

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**WIDOWHOOD RITES IN THE AKUAPEM TRADITIONAL SOCIETY**

**A CASE STUDY FROM AKUAPEM-SOUTH MUNICIPALITY**



**PATRICK KOFI ANTWI**

**2015**

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**A THESIS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION,  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCE. SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF  
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THE AWARD OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE OF THE  
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**APRIL, 2015**

## DECLARATION

### Candidate's Declaration

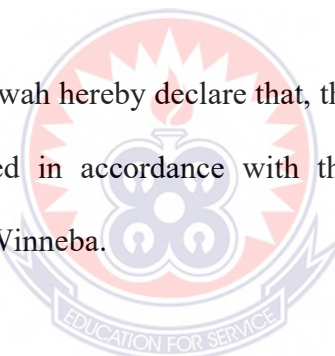
I, Patrick Kofi Antwi do hereby declare that, except quotations and references to other people's work which have been duly cited and acknowledged, this thesis has neither in whole nor in any part been presented elsewhere for any degree.

Candidate's Signature .....

Date: .....

### Supervisor's Declaration

I, Professor R. H. K. Darkwah hereby declare that, the preparation and presentation of this thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines laid down by the University of Education, Winneba.



Supervisor's Signature.....

Date: .....

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to Group Captain M. L. K. Obeng-Ntim, my dear uncle who put me on a pedestal to pursue further academic studies, Mr. M. Opoku-Boateng, a former Regional Manager of Catholic Educational Unit, who helped me in diverse ways to make my teaching career fruitful, my dear parents, Catherine Akosua Ameyaa and Patrick Kissi Antwi of blessed memory, my wife, Florence Anakwah and my children-Daniel Agyei, Sarah Obenewaa Agyei, Felicity Konadu-Antwi and Patrick Antwi Ntim.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“Rome was not built in a day” so goes a saying. This work was a daunting task which took me more than the required time frame to complete it. Anything that has a beginning has an end indeed. To bring this work to completion, I would first of all express my thanks to the Almighty God for giving me strength to go through sleepless nights and His travel mercies for undertaking arduous and risky trip of moving from one village to another and from one town to another interviewing participants.

My special thanks go to my supervisor, Professor R. H. K. Darkwah whose rich suggestions and guidance pointed to the direction of the destination of the work. Also I thank him immensely for his patience in painstakingly, reading through the draft.

Many thanks also go to my course mates, Akosua Baah, Philip Darko and Evelyn Yirbekyaa whose words of encouragement galvanized me into action in moments of relaxation and inertia. Also, I express appreciation to Mr. Listowel Afriyie whose assistance contributed greatly to the analysis of interview data collected. I express my gratitude to my daughter, Felicity Konadu-Antwi who typed the interview scripts meticulously for me.

Finally, I express my sincere gratitude to the authors and authorities whose work served as guidance from which I quoted to buttress my findings and ideas expressed. However, any omissions, inaccuracies and errors that may be found in this work are due to human fallibility and I bear responsibility for them.

Patrick Kofi Antwi

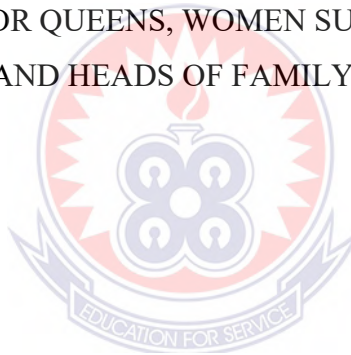
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## MEANING OF ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

<b><i>CEDAW</i></b>	:	Convention on the Elimination of all form of Discrimination Against Women
<b><i>CHRAJ</i></b>	:	Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice
<b><i>DOVVSU</i></b>	:	Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit
<b><i>G. C. E. 'O' LEVEL</i></b>	:	General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level
<b><i>J.S.S</i></b>	:	Junior Secondary School
<b><i>M. D.C.C</i></b>	:	Musama Disco Christo Church
<b><i>M.S.L.C</i></b>	:	Middle School Leaving Certificate
<b><i>NCCE</i></b>	:	National Commission on Civic Education
<b><i>P.N.D.C</i></b>	:	Provisional National Defence Council
<b><i>W.A.S.S.C.E</i></b>	:	West African Senior School Certificate Examination



