, 142) explains that loneliness may provide the drive for remarriage as widows feel insecure. She however cautions them to rethink about this issue for the reunion may not last if it is made out of emotions. Her advice is that one can learn to be alone and happy. However, she does not refute the fact that widowhood is difficult and also challenging.

Like westerners most African widows feel lonely and would like to remarry but cultural and religious practices keep holding them in the new era. Schineller (1989, 19) indicates that to tackle the new challenges, construction of local contextual theologies which would take cognizance of the gospel, church and culture is necessary. The African widow is at the cross-roads, though lonely, she does not have a clear mind, to remarry or not. To console and give hope to all widows Ifeoma says that:

The most successful factor is making God the focal point. God is the husband of widows, God knows why He allowed them to be widows, God knows their needs, God feels their pain, God sees those shed and unshed tears, God knows their worries, God sees the challenges ahead of them, God has a

special passion for them. So then, they cannot afford to side track God in the schemes of things. Those things only their husbands used to hear are now available to God's ears. God is a lover who never fails or disappoints His loved one. He knows that widows will stumble and fall, will pass through fires and rivers but more than ever, God is there to lift them up when they fall, to allow them pass through that fire without being burnt, to allow them go through the Red Sea and not be drowned. God is particularly happy when his widows pass through widowhood cheerfully and with love for God's other creatures. (Ifeoma 2008, 6)

After the death or divorce of one's mate, it's easier to slide in one's loneliness as highlighted by Young (1976, 85). These widows should get encouragement from the psalmist who said that God is the father to the fatherless and the defendant of the widows (Ps. 68:5).

### Biblical Perspectives on Widows

As the Bible covers other topics concerning human existence, it has likewise covered extensively the issue of widows and widowhood. Both the Old and New Testaments have something to say about the issue. Widows are members of our churches where they participate in a number of ways. The church has not yet come up with a defined role/policy on widows' care and is silent on wife inheritance. The church needs to alleviate the agony of losing a loved one and comfort the ever-increasing number of widows. She should help the widow to cope with the new environment of in-laws and society. The church should get insight from the book of Ruth 4:5, 10 and 1Tim. 5: 11. These past events can give the church an impetus in the care of widows. The two books clearly indicate that widows, especially the young ones, should be taken care of by the church.

## Old Testament View on Widows

The book of Genesis addresses the plight of widows as they are stigmatized and abandoned. Genesis 38:11-19 RSV gives the first account of a widow, that is, Tamar who is mistreated by her father-in-law through deception; God protects her by showing her the way out. God continues to show concern for widows by giving guidelines to the Jews for the care and provision for these widows as evidenced in Exodus 22:22-24. The exploitation of widows and orphans is condemned. Punishment for this evil was their wives becoming widows and their children becoming orphans as prescribed in verse 24. Included among the other protection laws, the book of Leviticus addresses the issue of widows. They should be accepted by the family members and stop being treated like aliens (Lev. 22: 13). A widow should be supported by her father if she has no children or support from elsewhere.

God shows extra care and concern for widows, aliens and the orphans. This is witnessed in the whole of Exodus and in the covenant way of life, as observed by Creig (1976, 59). God's impartiality is expressed in Deuteronomy 10:18. He is portrayed as showing orphans, widows and foreigners love by providing food and clothing for them just as He does for the other people. God also promises blessings to those who provide for the Levites, foreigners, widows and orphans. The Old Testament view is that the tithe from farm produce should be laid in towns so that among the poor people, widows should get a share (Deut.14:29). Further care for widows should be expressed in incorporating all families of servants, Levites, foreigners, orphans and widows in celebrations before the Lord.

The book of Deuteronomy points out how widows should be provided for and treated (Deut. 24:17). Hebrews should not accept a widow's garment in pledge for her debt. Blessings are promised to those who bring a bundle of grain from the field for

widows and orphans (Deut. 24:19-21). Similarly people were not to beat the olive tree twice; they were instructed to leave some of it for the orphans and widows. When harvesting the grapes they were not to glean the vines after they were picked, they were to leave the remaining grapes for widows and orphans. Further protection and care for the widows is provided in levirate marriages which gain legal authority in the community of Israel. Guidelines for this relationship are spelt out in Deuteronomy 25:4ff and in Ruth 1:11ff. A male relative of the deceased husband usually took care of the widow, bore children for his late brother or relative and supported the widow (Kirwen 1979, 30, 31).

Those who mishandle widows should borrow a leaf from Wellington (1990, 5) who states that women in Israel were held dearly. They had as extensive duties as men did. Neglect and lack of concern is not in God's plan as David demonstrated by marrying Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. Neglect and lack of compassion to people without protection, especially widows and orphans, is considered as a form of the worst social evil (Anderson 2003, 32). The Bible also condemns those who take advantage of widows and the fatherless as indicated in Psalms 94:6.

Job, in a bid to explain the ways of the wicked, says that they feed on the barren childless woman (Job 24:21). This is contrary to God's expectation of the Jews. Job 29:13 indicates what Job did in his happier days. He helped those who had lost hope and made widows' hearts sing with joy. This is God's wish for His people. The predicament for widows does not seem to have been Job's joy, he says that throughout his life from childhood, he cared for both widows and orphans (Job 31:18), an act for the righteous.

The predicament of widows does not appear to be an envied one, as indicated by Muhia (1999, 8). Similar views are seen in Isaiah 54:4 RSV where widowhood

denotes suffering. On the contrary, Proverbs 15:25 says, “The Lord destroys the house of the proud, but protects the property of the widows.” This is a clarification of the great care and concern God has for this group of women. Mungahu (1991, 4) highlights a similar concept when he states that the same curse would befall Kenyans because of unfair cultural and social structures which make it difficult for women to defend their property rights.

The stigmatization of widows is condemned in the Old Testament and widows are given responsibilities. God directed Elijah to a widow’s house at Zarephath (1 Kgs 17: 9). Although she is described as poor, she welcomed the prophet who in return provided her with spiritual and material needs and also healed her son. People should visit widows often and defend their interests as well. When a creditor wanted to take the widow’s two sons as slaves, Elisha intervened as evidenced in 2 Kings 4:1 and provided her with oil which she sold and paid the debt.

According to Jeremiah, blessings and curses for God’s people are based on their treatment of widows and orphans (Jer. 7:6, 15:8, 18:21). Blessings will come when they stop exploiting widows and orphans. Anguish and terror will be leashed on them by God by increasing the number of widows among them. The writer of the book of Lamentations likens the desolate Jerusalem to a widow broken with grief (Lam.1:1), the orphaned and the fatherless. The image created here is that of desperation and a chain of problems; a similar case is experienced by Mutomo widows today. They mourn their spouses for life alone with their children. Elijah cautioned people on the protection of the orphans and widows. Although the Israelites ignored, wronged and oppressed them, they were supposed to offer security to them. Contrary to this, “princes plotted conspiracies just as lions stalk their prey. They devour innocent people... increasing the number of widows” (Ezk. 22:7-25RSV). It

shows the great care God has for this group of women. The African community should extend the same concern to these women.

Widows do not only reflect a negative image in the Old Testament but were also used by God to do commendable things and their image used as an encouragement to the Hebrews. Isaiah tells them not to fear for they will no longer live in shame; neither will their sorrows of 'widowhood' and shame be remembered. Ezekiel instructs priests to marry a virgin or a widow of a priest as in Ezekiel 44:22. God instructed the widow of Zarephath to give Elijah a cup water (1 Kgs 17:10); people should not stigmatize them for even God gave them responsibilities. God protects the property of widows as indicated in Proverbs 15:25. Ruth portrays another positive image of a widow. This young Moabite widow rose above the loneliness, financial deprivation and social insecurity through an opportunity given to her by her mother-in-law, Naomi. In return she served her mother-in-law, clung to her, confided and obeyed her as pointed out by Muhia (1999, 8).

These incidences show widows' dedication, active dynamic purity as in the case of Anna (Luke, 2:36-38) and God can use them to meet his purposes in life. This is why they should be taken with due respect as God is their advocate.