## ABSTRACT

Widowhood cultural practices in Africa in general and Ghana in particular has been subjected to criticisms the world over to the extent of describing it as dehumanizing, torturous, cruel and outmoded, and for that matter calling for its abolishing. This study aimed at finding out the nature and the effects of widowhood rites as practised among selected Akan communities in the Akuapem-South municipality on the widows who go through those rites. The sub-themes that guided the study were to find out the origins of widowhood rites, discover some aspects of widowhood which apparently were described as dehumanizing, cruel and humiliating, find out what the widows felt about the experiences they went through and explain why widows who apparently went through harsh and severe form of the rites failed to report their ordeal, in spite of legislation prohibiting such rites. Case study research design was used in the study under qualitative research and methods to come out with the research findings. Thirty (30) participants were selected using snowballing sampling method under purposive sampling. The respondents included fifteen (15) widow, five (5) queens, five (5) women who had once supervised a widow to go through the rites and five (5) heads of family. Beside the widows, the other participants were selected on the grounds that they were the custodians of culture of the various communities selected for the study. The data collection instrument used was conversational interview. The study revealed that widowhood rites had no mythical origins, but it is part of the culture of the people based on their traditional religious beliefs. Again, the study revealed that no aspect of the rites could be described as dehumanizing, cruel or humiliating as the widows did not complain of what they went through and for that matter there is no need to report any ordeal to any authority. In conclusion, the study revealed that widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem-South municipality is really a good emotional and psychological support instrument for widows to cope with their grief on the loss of the husband. It is recommended that the various reasons for going through the widowhood rites must be explain to them before or after every stage of a rite.

## **Definition/Explanation of Akan/Twi terms**

**Akan:** An ethnic group who trace their ancestry from a common source and speak any of the Twi languages (*Asante, Akuapem, Akyem, Fante, Kwawu and Nzema*).

**Ampesi:**(A meal) Cooked plantain, cocoyam, cassava or yam eaten with a stew before noon or in the afternoon. When eaten in the evening as supper among the Akans, it denotes one has undergone fasting.

**Anoka:**This refers to one of the stages of widowhood rites where the widow's mouth is touched with assorted food substances in their raw state, symbolically to break her seeming fasting period resulting from the mourning of her late husband.

**Asamando:**A word in Twi which refers to the spiritual world where the souls of dead persons go and reside before they re-incarnate.

**Dufokye da nsu mu sen ara a erentumi nnan odenkyem:** (Akan proverb), If a dead stem of a tree floats in a river for ages, it will never turn into a crocodile.

**Eka ani a na aka hwene:**(Akan proverb) When an object enters the eye water oozes from the nose in reaction.

**Eka nnanti a na aka eto:**(Akan proverb) When the heel is smeared with anything, the buttock also gets smeared with the same thing on squatting.

**Fufu:** (A meal) Pounded plantain or cocoyam mixed with pounded cassava which is eaten with light soup, groundnut or palm soup. It is the main meal of the Akan eaten as supper.

**Mmusu or mmusuo:** A word in Twi which refers to a forbidden act or a situation one finds oneself which carries retributive effect spiritually. It is synonymous with taboo. In this context, it refers to the 'dirt' the widow contacts as a result of the

death of the husband which has contagious effect on those she comes into contact with, unless she is cleansed.

***Obea no agu ne kunu ho fi:*** The woman has contaminated the soul of her husband.

***Obea no aku ne kunu sunsum:*** The woman has killed the spirit of her husband.

***Obea ton ntorewa na onnton atuduru:*** (Akan proverb) A woman only sells garden eggs but not gun powder.

***Okra or kra:*** A word in Twi language which refers to the soul, the undying part of man given by the Creator according the Akan concept of man (Opoku, K. A. 1978).

***Okunafo:*** Unisex word in Twi language used to refer to either a widow a widower before he/she re-marries.

***M'anidaso asa:*** My hopes are dashed.

***Sensempu:*** Refers to the *kuna suman* (widow's amulet) which the widow wears or carries in the left hand. It is believed to have the potency to drive away *sasa* (harmful spirits). It is made of a bundle comprising *prekese* (a kind of seeded fruit), *abrohyee* (burnt corn), *emi, nunum* (fine scented herbs) bound with *edoa* (raffia) (Sackey, 2000).

***Se obea to tu a etwere obarima dan mu:*** (Akan proverb) When a woman buys a gun, it is kept in a man's room.

***Sunsum:*** A word in Twi language used to refer to the spirit; an intangible element which accounts for the character, disposition and intelligence of a person; a part of man which is open to attack by witchcraft and cause illness (Opoku, K. A.).

***Trokosi:*** A word in Ewe language used to refer to a traditional practice where a young virgin girl is sent to a shrine to serve a number of years in order to pay for the wrong of her parents.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Background to the Study

Widowhood is a universal experience of losing a spouse which is accompanied by rites socially and culturally determined. The meaning and significance of the rites differ from one society to another. There is underlying reason of providing social, psychological and emotional support for the surviving and grief-stricken spouse.

In the traditional Ghanaian societies various importance are assigned for the observance of widowhood rites; however, the kinds of rites the widows are made to go through seem to defeat those important reasons. Some of the rites apparently do not only infringe on the rights of the widows but are also injurious to their health. For example, in some communities, it is said that widows are made to drink the water used to wash the deceased husband, (Tei Ahontu, 2007: 2). Some are confined in rooms for days and weeks and are made to use stones as pillows (Kondor, 1993: 117). Many reports of this nature have been made in our traditional communities, making widowhood rites appear to be outrageous practice. For example, Nana Oye Lithur, a Human Rights activist reported in the Daily Graphic on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 that it is customary in the Upper East of Ghana to find a widow standing while two women throw hot and cold water at her one after another. If the widow is scalded it means she was unfaithful to her husband before he died.

Perhaps, the people of Upper East hold similar belief of the Akan that a wife being unfaithful to a husband is a serious offence affecting him spiritually with negative consequences, and therefore, on the least suspicion of unfaithfulness, the widow must prove her innocence. If such is the belief of the people and the widow was fully aware

of the negative result of her unfaithful action on her husband, then being scalded by the hot water is a deterring punishment for endorsing the late husband's omen. If the modern court system could inadvertently impose wrongful prison sentences on accused persons to various terms of imprisonment, the emotional and psychological pain and sometimes, the physical pain of hard labour the accused go through may be more than the physical pain the widow who is scalded will go through. Physical pain, discomfort or any emotional pain an accused or offender goes through as a result of punishment is a means of social control, creating the awareness to the offender that pain inflicted on another person deliberately is equally painful when it is deliberately inflicted on us by other person and that, we should all learn to live in harmony as social beings. This aspect of the widowhood rites is a way of proving to the public that the widow had nothing physical or spiritual concerning the death of the late husband. This is a kind of trial by ordeal.

Trial by ordeal had been a spiritual mechanism by which accused persons in most African traditional societies who had committed various offences in secrecy are pronounced guilty or not. Since the practice has no scientific basis for explanation, it is frowned upon by some people. It is also frowned upon by some religious groups by saying that, according to their religious belief, it is devilish. Others condemn the practice that it infringes on the rights of the individual who go through it. No matter how one looks at trial by ordeal in its numerous forms, it exists in the African societies, and it has been used to prove many accused persons guilty of serious secret crimes, because, the accused later confessed their various crimes and offences. In the same way, persons who have been suspects and have been wrongfully accused of serious crimes have been pronounced innocent by the same spiritual mechanism of trial by ordeal, thereby saving them from public condemnation and ignominy.

Trial by ordeal, which is used spiritually to expose secret crimes committed by individuals in our traditional societies, is a mechanism for social control to make the people behave properly in society. When used by charlatans, trial by ordeal in its various forms has been a sort of duress through which a suspect is made to admit to a crime he/she has not committed. By admitting to the commission of the crime or offence, the charlatan is seen in the eyes of the society or the community as a powerful clairvoyant, medicine man and a traditional priest who evokes and exudes fear and reverence, because he/she can uncover the unknown and in that status, cheats and extort money from unsuspected clients, and even to the extent sometimes causing physical injuries to their innocent suspects. So far as some charlatans exist in the practice of trial by ordeal does not mean that it is not effective. It is, and still exists in African societies, to the benefit of people of all social class who believe in its practice.

Even though widowhood rites are supposed to be undergone equally by a man or a woman who loses a spouse, widows go through more elaborate rites than widowers in terms of duration and severity of the rites. For example, women are compelled to be in mourning cloth, either black or white for a year, depending on a particular society, and forbidden to have sex with any man within the year of mourning. Should she be seen within the year of mourning without the mourning clothes eye-brows are raised with a suspicion that she is in a sexual relationship with another man. In this situation, she is perceived to be a lascivious woman who could not control her sexual desire in a critical moment. She is then seen by some members of the community as an unfaithful woman who might have engaged in marital infidelity when the husband was alive. From this perspective, she is shamefully regarded as a flirt and a 'harlot', to the extent of suspecting her to have a hand in the husband's death. This suspicion is based on the



belief that adultery committed by a wife is evil and a taboo in the Akan society and that contaminates the 'okra'(soul) and the 'sunsum'(spirit) of the man, to the extent of attracting bad omen such as bad luck, accidents, ill-health and death. It is therefore, common to hear comments passed by some members of the community over a woman caught in adultery as saying: "Obea no agu ne kunu kra ho fi" and "Obea no aku ne kunu sunsum", meaning, "The woman has contaminated the soul of her husband", "The woman has killed the spirit of her husband", respectively. This point is buttressed by Opoku:

"the sunsum, is the part of man which is open to attack by witchcraft. The Akan recognize the sunsum as the spiritual cause of ill-health, quiet apart from the physiological causes of which they also recognize, hence the closeness between religion and the practice of medicine. Not only can a weak sunsum be attacked by witchcraft and cause illness, but it can also be overpowered by a person's evil thoughts, causing the person to become ill." (Opoku, 1978:97)

It is important to note that any negative or evil thought and action against a close associate or neighbour have the potential to affect his/her sunsum. Opoku A. K (1978) corroborates this belief by saying, "...confessions usually precede traditional treatment of diseases, because they are regarded as a way of unburdening the encumbered sunsum". Furthermore, quoting Rattray's informant on this subject he continues:

"you know that everyone has a 'sunsum' that may get hurt or knocked about or become sick, and so make the body ill. Very often, although there may be other causes, e.g. witchcraft, ill-health is caused by the evil and hate that another has in his head against you. Again,

you too may have hatred in your head against another, because of something that person has done to you, and that, too causes your sunsum to fret and become sick. Our forebears knew this to be the cause, and so they ordained a time once, every year, when every man and woman, free man or slave, should have freedom to speak out just what was in their head, to tell their neighbours just what they thought about them, and of their actions, and not only their neighbours, but also the king and the chief. When a man has spoken thus he will feel his sunsum cool and quieted, and the sunsum of the other person against whom he has spoken will be quieted also.”