God knew and still knows the dedication inherent in most widows; their need to feel useful and accepted in the society was as real as it is today (Muhia 1999, 10). Basing it on the Old Testament text, people should then appreciate that widowhood is simply a phase in womanhood. The community should help them lead a fruitful and a happy life as widows. If not stigmatized, they will overcome widowhood comfortably (Ifeoma 2008, 1)



## **New Testament View on Widows**

As a continuation of the Old Testament, the New Testament widow continues to be ridiculed, exploited and neglected. She is not accorded same respect and dignity given to her counterpart widower. The Bible forms the base and informs African Christians on how widows should be treated, as pointed out by Oduyoye and Kanyoro (2002, 164). The Bible has similarly addressed the issue of the African widow who continues to suffer, yet man and woman were made in God's image as in Genesis 1:26. Her social and legal possessions continue to be abused. The New Testament gives a picture of their oppression on one side and God's love and protection on the other. The scribes are condemned for cheating widows and saying long prayers (Mark 12:40). African widows are similarly suffering in the hands of fellow Christians but their hope rests in God.

Widows are denied justice as expressed in Luke 18:1-5; they are also looked upon as a poor lot as indicated in Luke 21:2-4, Mark 12:42-44. "The poor woman came and dropped in two pennies." To show His love and protection for widows, Jesus recognized her by saying that she had contributed more than the rest of them. Though poor, widows had special commitment to God's work; Anna worked diligently as a prophetess in the temple as portrayed in Luke 2: 36. The African widow should take heart and work for God, God will recognize, console and provide for her.

The low social esteem accorded to widows and the denial of justice made Jesus empower them throughout His mission. He commended the widow of Zarephath in Luke 4: 25 for accommodating Elijah. He assisted the widow of Nain, whose son had died by resurrecting him (Luke. 7:12). In His teachings, Jesus used the example of the widow who had been denied justice by a judge. This is enough proof that even

in Jesus' time widows were still mishandled. The same issue resurfaces in the early Hellenistic church; the widows who spoke Greek were discriminated against by those who spoke Hebrew as highlighted in Acts 6:1. The early church took care of widows as portrayed in Acts 6; 1-7. Similarly the church should show active and serious obedience to God through sincere care and support for the widows as highlighted by Guthrie (1984, 100). True religion, according to James, can be demonstrated through assisting widows. This is because widowhood exacerbates poverty in families (Mungahu 1991, 4). Care for the widows was one of the main ministries in the early church as indicated by Bromiley (1988, 1061). Stephen, one of the seven deacons, was in charge of widows of the Jews of the Diaspora. Widows are portrayed as being appreciative and sincere worshipers, in solidarity; they mourned the death of Tabitha who always assisted them. They wept showing Peter the tunics and other garments which Dorcas made while she was with them (Acts 9:39-41). Through their act, Peter called Tabitha back to life. Today, widows should not be taken for granted in our churches. They offer sincere prayers and have a major role to play in expanding and strengthening the church.

On the pastoral care of widows, Paul gave detailed guidelines to believers. The church should take care of them (1 Tim. 5:3). Widows may be forced into a new conjugal relationship with a male relative or be forbidden to re-marry (Kirwen 1979, 30). Paul advises them to marry or choose to remain unmarried like him if they are able (1 Cor.7:8). Levirate marriages for widows took place as is evidenced in Luke 20:28. Timothy instructs the church on how to treat and care for the widows. It should care for older widows with no family assistance. He encourages younger widows to remarry (1 Tim. 5:5-9, 9-15). The early church gave the contemporary church a model for the systematic on-going care of widows (Thomas 1996, 2215). Relatives should

help the widows, as expressed in 1Tim. 16ff. This will enable the church to assist those who are truly alone and in need. Widows should be encouraged to live on; to develop self pride and confidence as indicated by Ifeoma (2008, 24). They should not wear their widowhood. African widows should be encouraged as their problems are partially or not at all addressed by the community.

### Widows' Socio-Economic Challenges

Today millions of the worlds' widows, of all ages, endure extreme poverty, ostracism, violence, homelessness, ill-health and discrimination in laws and custom. They are denied inheritance and land rights. They experience widow abuse and other degrading, mourning and burial rites which threaten their lives. This is justified by reliance on culture and traditions. The church world over and respective communities have not addressed widows' problems, both socially and economically, which necessitates the following discussion.

#### **Social Challenges**

In the African context, the term prostitute is not as specific as in the west as explained by Kanyoro (2002, 42); it refers to a wide range of women who are not under a patriarchy. Gaidzwana (1995, 36) is of the view that widows are weighed down by widowhood and maternal responsibilities. In the absence of the husband, the same woman is viewed as a prostitute and blamed for promiscuity. Sadly, she is not expected to socialize nor have male friends. Suspicion is raised high if she is seen with casual friends, her late husband's friends or even her farm hand! People distance themselves from her. If a husband dies in mysterious circumstances, women are blamed for the death. They are stigmatized and looked upon as social misfits. Ridicule and disrespect come their way.

The society forgets that the widow does not become a lesser being after her husband's death. The African Christian churches should modify their culture and acquire biblical knowledge on widows. This will help in changing the attitude towards widows, both by the church and the community. They will henceforth sympathize, accept, incorporate and empathize with them. They will make them feel part and parcel of their traditional community, family and their respective church fraternity.

Some widows are very wealthy as they inherit businesses and land. Re-marrying means the loss of all that property to the family of the new husband. It is also rare for a widow to remarry, especially if she has sons. Contrary to African traditions, Kenyan laws today entitle women to inherit an estate (TAG 1994, 163). They obtain identity cards and thus can inherit and run the estate of the deceased husband. This aspect scares prospective husbands away for fear of being dominated. This leaves the widow lonelier with no one to propose to her, yet she may be interested in re-marriage. Christian widows can stand firm and remarry if they want. However, a problem arises if they have inherited their husband's property. The deceased husband's immediate family would object if she takes the man's property to another family, especially an outsider. This leaves the widow at crossroads of traditions and Christianity, but neither addresses her problems fully. The widows not only suffer obvious loneliness and insecurity but also face humiliation as most men would like to solicit sex from them, especially from younger widows.

### **Economic Challenges**

Economic situations have led to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village. People hate associating with these women who have low income and at times none at all. They are rarely invited to social functions, especially fundraisers. This makes them helplessly regret the deaths of their husbands. Society should remember

that everyone who is married will lose his or her mate, as expressed by Diehm (2008, 5).

The other class of widows is of those who have inherited property. Their problem is from both relatives and male friends trying to exploit them. They are stigmatized by being referred to as 'rich widows'. This makes them feel threatened and insecure in the absence of the husband's protection. Advice given by Bequaert (1977, 42) to the society is that a widow needs time for the process of grief to run its course. She needs to be allowed to recognize her grief as a normal human condition, not an occasion for repression and guilt. The reaction of family friends and relatives can be both troubling and comforting; they should allow these people to assist them but make sure they make all the decisions concerning finances on their own. Poor women, particularly in predominantly agricultural societies, are actually carrying extremely heavy loads in economic activities, as indicated by Bradan (1982, 5). To perceive the woman in isolation with her household, as if childcare is her exclusive activity is not only unrealistic, but also unfair to her and the child. Widows are weighed down by widowhood and maternal responsibilities in Mutomo. The situation needs further investigation

### **Problems Related to Parenting**

This has become a major problem for the widows in Mutomo village. They have been left alone by relatives and the wider society to not only feed their families but also give moral advice. The same women are too busy providing for their families. The most affected parents are the younger ones with adolescents. They do not have enough time to guide their children and worse, if they have boys who need a man figure for role modeling at this age. Bequaert (1977, 50) indicates that many children from widowed families have joined bad company and drug taking; unruly behavior is

rampant among them. Girls from the same families are dropping out of school and either opt for an early marriage or have unwanted pregnancies.

Heading of households single-handedly has added extra burdens on the already stressed and stigmatized women. Children are not spared the humiliation as expressed by Emecheta (1994, 99). They are at times referred to as orphans in circumstances which do not warrant this identification. This has worked negatively for them, thus affecting their social life while interacting with others. This affects the younger ones in their academic performance.