Parallel to this belief and practice, it is significant to note that in the Christian Holy Bible, the Christians are enjoined to speak of their sin to one another (James 5:16; 1 John 1:19; Romans 10:10). Before the advent of Christianity, our forebears were perceived to be pagans or atheists and therefore had no religion and the idea of God. If our forebear who had not then read the Christian Holy Bible were confessing their sins committed against their fellow human beings at certain period of the year as the Christians are enjoined to do, it is an indication that what our forebears were doing was right in the sight of God, and the proponents and adherents of Christianity who condemned African religious practice and culture were bias.

In the case of a widower if he is seen to be in sexual relationship with a woman within the mourning period, eye-brows are not raised. This points to the fact that in the Ghanaian traditional societies, women bear the brunt of widowhood rites as against their male counterparts due to the patriarchal nature of the society (Olapegba and Chovwen, 2006). Citing Goody (1962); Nukunya (1969); Ahiekpor (1975) and

Kirwen (1979), Sackey observed in 2001 that ‘in many African cultures while widowers go through the required ritual processes over a short period, and with little public attention, widows customarily go through a protracted period of isolation in the midst of invectives and conflicts’ (page 60).

In this contemporary era, socio-cultural practices such as female circumcision, “trokosi” and widowhood rites in Africa and Ghana in particular have suffered much condemnation from human rights and gender equality advocates such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) with the support of the United Nations. As a result, most countries have used constitutional instrument to prohibit obnoxious cultural practices such as some aspects of widowhood rites which are injurious and infringe on the rights of the citizens. For example, Article 26 clause 2 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states that, “All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental well-being of a person are prohibited”.

In spite of world-wide criticism against cruel widowhood rites and constitutional provision prohibiting them, they are still prevalent in some Ghanaian traditional societies. The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) Annual Report of 2005, states “Inhuman treatment of women and girls manifesting in female genital mutilation, ‘trokosi’ (ritual servitude) forced marriages (which take the form of childhood betrothal, exchange of sisters, early marriage of young girls and marriage by inheritance), trial by ordeal of women suspected of witchcraft, cruel widowhood rites and other forms of dehumanizing practices perpetrated in the name of culture “are all vestiges of inhumanity and constitute a scourge on the conscience of the nation” (page 83). CHRAJ further reports that:

“In spite of legislation and public education to eradicate these inhuman practices, our regional and district offices continue to report that they take place quiet frequently, and that their efforts are often met with suspicion or hostility from those communities practicing them. Unfortunately, victims are reluctant; often out of fear or ignorance to report such cases.”

To buttress the above report, many cases of cruel widowhood cultural practices have been reported in some Ghanaian newspapers. For instance, on 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2006 the Ghanaian Times reported a case with the heading “Widows hit streets to protest against bad cultural practices”. Again, the Daily Graphic of 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2008 reported of three “royal widows” who had been confined in a room for nine years in the name of widowhood cultural practices.

Agitated by the plight of these widows, a female Human Rights activist and a legal practitioner, Nana Oye Lithur condemned dehumanizing widowhood cultural practices in general in the Daily Graphic of 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 (page 11) under the heading, “What laws regulate widowhood rites in Ghana?” She ended her article by posing a pertinent question, “Why do we as people consistently fail to implement the laws we pass to protect the vulnerable in our society?” The stark reality is that there is legislation prohibiting some cruel aspects of widowhood rites, therefore why are they being practised in our traditional societies?

Recently, I interviewed a known widow who informed me that she went through widowhood rites by wearing white clothes and a white scarf for a year, and then took a ritual bath after discarding the clothes to end the widowhood rites. She added that she did not go through any severe form of ritual such as using grind stone as a pillow or swearing an oath to prove her innocence as to having a hand in the death of the

husband. (Kondor 117; Olapegba and Chovwen 873). Her reason was that her mother-in-law stood against any form of the rites that she felt would make her (the widow) uncomfortable. Against this background, a question is raised, how can widowhood rites be made less severe or be modified to become more socially and emotionally supportive of the grief-stricken widow to enable her resume her normal social life?

Some traditional communities seem to hold the view that, if a widow does not go through the rites a bad omen or the spirit of the deceased husband would haunt her. Some also believe that in the name of culture and tradition the rites must be carried out because they are heritage from our forebears. Do these beliefs account for the reason why in spite of legislation victims do not report their ordeal or complain publicly?

Are there some widows who out of certain circumstances did not undergo the practice? If so what omen befell such women?

It is these pertinent questions and many more that prompted the researcher to research into the widowhood cultural practices in the Akan traditional community in the Akuapem South Municipality so that the findings of the research will help to modify the practice or enforce the law prohibiting the injurious and dehumanizing aspects of the rites.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Widowhood cultural practice in Ghana seems to be deeply stuck in strong traditional beliefs such that it has become mandatory for spouses who lose their marriage partners to go through certain elaborate rites willy-nilly. The focus of these rites,

however have been placed on women which to a large extent affect their physical, emotional and psychological well-being.

In the wake of globalization, African widowhood practices, of which Ghana is no exception, have suffered world-wide criticisms and condemnations through the lens of human rights. In this connection, Olapegba and Chovwen (2006) acknowledge that “widowhood in Africa can be described as a dehumanizing, humiliating and almost barbaric experience, (page 243). This revelation has attracted strong voices world-wide calling for the prohibition of those widowhood rites. Most countries have, used constitutional instrument to abolish these rites. Ghana is one of such countries.

In spite of legislation prohibiting some aspects of widowhood rites considered as dehumanizing and cruel in Ghana, they continue to be perpetrated with impunity in some communities. What strong beliefs with strong emotional attachment have made it difficult to prohibit those widowhood rites which affect the widows? CHRAJ has revealed that, its district and regional offices continue to report cases involving perpetration of obnoxious cultural practices against women. However, victims of these cases out of fear or ignorance do not report their experiences (CHRAJ Report 2006 page 583). No specific reason is assigned for the fear or ignorance that compels victims not to report their ordeal to the appropriate quarters for the perpetrators to be brought to book. Is it because the widows want to be treated like this? The above considerations have agitated the researcher to conduct this study on widowhood cultural practices among an Akan sub-ethnic group, the Akuapem, in the Akuapem-South Municipality.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to find out the nature and the effects of widowhood cultural practices (rites) on the victims who go through them as practised among selected Akan communities in the Akuapem- South Municipality.

### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The main objectives of the study are to:

1. Find the myths, reasons, beliefs and significance which surround widowhood cultural practice making it a relevant social and emotional support instrument for widows to cope with the loss of their husbands.
2. Discover some aspects of widowhood rites which apparently are described as dehumanizing and cruel.
3. Find out how the widows feel about the experiences they go through.
4. Explain why widows who apparently go through harsh or severe form of the rites fail to report or publicize their ordeal, in spite of legislation prohibiting such rites.

### **1.5 Research Questions**

The researcher made use of the following questions in the study to come out with his findings. The questions were administered to widows, queens, heads of families or clans and selected older women in the communities who have seen widows through the rites before.

1. What are the myths, beliefs and significance surrounding widowhood rites?
2. What are the aspects of widowhood rites described as severe and dehumanizing?
3. How do widows feel about the experiences they go through?

4. What reasons account for widows' silence in going through cruel and dehumanizing rites?

### 1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of the research will:

- a. Provide some clues that will help to modify some aspects of the widowhood rites which are considered dehumanizing, cruel and punitive.
- b. Provide information to the government, opinion leaders, non-governmental organizations, chiefs and other stakeholders to draw up educational programmes, formal and informal to provide cultural re-orientation in our traditional communities for accepting modifications of the rites that conform to present time.
- c. Contribute to the knowledge base, that is, the content area of Social Studies, as the study will seek to explore, describe and explain pertinent issues and questions of widowhood rites bordering on social problem of survival.

### 1.7 Definition/Explanation of Terms

**Akan:** An ethnic group who trace their ancestry from a common source and speak any of the Twi language (*Asante, Akuapem, Akyem, Fante, and Kwawu and Nzema*).

**Ampesi:** (*A meal*) Cooked plantain, cocoyam cassava or yam eaten with a stew before or in the afternoon. When eaten in the evening as supper among the akans, it denotes one has undergone fasting.

**Anoka:** This refers to one of the stages of widowhood rites where the widow's mouth is touched with assorted food substances in their raw state, symbolically to break her fasting resulting from the death and mourning of her husband.



**Asamando:** A word in Twi which refers to the spiritual world where the souls of dead persons go and reside before they are re-incarnated.

**Dufokye da nsu mu sen ara a erentumi nnan odenkyem:**

(Akan proverb) If a dead stem of a tree floats in a river for ages, it will never turn into a crocodile.

**Eka ani a na aka hwene:** (Akan proverb) When an object enters the eye water oozes from the nose in reaction.

**Eka nnanti a na aka eto:** (Akan proverb) When the heel is smeared with anything, the buttock also gets smeared with the same thing on squatting.

**Fufu:** (A meal) Pounded plantain or cocoyam mixed with pounded cassava which is eaten with light soup, groundnut or palm soup. It is the main meal of the Akan eaten as supper.