### **The Community's Regard for Women**

Married couples have shared important parts of their lives; they may have acquired a home and other material property in addition to the children they have borne and raised together, as indicated by Messinger (1995, 75). These widows experience problems as they try to defend their family property from brothers-in-law and other men. This is mainly because the society is gender biased and all women are given a low deal. The most affected group is of those widows whose husbands were wealthy. The regard people have for women is that behind every successful woman there has to be a man. Once a husband dies, other men rush to that home not to assist in running businesses but scramble for the wealth to enrich themselves. Resisting their advances has become a task to these widows. They are branded as proud, harsh and non co-operative, which makes them live in perpetual fear and insecurity. Society does not have much regard for women and does not trust them with manning of the deceased husbands' estates. This regard has been a double tragedy for widows as they are also women. If the community shows them respect and trust, they will feel encouraged to continue with the challenges of widowhood.

## Summary of Literature

Traditional African communities had defined ways of taking care of widows. Most communities re-united their widows in a levirate marriage as indicated by Kirwen (1979, 30, 62). Care was given to widows and orphans especially in the extended family context. As indicated by Mugambi (1988, 51), kinship in Africa is like a closely woven network that stretches in every direction including marriage. The care itself was a kind of slavery as the widow lost her freedom (Wachege 2003, 30). To overcome stigmatization for these women, Africans should do some modifications on marriage regulations. The woman should be taken care of by a male relative without cohabiting with him due to health risks in this AIDS pandemic era. Widows should also be allowed to choose a suitor of their own choice and remarry if they wish. This should be from within or outside the family without cultural restrictions, as indicated by Ruyema (1983, 100). This remarriage would act as an insurance policy covering both physical and metaphysical dimensions of human life.

In the scriptures, God continues to show concern for widows by giving guidelines on compassion, care and protection of widows as described in Deuteronomy 25: 4ff and in Ruth 1: 11ff. Stigmatization of widows is condemned and punishment prescribed for the offenders in Proverbs 15:25. Widows are recognized for their dedication and inherent nature to feel useful and accepted in the society.

The modern church should borrow a leaf from Paul and pastoral care for widows. It should take care of the widows (1 Tim. 5:3). This would alleviate some financial and spiritual problems. Paul advises widows to marry any man of their choice but not if they are not Christians (1 Cor. 7:31). This is a sure way of providing widows with security and removal of the stigma placed on widows. They should be encouraged by the church.

The community, which is also part of the church, should embrace this idea. This is because a modern widow is subjected, to modernity as a Christian, and traditions as an African which has seen to her stigmatization. Contemporary widows face challenges in dealing with socio-economic issues as well as parenting single-handedly, as highlighted in the study. They should be assisted by both the government and the church on how to start income generating projects. Lessons on resource management should be taught to the ones who have inherited property. They should also be given lessons on good parenting to help them raise their children well in the absence of their husband.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES**

The researcher sought to answer the research questions using qualitative approach which takes place in a natural setting and is supplemented by insights (Creswell 2003, 22). Multiple methods could also be used to get information from respondents. Grounded theory design was preferred as the study aimed at developing a theory, grounded in raw data collected from the field rather than test a hypothesis (Creswell 2003, 65). The assumption underlying the grounded theory approach is that the concept pertaining to a given phenomenon has not yet been identified (Starcher 2003, 70).

The interview method was preferred as face-to-face contact provides rich data. It offers the opportunity to establish rapport with the interviewees and helps to explore and understand complex issues as indicated by Senkran, (2003, 25). Many ideas ordinarily difficult to articulate can also be brought to the surface and discussed during such interviews. Different groups of widows were interviewed according to their age in this study. Since interviews are impersonal, respondents gave information from their point of view without influence. In interviews, questions that are sensitive can be asked without hurting the respondents' feelings. Statements made by the respondents are clarified there and then.

Interviews allow a researcher to investigate and prompt things that cannot be observed (Jerry 2004, 71). We can also probe a participant's thoughts, prejudices, perceptions, views, feelings and perspectives. The account of situations

which they may have lived or thought through can also be elicited through this method. Interviews can be structured or unstructured and are done orally and personally. This method is therefore appropriate to the study on the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village.

Mugenda and Mugenda (1999, 197) state that grounded theory research design provides a list of factors that are responsible for its reference, "By using the qualitative method, researchers are able to collect data and explain phenomena more deeply and exhaustively". The researcher will be able to collect data and raise questions well considering the views of the participants, using this theory in the study. Creswell indicates that:

Grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical scheme of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation. This situation is one in which individuals interact, take actions or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon. To study how people act and react to this phenomenon, the researcher collects primarily interview data, makes multiple visits to the field, develops and interrelates categories of information and writes theoretical propositions or hypothesis or presents a visual picture of a theory. This theory was first used in 1967 by two sociologists; Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss and later elaborated on through subsequent books. (1998, 56)

Creswell (1998, 15) defines qualitative research as "an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem." The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants and conducts the study in a natural setting. As regards to qualitative studies, their main concern is to study the complex social behavior. They are used in a wide variety of research and do not depend on particular disciplinary perspective. Due to its many advantages the researcher used it in this study.

### Entry

This is the process through which initial contact between the researcher and the source of data is established. The respondents need to be approached in order to notify them of the intended study, the purpose and the person who will be conducting the study. This process serves to prepare the respondents before hand to receive the researcher (Mann 1995, 145).

The researcher did not anticipate a lot of problems while interacting with the respondents in a bid to get necessary information. The researcher had been with them in social functions such as parties, church and at a family level. The researcher introduced the intended research topic and made a request for co-operation while visiting these women, both in their homes and their newly formed group of a widows' association. For a researcher to gain access to a site, school or church group, the person responsible for the site must be involved (Seidman 1998, 37). The researcher visited the respondents in their natural settings individually and at their own appropriate time and place.

### Population

The research participants were twelve widows drawn from Mutomo village of Gatundu district in Kenya. They shared a common cultural background as they were all Kikuyu, either born or married in the village from other parts of the country. They were to represent the population of thirty widows from all age categories; young, middle and the old. Four participants were picked from each age category as representatives in the study.

While some participants had lost their husbands many years ago, others had lost theirs recently. Some participants were materially stable having inherited from

their husbands; others were poor as they either had nothing to inherit. According to them, their husbands' relatives had taken it from them.

### Sampling Techniques

For the purposes of this study, the researcher used purposive sampling in selecting the interviewees. In qualitative research, one purposely targets a group of people believed to be reliable for the study (Tromp and Kombo 2006). In this study, twelve widows drawn from Mutomo village of Gatundu District were interviewed. They shared a common cultural background as they were all Kikuyu.

The researcher approached and identified respondents in person and requested them to participate in the research (Tromp and Kombo 2006, 104). Respondents in this study were categorized according to their age: Young (18-39 years), middle age (35-49 years) and old (50-80 years). The researcher interviewed each group independently in focus groups by using an interview guide. The study used a sample size of twelve respondents who represented the population under survey as recommended by Bailey (1978, 34). The researcher decided to limit the research participants to twelve because grounded theorists assign to the term sampling a meaning radically different from that of various quantitative researchers (Starcher 2003, 65). According to Creswell (2003, 66) the investigator choose participants based on ability to contribute to an evolving theory.

According to Starcher (2003, 65), given its vigorous and time consuming data analysis procedures, a grounded theory rarely involves a large number of participants. The number of participants was not of primary importance because representatives of concepts, not of persons were crucial. Submissions gathered out of twelve respondents would be a representative of possible views of the thirty widows in

Mutomo village. The number of participants was also small because of the depth and volume of information obtained in an interview (Vyhmeister 2001, 136). The researcher participated in the discussion by asking questions and guiding the discussion (Chandran 2004, 107). The discussion was audio-taped and the researcher took notes.

### Instrument

The researcher used a twelve unstructured open-ended interview guide as an instrument in this study. Interview was favored as a chief method of collecting data as it allows the researcher to investigate and prompt things that cannot be observed (Jerry 2004, 71). The instrument was addressed to twelve widows from Mutomo village. Open questions were preferred as they seek opinions to invite the interviewees to express views and attitudes or to encourage prediction or sheer speculation, for instance on the future needs and new development. The extreme of open –ended questioning contrasts with the tightly closed question asking for a specific piece of information (Jerry 2004, 78).

The focus of the qualitative research, on the perspective of participants and the meaning they attach to their experiences, also favored the choice of interview (Creswell 1998, 56). The guide contained an outline of issues and topics to be covered. It was not however used rigidly; it was used to ensure that all the important issues were covered. Once a question had been asked, the researcher used the participants' responses as a guide to further probing, thereby obtaining more in-depth responses. Rather than use the interview guide as a separate approach, it was used to supplement the unstructured or informal conversational interviews (Patton 1990, 282).

The twelve item open ended instrument was designed to help the respondent enjoy freedom of expressing personal opinion. The first four items address research question one, item six and nine address research question two while items four, five, seven, eight, ten, eleven and twelve assist in answering research question three.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected using unstructured, open-ended interviews with the participants (Creswell 2003, 189). The mode of the interview was “face-to-face; one on one in-person”. This enabled the participants to provide historical information as well as allow the researcher to have command over the line of questioning (Cresswell 2003, 186). This strategy helped the researcher to get useful information as to why and how widows are stigmatized in the village. Interviews allowed the researcher to interview and probe things which could not be observed (Jerry 2004, 11). Twelve open-ended questions helped the researcher to get the necessary details.

The twelve respondents were briefed on the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality before the study was carried out. Weiss indicates that:

There can be appeal in a request for an interview. People may welcome the chance to make their situation known or just have a break in the day. People marooned at home tend to welcome interviewers. So do people with time on their hands, like the hospitalized or the retired. So may people in crisis, such as people going through marital separation, although this is chancy and may change for the same person from day to day but most people, given adequate assurance about the legitimacy of the interview, and the confidentiality of what they say are willing to talk. (Weiss 1994, 33)

The process of data collection took place for two months to ensure adequate relevant information to the study was gathered.

An interview guide (see appendix) as an instrument to collect data from the field was used. The interview guide was administered by the researcher to the participants; they were allowed to use their own words in answering the questions.

The researcher made use of a note book, a pen and a cassette recorder in the data collection process. Interviews were audio-taped with the consent of the respondents (Vyhmeister 2001, 136). The researcher preferred this method as it “allows the production of verbatim transcript for subsequent analysis” (Starcher 2003, 73). Notes were taken down where the respondents were not comfortable with recording. Weiss (1994, 53) says that sometimes respondents, before sharing a confidence, request for the tape recorder to be put off. Each interview session took thirty five minutes.

The researcher ensured notes were written as this helped her to keep focused and restrained the mind from wandering (Weiss 1994, 55). The researcher wrote down the data so that “if the recording equipment fails” (Creswell 2003, 191) no data would be lost. Respondents were informed of their involvement in the interview process three weeks in advance to prepare them psychologically.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

In data analysis, the researcher used what other researchers have recommended. First, the researcher transcribed the interviews and typed the field notes. This was the first stage in organizing and preparing the data for analysis (Creswell, 2003). The researcher perused the data collected and identified what was relevant to the research questions and objectives. (Tromp and Kombo, 2006, 119). The researcher then wrote notes on the margin of the typed notes as she got the general thoughts about the data (Creswell 2003, 191).

To analyze and interpret data, coding method procedure was used. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999 2003) define data analysis in qualitative research as “the process of putting in order the structure and meaning to the mass of information collected.” Since this was a grounded theory study, the researcher generated categories of

information known as open-coding. During open-coding, the researcher developed themes, which were the major topics or major sub-topics that come up for discussion (Tromp and Kombo 2006, 119). The data collected in this study was analyzed through open, axial and selective coding. Creswell indicates that:

In open coding, the researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Within each category the investigator finds several properties or subcategories and looks for data to dimensionalize, or show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of, the property. In axial coding, the investigator assembles the data in new ways after open coding. This is presented using a coding paradigm or logic diagram in which the researcher identifies a central phenomenon (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon), explores casual conditions (i.e., categories of conditions that influence the phenomenon). Specifies strategies (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), identifies the contexts and the intervening conditions (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies) for this phenomenon. In selective coding, the researcher identifies a “story line” and writes a story that integrates the categories in the axial coding model. In this phase, conditional propositions (or hypotheses) are typically presented. (Cresswell 1998, 56-57)

After sorting out the data, the researcher expected to get conclusions and remedies on how widows should be assisted by family members, church and the government. The researcher focused upon the data to understand reasons for the stigmatization of widows. Information from respondents was compared to see if there were similarities. Similar replies were categorized together. Writing notes or transcribing tapes through listening to conversation assisted the researcher in the analytical stage of becoming familiar with the data. All the data collected was used to understand reasons for the stigmatization of widows in the village. The study would be used to sensitize the church, government officials and the whole society in their attitude towards widows. It would educate them on why widows deserve fair treatment and assistance to ease their lives.

Through data procedure, analysis and the interpretations cited above this qualitative research gathered useful information. The coding method applied in the



study enabled the researcher to know the main factors leading to the stigmatization of widows in the village.

### Validation and Verification Strategies

The study was validated to determine whether the findings were accurate from the view points of both the researcher and the participants. Validation consisted of sharing the results of data collected and analysis with the research respondents to see whether they agreed with the researcher's findings. The researcher used the following strategies to ensure that the findings are accurate and credible:

1. First the researcher triangulated the different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for the themes (Creswell 2003, 196). Data was collected through multiple sources such as interviews and note taking and tape recording.
2. The researcher used member checking to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings (Creswell 2003, 196). The checking was done with the twelve widows. They were given the final report and asked whether it gave an accurate account.
3. The researcher established an audit trail. The notes, the transcribed data and the tapes were preserved. This will enable anyone who may want to verify the findings to follow what was done (Starcher 2003).

The respondents who verified the results confirmed the findings as a true record of the information they gave about their tribulations to the researcher in the study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS**

#### Purpose

This chapter contains the findings and analysis of data produced in this study. The researcher sought to investigate the factors that led to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village of Gatundu district in Kenya. Data was collected from twelve respondents across all ages. For the sake of clarity, the researcher grouped them into three main categories. Young widows ranged from eighteen to thirty- four years, the mid-age from thirty-five to forty-nine years while the old age were fifty to eighty years. Information on the stigmatization of widows was gathered through verbal interview. The sample represented the whole group. Through the interview the researcher had the opportunity to probe things which could not be observed and tape recorded respondents' speeches for reference while writing the report. Data was collected from the field, transcribed, analyzed and interpreted.

#### Data Analysis

The three research questions formulated at the beginning of the study greatly assisted the researcher in realizing the goal of the study. The interview guide sought to help answer the questions.

Twelve questions were used to interview the twelve respondents. They gave their own experiences as widows and freely cited factors which led to their stigmatization.

Data analysis was done by using the three main coding processes as mentioned in the previous chapter.

1. Open coding - breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data.

2. Axial coding - Doing intense analysis around one category at a time, in terms of paradigm items. This resulted to cumulative knowledge about the relationship between that category and other sub- categories.

3. Selective coding - All categories were unified around a core category and categories that needed further explanations were filled in with descriptive details.

4. Participants are code named as in the table below:

Table 1: Widows code names

Age (years)		
18-34	Young Widow 1	YW 1
	Young widow 2	YW 2
	Young widow 3	YW 3
	Young widow 4	YW 4
35-49	Middle widow 1	MW 1
	Middle	MW 2

	widow 2	
	Middle widow 3	MW 3
	Middle widow 4	MW 4
50-80	Old widow 1	OW 1
	Old widow 2	OW 2
	Old widow 3	OW 3
	Old widow 4	OW 4

### Factors Contributing to the Stigmatization of Widows

**R.Q.1** What are some of the factors contributing to stigmatization of widows?

To answer this question the following issues were considered:

#### **Kikuyu Customs on Widows and Remarriage**

In response to this question, ten respondents blamed the change of Kikuyu traditions for their stigmatization. They revealed that unlike before, when there was a defined support system for widows, no one minds about them today. Formerly, widows were given an option of levirate marriage; they were protected and provided for by their husbands' male relatives. The study noted that this has changed with the onset of Christianity. YW 2 and YW 3 cited cases when they went without food and

lacked fees for their children and no relative assisted. The study showed that today, widows do not become part of their late husband's family by the virtue of his death. The study revealed that widows are mainly ex-communicated by their in-laws. MW 1 and MW 3 narrated their experiences of being isolated by their late husbands' kin on various occasions.