**M'anidaso asa:** My hopes are dashed.

**Mmusu or mmusuo:** A word in Twi which refers to a forbidden act or a situation one finds oneself which carries retributive effect spiritually. It is synonymous with taboo. In this context, it refers to the 'dirt' the widow contracts as a result of the death of the husband which has contagious effect on those she comes into contact with, unless she is cleansed.

**Obea no agu ne kunu kra ho fi:** The woman has contaminated the soul of her husband.

**Obea no aku ne kunusunsum:** The woman has killed the spirit of her husband.

***Obea ton ntorewa na onnton atuduru:*** (Akan proverb) A woman only sells garden eggs but not gun powder.

***Okra or kra:*** A word in Twi language which refers to the soul, the undying part of man given by the Creator according to the Akan concept of man (Opoku A.K.1978).

***Okunafo:*** Unisex word in Twi language used to refer to either a widow or a widower.

***Se obea to tu a, etwere obarima dan mu:*** (Akan proverb) When a woman buys a gun, it is kept in a man's room.

***Sensempu:*** Refers to the *kuna suman* (widow's amulet) which the widow wears or carries in the left hand. It is believed to have the potency to drive away *sasa* (harmful spirits). It is made of a bundle comprising *prekese* (a kind of seeded fruit), *abrohyee* (burnt corn), *emi* and *nunum* (fine scented herbs) bound with *edoa* (raffia) (Sackey 2000).

***Sunsum:*** A word in Twi language used to refer to the spirit; an intangible element which accounts for the character, disposition of and intelligence of a person; a part of man which is open to attack by witchcraft and cause illness (Opoku A.K. 1978).

***Trokosi:*** A word in Ewe language used to refer to a traditional practice where a young virgin girl is sent to a shrine to serve a number of years in order to pay for the wrong of their parents to the shrine.

## **1.8 Organization of the Work**

The study is organized in five chapters. Chapter one deals with the background of the study of Widowhood rites in the Akuapem-South municipal district. It covers the

nature of widowhood rites and how it has attracted world-wide criticisms and condemnations, calling for its abolishing from the society.

Chapter two dwells on literature review under four main sub-sections, these are: the meaning of widowhood rites, socio-cultural relevance of widowhood rites, widowhood rites gendered and tilted against women and the negative (harsh, severe, de-humanizing) aspects of widowhood rites.

Chapter three covers the method used by the researcher for the study to come out with the findings. The themes considered include the research design, description of the research area, the population, sampling and sampling techniques and the instrument used for data collection.

Chapter four deals with data analysis and findings. The findings have been grouped into four main themes. These are: the origins of widowhood rites, the significance of widowhood rites, cruel and de-humanizing (negative) aspects of widowhood rites and how the widows felt about the experiences they went through. Each of these themes has sub-themes.

Finally, chapter five deals with the summary of the research findings, conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter takes cognizance of the views of other writers on similar work and therefore, the literature will be reviewed under the following themes:

- The meaning of ‘widowhood’ and ‘widowhood rites’.
- Socio-cultural relevance of widowhood rites.
- Widowhood rites gendered and tilted against women.
- Harsh/severe/dehumanizing aspects of widowhood rites in Africa.

#### 2.1 The Meaning of ‘Widowhood’ and ‘Widowhood rites’

Death is the ultimate end of human being on earth. When a married person dies, he or she leaves a widow or a widower, as the case may be. In the English language, when a man passes away, the surviving wife is referred to as a widow, and in the same way a surviving husband is known as a widower. However, in Akan the word is unisex- ‘okunafo’. The condition in which a man or a woman finds herself or himself as having lost a wife or a husband is referred to as widowhood. Olapegba and Chovwen (2006) citing Cavallo and Warner (2002) succinctly explain widowhood as “the phase of marriage following the death of one of the partners. More contemporary definitions however, want to consider as widows only people who do not re-marry at the death of their partners”. As pertains in the Akan society a woman is referred to as a widow only when she has not remarried after the death of her husband.

Widowhood rites constitute one of the socio-cultural practices of African communities. Its practice has both religious (spiritual) and social significance. But the religious significance which deals with the unknown, as to what might befall the

widow is most significant, because having gone through the rites, the widow appears psychologically relieved that all spiritual connections he/she has with the deceased is severed, and that he/she can re-marry without incurring the wrath of the unknown.

As Gyekye (1996:3, 4) states: “the African lives in a religious universe: all actions and thoughts have a religious meaning and are inspired or influenced by a religious point of view. In all undertakings – whether it be cultivating, sowing, harvesting, eating, travelling – religion is at work. To be born into the African society is to be born into a culture that is intensely and pervasively religious and that means, and requires, participating in the religious beliefs and rituals of the community.”

Therefore, the condition of widowhood in which a person finds him/herself does not concern him/her alone, but the community in which he lives. This condition then assumes socio-cultural concerns with elaborate rites and ceremonies surrounded by various beliefs and significance according to the tradition and custom of the area.

Sackey (2001:60), Goody (1962), Kondor (1993) assert that widowhood rites constitute one of the most important rites of passage, and they explain that there are ceremonies performed for a person on the death of his/her spouse.

Widowhood is a traumatic experience for both men and women worldwide. Brayer (1986) supports this by stating “widowhood is one of the major crises in life, a turning point, a readjustment process. It is time of life when grief and despair, a total sense of loss take over the person with brutal impact.” A person thrown into this situation of melancholy and tears needs to be supported by other members of the society to overcome his or her grief. In this vein, Brayer (1986) further indicates that:

“...facing the grim reality of death and trying to recover and regain one’s equilibrium is most unpleasant and difficult task. The community has a religious and moral obligation to help widowed person integrate into society and share again experience with friends in new affiliations and new meaningful relationship, for both personal and social adjustment.”

This means that the widow and the widower equally need social and emotional support from the community in which they live or belong to. According to Olapegba and Chovwen, social support expected in widowhood is seen in four categories. These are emotional aid, material aid, information and companionship. Unfortunately in some traditional Ghanaian societies, widows suffer the brunt of the widowhood through the elaborate rites they are made to go through.

## **2.2 Socio-cultural Relevance of Widowhood rites**

Goody (1962:44) has observed four stages of funeral ceremonies among the LoDagaa people (in the Upper West Region of Ghana) within which widowhood rites are incorporated. These are (1) “the preparation and disposal of the corpse, (2) the mourning of the bereaved and of the other members of the community, (3) the separation of the living from the dead...and (4) of the redistribution of certain marginal roles of the deceased.”

Sackey (2001:61) has also indicated that widowhood rites among the Asante, a sub-ethnic group of the Akan has three stages, namely: separation, liminal or transition and integration. She further states that:

“The ceremonies to mark these different stages include observances and taboos meant symbolically to express, among others, the new status of living spouse and to

ensure the safe transition of the deceased into the world of the dead. The ‘kunaye’ is over when ayikese (final rite) has been performed one year after the death of the husband.”

According to Goody upon the death of a man his surviving wives are washed and white washed in the same way. To each of the widows, the ritual bath “cleanses her from her husband’s dirt”(pp 40, 221), while the white wash symbolically identifies her as a widow, for that reason no man should sleep with her or engage her in any fight (page 186, 241).

It is significant to note that the ritual cleansing of widows almost permeates the widowhood practice in Africa, in the same way as they are symbolically dressed or coloured to be identified by other members of society who owe them sympathy and supportive social and psychological adjustment (Amoako-Atta Fosu 2000:10; Sackey 2001:66; Olapegba and Chovwen 2006:10).

Again, there are elaborate rites to sever spiritual connections between the surviving spouse and the spirit of the deceased so that there will be no sexual relations between them, and also the spirit of the deceased to make transition or journey to the spiritual world(Goody 1962:196; Sackey 2001:67, 78). This explains the immortality of the soul as a belief prevalent in African societies. In this vein, Gyekye (1996:13) states:

“Traditional African religions hold in common the belief that the soul is an immaterial part of the human being that survives death and that humans, in an afterlife, will give an account to God for their lives in this world. The belief that the soul of a person survives bodily death is expressed in the Akan maxim: when a person dies, he is not (really) dead. This implies that

there is something in human being that continues to exist in another world called “the world of spirits”.

### **2.3 Widowhood rites Gendered and Tilted Against Women**

Even though both the widow and the widower equally loses a dear life partner and therefore should undergo the same form of rites, in some traditional societies of Ghana widows suffer the brunt of widowhood rites through the elaborate rites they are made to go through. To buttress this point, Olapegba and Chovwen (2006) assert that “widowhood is deeply gendered, it is a condition shared by both men and women, but difference in experience along gender line has made it more women’s problem”. This point is observed by Goody (1962:194) that a widower does not completely go through widowhood rites as elaborate as the widow does because the funeral of a woman is shorter than that of man (Kondor, 1993: 118; Sackey, 1993: 60). “The overall view is the polygenous nature of the African society, that a husband with several wives cannot be expected to remain continent for a long time” (Goody p.194). In an explanation for the differences in the length of widowhood rites for the widow and the widower, Kondor (1993:166) says, “since the onus of performing the funeral rites of the deceased wife lies on the widower in the Vagla society, he is hastened through the rites in the shortest possible time to enable him to perform the funeral”. Olapegba and Chovwen (2006) citing Cavallo and Warner (2002) agree that “the loss of wife rarely altered a man’s status, while the loss of a husband invariably and irrevocably brought about change in a woman’s life. This reflects the patriarchal nature of the society we live in, heavily tilted against women”.