YW 2 had this to say, "on the same day my husband was buried, my in-laws told me to pack and leave as I was not their visitor, as my host had died." She said that she refused to go and henceforth she was ex-communicated from family functions. No one cares about her and the children. YW 3 said her husband's kin told her "never think that you will ever get any land or property in this place, look for opportunities elsewhere." She also said they used to abuse her, calling her a prostitute.

To stress this point, MW 2 cited cases when relatives seemed not to care, she said "imagine when my children were sent home for lack of school fees, my brothers in-law, who have a lot of property never assisted; I was helped by friends." Another old woman had a similar experience, that the daughter never joined high school as she could not support her and no relative stepped in.

It was noted that widows are not accorded the love and respect that used to be enjoyed in the traditional set-up. Two respondents, YW 2 and OW 4, described their ordeal with family and the society. OW 2 said, she was working in her farm when she was confronted by a brother and a sister in-law younger than her late husband. The girl harshly shouted at her "we have come to warn you, you better stop moving with people's husbands or we will flush you out of this family, you are a disgrace to us." On trying to convince them that she was innocent, she was assaulted by the brother, while the girl watched. MW 1 told of a humiliating experience she underwent in a family gathering. She said, "I noted my contributions were not appreciated". This

woman, as she expressed it, felt like she did not fully belong to the family. OW 2 shared an experience of how she was publicly humiliated while trying to contribute in a farmers' meeting, "I was still talking when a man disrupted me and I had not even made my point".

This woman said that she was ignored because she was a poor widow. Both YW 2 and YW 4 related similar cases of disrespect and the humiliation they undergo from the opposite sex. YW 2 said, "I could not believe it when a married man visited my house and sexually harassed me, I had to scream to scare him off".

Participants associated their problems to a relaxed traditional security system. MW 2 cited a case when a neighbor confronted her over a boundary issue. She resolved the problem alone without any assistance from the in-laws, which is un-African.

### **Widows' Social Status**

Young and mid-life widows would like to re-marry but the data revealed that there are problems which hinder them from such a re-union. The majority cited discouragement from their immediate exploitative family members. Both their relatives and the in-laws discourage them from such a re-union. The children of the deceased man are supposed to perpetuate his name and should not be taken away from his clan. Eight widows cited the stigma pegged on them, while YW 1 and YW 3 attributed their failure to get another husband to having had sons in the first marriage. YW 2 said "men fear adopting boys." MW 3 said she had been engaged, but when the fiancé learnt that she had inherited a lot of property, he withdrew from the relationship. The study showed that men do not propose to wealthy women for fear of being dominated financially. It also revealed another form of dominance which scares intending males from proposing to respondents, their academic achievements.

MW 1 attributed her lack of a suitor to her level of education, she has a degree in education and the intending men have lower grades. She said, “many men, especially the wealthy ones, come to me with intentions of having extra marital sex but not for a marriage relationship.” She expressed her bitterness by saying “these men misunderstand us; they forget that some widows have their own money and all they need is a caring husband.”

Old informants registered their disinterest in remarriage. OW 3 said that she was more settled in her initial family and would not like to begin a new one. Three respondents from this group revealed that they had grown up children who are married and would not appreciate their re-marriage. OW 2 said “some of my children have their own families, those who are single would not follow me and I would not like to shift homes alone.” Other participants from this group declared no interest in re-marriage.

YW 1, YW 3, YW 4, MW 3 and MW 4 narrated how they stood firm as Christians and wanted to re-marry. This, as they explained, was objected to by their immediate husbands’ family relatives. They were both threatened with losing their husband’s property according to the Kikuyu culture; so they chose to remain single.

YW 1, YW 2, YW 4, MW 2 and MW 3, could not be allowed to take the children away as these belong to their deceased father. Participants agreed that the widow lives in a dilemma as regards re-marriage. While Christian religion encourages them to re-marry, tradition does not. These respondents are at the crossroads on this issue, they are torn between two worlds, Kikuyu traditions and Christianity. They do not know whether to follow Paul’s pastoral advice in 1 Corinthians 7:39 and remarry or to follow the culture and retain the family name.

### **Negative Attitudes towards Widows**

The community has little respect for the respondents. YW 2 and YW 3 said they were not impressed when they were referred to as widows, in circumstances which did not warrant their identification. MW 4 in the middle age category narrated her experience with her married mates, when she tried to contribute in an informal discussion on husbands; she was humiliated by being asked, “You mean you still remember how men behave in the bedroom?” OW 2 from the old category cited an incident when people talked about widows in her presence as if she did not exist, a man commented that “some widows suffer as they are lazy; they seek public sympathy by talking about their dead spouses.”

From the data, it was evident that women in general are referred to as the weaker sex. Ten participants agreed it is even worse for widows; no wonder the Kikuyu have a saying that a woman’s word should not be taken seriously. YW 1, YW 2 and YW 4 said that widows are respected according to their age. The study revealed that once a husband dies leaving a young widow, other men do not respect her as a person; they view her as an object for cheap sex. MW 1, MW 2 and MW 4 produced similar responses; they are also approached by men interested in a sexual relationship. One woman expressed her displeasure about this when she said “I only wish such men could be more sensible, do they think we are objects?” The four participants from the old age category confirmed this as true. OW 3 and OW 4 narrated their encounters with men during their young and old age respectively since the death of their spouses. OW 4 confessed that she had lost count of the number of men who have ever approached her for sex; she said “it is a painful experience.”

It was evident that these men, both married and unmarried have similar objectives; to exploit the participants both sexually and materially. Information



gathered revealed that younger men accord older widows respect; they do not approach them for sex as they are their children's age. Age, as it was explained by OW 1 and OW 3, does not totally exempt them from this form of humiliation as they are approached by men their age or older ones for a sexual relationship.

Data analysis from the twelve respondents indicated that younger widows are given less respect in the village. They are approached for sex by men of all walks of life and social status. OW 1, MW 3 and YW 2 said it was evident that they always carry the sorrows of widowhood and bad feelings with them, as the society sits back and watches them suffer without offering any assistance.

### **Challenges in Social Interaction**

The researcher gathered information on how the respondents interact socially and the challenges they encounter. It was revealed that respondents in all age categories had similar challenges, but each category cited problems unique to the group. Information gathered was that all respondents are not expected either to socialize freely or to have casual male friends. Two participants from each category narrated their own experiences with society when seen with male friends or their late husbands' friends. While YW 3 said rumor had it that her late husband's friend intended to marry her, MW 4 was said to be out to destroy the couple's relationship; this was malicious gossip. OW 2 was discussed and ridiculed for retaining her farmhand for a long time. Data showed that out of these relationships, the respondents were looked at suspiciously, stigmatized as loose and isolated by friends and relatives. MW 4 said, "If death is reversible I would call my spouse back to help me retain a positive public image."

As the interview continued, OW 2, MW 1, MW 2 and YW 4 highlighted similar problems. They suffered from widowhood and material responsibilities. The

researcher discovered that the respondents do not freely interact with members of society for they fear being frustrated. YW 3 had this to say “Nowadays, I choose the occasions to attend and the people to interact with, I fear being humiliated.”

Information gathered supported these respondents; they exempt themselves from social functions as they do not feel accepted.

### **Encounter with the In-laws**

Four informants from each age category narrated their experience with the in-laws. Most respondents said that they are not close to them. MW 2 while sharing her experience cried and said “if my mother-in-law stayed for a week without her husband, she would understand what I go through in the absence of my husband, she would treat me fairly.” She had been stigmatized as a murderer and a witch, while being blamed for her husband’s death. It was evident from the data that at least one participant from each category had been branded as greedy or uncooperative and isolated by relatives and friends after refusing to share the property she inherited. Respondents said they have a poor social relationship with people who do not appreciate them; this has affected their social life, they feel lonely.

### **Financial Problems**

The informants mentioned their economic status as a source of their stigma. Information gathered showed that informants are stigmatized either because they are poor or they have a lot of wealth. The poor ones suffer from loneliness as people hate associating with them. YW 4 continued to say, “who would like to be associated with someone who is not influenced by fashion?” As she explained, most of her friends deserted her after the death of her husband who left no property behind. OW 3 supported the YW 4 as she said “poor widows are not invited to social functions like

fund-raising, not even by close friends”. This respondent confessed that she is only invited to assist in manual work like cleaning the compound and other domestic chores. In her own words she said “I am never invited for fund-raising as they know I have nothing to offer.”

The interview exposed another form of stigma, wealth. OW 1 and OW 3 explained that those wealthy widows are the employed; those own businesses or have inherited property. The researcher noted that widows are referred to as the poor, the rich or the widow. This makes them feel insecure and uncomfortable. One respondent from each age category condemned this social humiliation and the stigma pegged on them because of their financial status. OW 4 said, “The wealthy widows live in perpetual fear of being attacked by thugs because of this stigma.” She told of the many times her house has been vandalized since February 2008. The same woman said, “people value our property more than us” as she explained it, wealthy widows are always invited to fund-raiser occasions in the village just to exploit them.

### **Widows Dilemma in Parenting**

Informants from the three age categories cited problems they encounter as single parents. All the young and middle aged respondents shared similar problems. Middle aged respondents share similar challenges with the old participants, as they have teenagers who would like to be identified with a father; some are at their rebellious stage.

Analysis showed that parenting for all categories of widows has added to their sorrows in widowhood. YW 1 who has young children cited financial problems in educating, feeding and clothing the family. She said that some people isolate her as they say she is lazy which is not true. Informants from the mid and old categories cited lack of control over adolescents. About the youth, MW 3 said “I do not fully

understand my children, they expect a lot of attention from me; yet I am the only bread-winner". These respondents talked of their tight schedule looking for their families' provision; at the same time, they are expected to counsel and guide their children. OW 2 said, "When my son dropped out of school, ran away from home and joined bad company, I was blamed by some people for not instilling discipline in him." She said that some people disassociated with her, which is hurtful.

All categories of respondents have scarce time to be with their families. MW 1 said that she normally sends her children for counseling sessions during school holidays in camps organized by churches. OW 1, OW 2, and MW4 cited indiscipline among their sons. No male relative steps in to console, counsel or discipline the respondent's children. On few occasions widows are commended if their children are disciplined. However, they are mainly blamed and deserted by friend if their children are undisciplined and in bad company. OW 3 cited the problems she faced while bringing up her two sons. She said, "My sons never obeyed or listened to my advice, they joined bad company and dropped out of school," she regretted her husband's death. Despite all these problems, the community continues to look at widows as non-performers in parenting.

### God's Care for Widows

**R.Q.2** What is the widows' biblical knowledge on widowhood?

To get answers for this question, the researcher interviewed the respondents. She wanted to assess, their biblical knowledge on this issue both from the Old and New Testaments. The study wanted to know whether the respondents could apply Bible knowledge to their situation.

As the Bible covers other topics concerning human existence, it has likewise covered extensively the issue of widows and widowhood. Information gathered from the participants showed that they were well-versed in the topic of widows from the Bible as they could quote relevant verses. OW 2 quoted Exodus 22:23 to show God's love for widows. In her own words she explained how God listens to their cries. "Our final word rests with God; He always cares and always provides for us". YW 3 referred to Proverbs 15:25 which states that God protects widows. In this context, the respondents challenged their local church, which was not keeping up with these teachings. The researcher gathered from the respondents that Old Testament widows were loved by God as they were active and dynamic. MW 1, MW 3 and OW 2 mentioned the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 9:20. She was given the responsibility of feeding Elijah. Three participants registered their dissatisfaction with the church which does not recognize them as they are equally responsible, yet they are not given key duties in the church.

When the researcher asked the young respondents whether they had a role model in the Old Testament, the four mentioned Ruth. YW 3 narrated how the young Moabite rose above the loneliness, financial deprivation and social insecurity through an opportunity given to her by her mother-in-law Naomi. All the young respondents registered interest in such a good relationship with their in-laws. YW 4 reported that her mother-in-law showed love and was kind to her. YW 2 cited cases of hostility as she recalled some rude remarks aimed at her by her mother-in-law. "Never call me mum; don't you have your own mother?" OW 2 and MW 1 indicated that widows should be treated well as referred to in Exodus 22: 22-24. The texts revealed that exploitation of widows and orphans is condemned and punishment prescribed. The

twelve respondents condemned the stigma pegged on them as the data revealed it was not in God's initial plan.

### **Position of Widows in the New Testament**

The study wanted to know what the participants understood about the position of widows in the New Testament. The researcher asked the respondents what they knew about it. YW 2 explained that the New Testament widow's social and legal position did not differ from that of the Old Testament. OW 3 compared Mutomo widows to biblical widows as they are still stigmatized. In support of her, MW 2 and MW 4 referred to Luke 18:1-5 where widows were denied justice and Luke 21:2-4 where they were degraded and looked at as poor.

Just like the New Testament widows, the respondents are denied justice, as MW 3 narrated the story of the widow and a judge in Luke 18: 1-5. The study revealed that the respondents knew about Paul's pastoral care to widows. YW 4 referred to Acts 6:1-7 and in her own words, she described how the early church appointed deacons to take care of Hellenist widows. The information gathered showed that respondents from all the three age categories longed for such care by the church; a virtue they deserve.

### **Assistance Offered to Widows**

**R.Q.3** What roles are the family, church and government playing in intervention of widows' lives?

#### **Family**

After the demise of their spouses, the respondents said that the only hope for solace was in their families and close friends. Family is the most basic unit in the society. In the African setting, family includes members of the extended family and

the in-laws. The relatives were supposed to care, protect and provide for widows and orphans. The study revealed that relatives are doing contrary to this in this village. YW 4 accused families of interfering with their private affairs and denying them respect; a young participant said, "One's movement is monitored from morning till evening, one has no freedom." She was referring to her late husband's family members who are always interested in knowing her destinations. OW 2 and OW 3 supported her with OW 2 narrating an incident when a young boy was stationed near her house to know who her visitors were; the boy revealed his mission by innocently asking her, "Auntie, what are the names of those men who were in your house? Granny wants to know." As she said, this granny was interested in spreading malicious gossip about her.

The study revealed the role of a Kikuyu family to widows; it was to incorporate love, protect and provide for the bereaved family. The study showed that these roles have been abandoned. A participant in her early thirties commented and said "to be appreciated, you must have property to share with these relatives". Even then, they do not fully accept widows as they still subject them to stigmatization due to the current change in attitude on widows.

Family members are supposed to be supportive to the widow's family. Widows should be given financial and material aid by the in-laws in case of need. They should also be given access to the family land to till in order to provide enough food for their families. In a case where a widow has many children and is not able to provide for them all, the well-to-do relatives can adopt some of their families to cater for their needs. The widow should be visited by both her relatives and the in-laws to alleviate her loneliness. This would enable them to carry on with widowhood without regret. Parents-in-law should show the widows the same love as they would if the

husband lived. Mothers-in-law should be kind and should have no prejudice against the widow. They should look at them as their own daughters and not as foreigners. Sisters and brothers-in-law should step into the shoes of their bereaved brother and give the widow unconditional love and assistance. The family should protect the widow from outsiders who would like to exploit them. They should be accepted and a sense of belonging instilled in them through love and kindness.

Female relatives should be close to the bereaved women to console, give company and share different ideas with them. This will make widows feel accepted in the family as well as society. Parents-in law should be the source of inspiration to the widows. Not only should they assist them materially they should also pray with them and counsel them. The immediate family members should participate in the deceased man's family issues such as dowry negotiations and other celebrations, they should also mourn with them. Widows' families should give unconditional love and assistance and stop looking at them with hatred and suspicion as they are not in that state by choice.

### **Government Intervention**

It was revealed that through the sub-chief's office, some of the widows' children benefited from the community development funds. Research revealed that the allocation of this money is not a guarantee as the government does not have a specific desk for widows at the district headquarters. MW 1 and MW 4 talked of the pain it took before they were allocated these funds for their children's school fees. Their children competed with other needy cases in the locality without regard being taken of the bereaved children' special needs.



The researcher noted that respondents needed governments' attention. MW 3 described why widows do not take their cases forward; they fear defeat as most of them cannot hire lawyers. Data revealed crucial information as to why the government should hire lawyers for them; YW 3 and MW 2 cited cases where justice was denied for lack of legal advice.

The study established that there is need for the government to start an education program for widows. Four respondents proposed this, as YW 3 said, "if the government educates us, we will know our rights as most of us are ignorant." OW 1, MW 3 and YW 1 proposed a counseling session from government officials to help them recover from the trauma. It was highlighted by the respondents that these officials had never visited the village in a bid to do so. Government agents should have an office in the village where widows' problems should be addressed. Counseling sessions should be done.

The study indicated that there are no non-governmental organizations dealing with widows in the locality. However, MW 1 and OW 3 who have children in secondary schools highlighted an issue of concern. Information gathered from them showed that there are people who go to secondary schools in the name of non-governmental organizations. They promise the bereaved children help in the form of school fees and other material help. Reports stated that they that they take photographs and details of the orphans; they then disappear never to honor their promises. The two respondents expressed their wish to have the government intervene and get genuine non-governmental organizations to assist their children.

All the participants agreed that the government should have a desk for women to cater for their needs and those of their children. Some money should be allocated to needy widows to start income-generating projects. Qualified bereaved children

should be given job opportunities to lessen the burden to their mothers. However, it was highlighted that the government has been assisting in the bereaved children's' higher education through the Community Development Fund (C.D.F.). OW 1 suggested that the government should start micro-finance banks in the area. This will help widows borrow money to finance their small businesses. The district agriculture officers should educate people on how to start projects like bee-keeping, poultry farming and zero-grazing. They should be enriched with skills on how to improve their farms through terracing and introduce them to intensive farming to enable them be self-sufficient. The researcher recommends that the government offer material assistance in the support of the widows to ease their lives.

### **The Church Role**

The dominant religion in the village is Christianity. All the respondents were Christians. The research sought to know the measures the church had taken to address the widows' problems.

OW 1 said, "The church only participated in the burial preparations and officiated in the subsequent burial ceremonies of our spouses". She continued to say that after this, no material help or counseling was offered to the families of the deceased. MW 4 said her church used to hold seminars for women; unfortunately they were for women in general. Women of all ages and status, married, divorced, never married and widows were addressed together. OW 4 from the same church contributed by saying, "most topics discussed in these seminars did not benefit us, imagine a topic on how to handle husbands being discussed in our presence", she rhetorically asked, "What do I gain from such meetings?" MW 2, MW 3, YW 1, YW 2 and YW 3 expressed similar sentiments while one of them said "most topics discussed were not practical to us, as they only triggered bad feelings and self pity."

OW 3 wished the church could support them fully. She said a few of them from one church had formed a widows association. The researcher learnt that this was an independent body but not church sponsored. The members assisted each other spiritually and materially using the funds they contributed. The study revealed the passive role the church has taken concerning widows and their families. The majority of them wished that the church could step in and make their association stronger. The chairlady said that this would enable them to accommodate widows from other denominations, as they all have some common problems. However, MW 1 and OW 3 said that during Christmas and Easter, the church provided needy widows with food and clothing. Widows also appreciated one priest who regularly attended their widows' meeting. He consoled them through preaching and also prays for their families. YW 1, MW 3 and OW 2 appreciated the moral support and prayers given to them by a section of church members. However the researcher noted that these widows need more material and moral support by the church.

### Summary of the Findings

The researcher's findings show that all the respondents had experienced stigmatization; either by relatives or the community members by the time of the study.

Reasons for stigmatization ranged from the breaking down of the traditional care system for widows, greedy relatives and the advent of modernity and Christianity. Widows who would like to re-marry are blocked by in-laws who declare that their sons' children and property will not be taken to another home. Intending suitors hate adopting children especially boys. Others lack husbands due to their economic status; either too rich or too poor.

All respondents were found to be having problems in social interactions as they are not fully accepted and are viewed with suspicion. The in-laws have added to the widows' problems by not protecting, providing or even identifying with them. These women encounter humiliation as they are addressed as widows in circumstances which do not warrant this introduction. They also face challenges in parenting as their children lack a male figure that would assist in disciplining, guidance and counseling.

The study showed the great care that God has for widows both in the Old and New Testament. They were loved by God as they were active and dynamic.

On intervention for these women, the family, church and government have a role to play, however the research revealed that these sectors have not fully impacted on the widows' lives as the little effect made by each sector is not enough. According to the study, the plight of widows in this village should be addressed as they need material and spiritual help.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of the study was to investigate the plight of widows in Mutomo village. It sought to elicit factors which leads to their stigmatization and suggested the remedies.

Findings of the study will benefit relatives of the bereaved women, local society, the church and the government. Widows were divided into three age categories; the young, the middle aged and the old who supplied information. To help the researcher realize the goals of the study, three research questions were formulated. These were:

1. What are some of the factors contributing to the stigmatization of widows?
2. What is the widows' biblical knowledge on widowhood?
3. How do the family, local church and government agents intervene in the widows' lives?

#### Major Findings and Implications

Information through the research questions revealed that widows in Mutomo village are stigmatized. Contributing factors were found to be changes of culture due to Christianity and modernity. Widows are no longer assisted by relatives and neither are they joined in levirate marriages. They are viewed suspiciously and isolated as the society does not fully appreciate them; they experience humiliation. Their in-laws are not close to them, as they are mainly interested in the property left behind by the

deceased. The financial status of widows has also seen to their stigmatization. They are referred to as either the poor or rich widows and this has a negative impact on them. A high level of education among these widows was found to be a source of stigma; men do not propose to them for fear of being dominated. Age is the other contributing factor as young widows are accorded less respect as compared to the older ones. They are viewed as prostitutes and accused of promiscuity.

The study also sought to discover the extent of the widows' Biblical knowledge and interpretations on widowhood. Information gathered showed that God has great concern and cared for widows. God loved and listened to widows' cries as referred to in Exodus 22:23. He protected them in all ways as highlighted by a respondent who referred to Proverbs 15:25. It was also noted that God gave widows responsibilities as in the case of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 9:20. The study noted that God is impartial as expressed in Deuteronomy 10:18. Two of the widows interviewed said that they get encouragement from the Psalmist who says that God is the father to the fatherless and defender of widows.

The study further revealed that care for widows in most traditional African communities was demonstrated in leviratic marriages and guidelines provided for it. A male relative of the dead man usually took care of the family by providing and offering security. The study pointed out that widows were helped and cared for by the community.

The researcher noted that Jesus recognized widows; He sympathized and empathized with them. He showed concern for them by resurrecting the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7: 12). It was also highlighted that Jesus commended them as evidenced in Luke 4:25 when He praised the widow of Zarephath for being responsible. The study showed that pastoral care should be given to widows by the

church as it happened in the early church where appointed deacons took care of Hellenist widows (Acts 6: 1-7). The exploitation of widows and orphans is condemned, as this was not in God's initial plan.

The study gathered information on how the family, the church and the local government should intervene in the widows' lives. To ease their problems relatives should care, protect and provide for the family of the deceased man. Widows and orphans should be accorded due respect and encouragement. Widows, especially the young ones, should be encouraged to re-marry if they wish. Participants aired their views on how the government can intervene in their lives. Through the government local offices, they should benefit more from the district development fund allocated to each location. The governments should have a desk for widows and orphans at the district headquarters to cater for their needs. Respondents highlighted the need for the government to hire a lawyer for them for legal advice and also to provide them with the education on financial management. It was revealed that widows need education programs to advise them on how to cope with widowhood. They should also be given free counseling to reduce their stress and trauma. Recognized non-governmental organizations should be encouraged by the government to assist the needy widows in the locality.

The study also established how the church should intervene in widows' lives through pastoral care, counseling, providing for them materially and being close to them always for spiritual guidance.

### Conclusion

From these findings it is evident that some people have failed somewhere. The families of the deceased men have failed in ensuring that widows are made comfortable in their matrimonial homes. It is sad to note that instead of helping these

women overcome the grief of losing their husbands, relatives continue stressing them in other ways. The community which should give widows solace is no better, it dwells on outdated culture and denies widows freedom to remarry and also stigmatizes them. The government which should treat people equally is not much concerned about them. The church which should give them pastoral care and unconditional love has abandoned them. This means that all people should share the blame of what has befallen widows in the village, stigmatization.

Widowhood is a topic no one wants to discuss. But the truth is that man and woman were not created on the same day nor do they die together. Women tend to have a longer life expectancy than men. In the event of a husband's death, the widow should be accepted and assisted in all social systems. She should not be stigmatized. The Bible was written not just to be studied but also to change people's lives. Mutomo residents, relatives of the bereaved women and the government agents should apply God's word as they relate with widows, lest they earn themselves a curse from God.

The researcher hopes that the study will help to alleviate widows' problems by removing the stigma attached to them. It will make people remember that everyone who is married will lose a mate. This simple truth should then be apparent while upholding the status of the widows in Mutomo village as action is urgently needed. Justice delayed is justice denied and a church, community and a government that holds itself aloof from people seeking justice to escape from marginalization poses danger in the locality.

The church should be credible as it links theological analysis to cultural heritage. It should marry the biblical and African culture to get a balanced way of



treating the widows. Stigmatized widows should hear God's voice through the church. Empty prayers will not work; the church has to be instrumental in assisting them.

If the findings of this research are well implemented by the sectors concerned, widows will be accepted, incorporated, sympathized with and empathized with. If the strategies succeed, the aim of the research will be met and stigmatization of widows in the village will be a thing of the past.

### Recommendations

The researcher recommends the following remedial measures in order to alleviate problems of widowhood:

Relatives should give widows freedom to run their own affairs without interference. They should respect and incorporate them fully in the family to cultivate a sense of belonging in them. They should be assisted materially and financially in case of need. Able relatives can adopt the orphans of the needy widows or step in by providing for their needs. Family members can organize a fundraiser and contribute funds which would be used to start an income generating project for the widow. This will make her self-reliant.

As for the wealthy widows, relatives should not interfere with their property; instead they should let them run their own affairs. To ease their psychological and social needs, these widows should marry men of their choice if they wish. This is because, like many other traditional practices which are dying out with the onset of Christianity and modernity, levirate marriage would not be the option for these women. Relatives should protect the widows from outsiders who would like to exploit them.

The church should help these women materially, through giving the needy ones food and clothing. It should organize seminars and advise them on how to overcome the trauma. Seminars for both widows and orphans should be organized separately. Every church should hire professional counselors occasionally to address widows as a group or at an individual level depending on ones' problems. The church should not only be theoretical on the remarriage of young widows; it should encourage them to re-marry if they are willing.

The church should encourage able Christians to offer money and material help to the needy widows and orphans. This should be demonstrated by church leaders organizing fund-raiser occasions towards the welfare of these families. This money should be used to start income generating projects for the widows to be self-reliant. The same money could be used to pay fees for needy orphans and to cater for their other material needs. Unemployed orphans could also benefit from such funds; they should be encouraged to start income generating projects.

In addition, the church should also invite various genuine Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) into the area; they will fund self-help projects for widows to sustain themselves. These organizations should start and fund technical courses like carpentry and dress-making. After graduating from these institutions, these orphans and widows will get employment and be self-reliant. Short courses like baking, weaving and making yoghurt and detergents locally should be offered to these widows. Sales from the products will help them meet their daily needs and be financially independent.

The government should also address the issue of widows. The Ministry of Gender should have a desk to address the issue of widows. They should be allocated the same amount in the annual budget as allocated to other groups like the youth. If

Mutomo widows get their share of this national fund, they would improve their standards. The money should be given to the needy widows as some are doing well financially. The government should introduce micro finance banks and encourage them to join so as to stop depending on their selfish relatives.

District agriculture officers should have sessions with the locals where they will be advised on both farming and the rearing of animals. With this knowledge, widows will subsidize their income with farm produce and be fully independent.

The root cause of the plight of widows is the Kikuyu attitude towards women. The woman is viewed as the weaker sex and has to depend on the husband who is the main decision maker in the family. The society views women as people who need a man's direction and advice in all ways. Being a kikuyu and a widow at the same time is a double tragedy. The way forward is for society to be educated through the pulpit and civic education on the equality of man and woman. Women should be respected, as with the onset of modernity .They have proved capable and responsible in various sectors like banks, scientific laboratories and in business. Social respect and recognition for women in general will also promote respect for widows which will bring an end to their stigmatization. They will be accepted just like their counterpart widowers.

They should be encouraged to write and publish their own work to create public awareness and to promote their well being. They should not live and die in silence as has been the case.

Leading women groups like the Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Kenya Network of Women with AIDS (KENWA) and *Maendeleo ya Wanawake* (Women Development) should be empowered by the government in the area. Through these groups widows will be taught their rights, helped to advance in business sectors

and the sick ones encouraged by these groups consecutively. All women can offer alternative vision to widows and incorporate them fully in social sectors to remove the stigma pegged on them.

#### Recommendation for Further Studies

The study shows that there are many factors that contribute to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo, a small village in Gatundu District.

In view of the above recommendations, there is need to expand the study to widows in other localities; mainly in the rural areas where some cultural values are still upheld. Another study could be done to include widows from other localities in Kenya.

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## APPENDIX

### Interview Guide

#### Introduction

I am a student at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) pursuing a Master's degree in Christian Education. I am carrying out a research on factors contributing to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village.

Your genuine response and cooperation will be of great assistance for the successful completion of the study. Confidentiality is assured on the information you provide and that your name and names of those you mention will not be published.

The interview will take about 45 minutes. Kindly answer the following questions.

- 1) How does culture contribute to the stigmatization of widows in Mutomo village?
- 2) What are your views on remarriage?
- 3) What is the community's regard for widows?
- 4) How are widows stigmatized in Mutomo village?
- 5) How does God show concern for widows in the Bible?
- 6) What social problems do you encounter as widows?
- 7) What economic challenges do you face as a widow?
- 8) What problems do you encounter in parenting in the absence of your spouse?
- 9) What do you know about God's concern for widows from the Bible texts?



- 10) How do the family of the deceased and the local church assist widows and orphans?
- 11) How do government agents and Non-governmental organizations assist widows in the area?
- 12) Suggest recommendations on how the family, church and the government should intervene into the lives of the widowed families.

## VITA

### Personal Information

Name: Esther Waithira Mwaura  
Birth: 1961  
Address: 602-00232 Ruiru  
Mobile No. 0722645527  
E-mail: wa\_mwaura@yahoo.com  
Nationality: Kenyan  
Marital status: Married

### Education Background

1998-2002 Kenyatta University  
Bachelor of Education (Arts)  
1983-1985 Kagumo College  
Diploma in Education  
1980-1981 Mugoiri Girls High school  
K.A.C.E  
1975-1979 St. Anne's Secondary School, Lioki  
E.A.C.E  
1968-1975 Kirangari Primary school  
C.P.E

### Profession

1985-1986 Teacher, Matuga Girls High School  
1986-1987 Gichuru High School  
1987-1994 Muhoho High School  
1994-present Kahugu-ini High School  
Church Ministry Evangelist, Thiririka Parish, Gatundu Presbytery  
Church Elder, Mutomo Church, Thiririka Parish