The life of the widow that is changed in most traditional African societies is also determined by the fact that the various societies are more gendered, and also stereotypical construct held about women underpinning the patriarchal nature of the



African society. In most African societies men are the principal actors - the locus of control of all the affairs of the society. While men are seen as strong, bold, brave, intrepid and unemotional, women are observed to be diametrically opposite to these attributes. Men therefore are the breadwinners for the family, the most difficult jobs and roles that require the use of brawn are their preserve, and the most daring undertaking such as defensive and offensive warfare are carried out by them. Above all, most lucrative jobs and roles are occupied and assumed by men, while women engage in petty economic activities and unpaid domestic chores and activities. In this situation, when a husband dies, the widows' life changes completely; she has lost almost everything. It is common to hear a widow in lachrymose dirge in a typical Akan society: 'Womma bedi dɛn?' M'anidaso asa oo, m'awie oo!' Translated thus "what will your children eat?" "My hopes are dashed, my hopes are dashed; "I am finished, I am finished". This portrays the situation that the widow is handicapped so much so that, she can hardly take care of herself, let alone her children.

However, if such situation is to be avoided, then African women should be empowered through education. When they are better educated and trained in various professions to secure jobs for a living, apart from the grief that they have to cope inevitably, they may be in a better position to take care of financial needs of themselves and their children when they become widows. It is therefore significant to note that socio-economic status of a widow may positively or negatively influence her emotional control and social adjustment to some extent. In this connection, Olapegba and Chovwen identify some unique individual personalities and how each can cope with problems and challenges of life, for example, the loss of a dear one, loss of job, loss of a limb or structure through an accident or illness, etc regardless of the individual's educational or socio-economic status. They mention that "personality

dynamics of individuals can moderate their perception and reactions to phenomena.” They note further that “widows with internal locus of control show significant positive perception of social support than widows with external locus of control. They explain thus:

“Using attribution theory to understand this, internals strongly believe that they personally have control over whatever happens to them in life, they can influence their environment and adapt to situations with less stress, unlike externals that see themselves as victims of the environment with little or no control over whatever comes their way.”(pg 840).

With this explanation, they agree with Arbuncle and Vries (1995) in this regard, and disagree with Okoye (1998), indicating that “educational status has no influence on coping in adverse situations”, but rather the personality trait of the individual which is genetically inherited. The fact remains that it is not easy to identify the personality traits of a person who has lost a dear one or facing bitter challenges of life to conclude whether he/she can cope with the situation or not. Therefore, the findings of Olapegba and Chovwen, supported by Arbuncle and Vries suggest that all persons who lose a spouse or experiencing any unpleasant challenge of life, whether educated, uneducated, rich or poor, high or low, needs counselling and support from other members of society or institutions set up for that purpose to adjust to that challenging situation.

#### **2.4 Dehumanizing experiences of Widows in Africa**

In some traditional African societies widows are made to go through severe and painful widowhood rites which are seen as dehumanizing, humiliating and cruel such that they invariably affect their physical and emotional well-being and infringe on

their fundamental human rights. Korieh (1996) in his field work provides some experiences of some widows among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria:

“A thirty five year old widow and mother of four noted: our entire property was confiscated. A lorry was sent from home to come and pack all the merchandise in his super-market. All his electronic items were also packed away. For the past year, the house had been like a battleground between me and them.”

Citing Nzewi (1989), Korieh further gives an experience expressed by a widow in an area of Imo State in Nigeria:

“the widow’s ordeal begins immediately the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws demand a list of the man’s property, holdings, investments, bank accounts, etc. she is required to take an oath as a proof that she has not concealed any relevant information on her husband’s wealth.”

From the widows’ experiences, the property of their late husbands was taken away from them seemingly, leaving nothing for them and their children.

Olapegba and Chovwen (2006) provide more elaborate instance of widowhood cultural practices among the Igbo people of Anambra State in Eastern Nigeria as follows:

**“Confinement:** The widow is not allowed to fetch water, cook and go to market or social gathering. This may last up to a year, thereby forcing the widow to depend on others.

**Defacement...**scraping of hair with razor blade to make the woman unattractive.

**Disinheritance:** This denies the wife the right to inherit or own property. In-laws force the widow out of her

home, leaving her with no means of support for her and her children.

**Mourning period:** The widow is forced to wear black or white and made to go through routine crying.

**Ritual Cleansing:** This is done to sever the link between the living and the dead.

**Dethronement:** A widow is made to sit on the bare floor or mat signifying an apparent fall in status.

**Ostracism:** The widow is seen as defiled and capable of defiling others, as a result she may not be allowed to touch or receive hand shake, and in some cases her hands are padded.

**Oath Taking:** The assumption here is that a woman is culpable in her husband's death so to prove her innocence she has to take an Oath." (Page, 837).

The stages of widowhood rites experienced by the widows presented by Olapegba and Chovwen are similar to what are practised in most African societies. They are symbolic practices reflecting in their religious beliefs and communal way of life as to the security of the vulnerable in society, especially widows and their children. The stages, viewed in their face value are offensive, but a critical look into them to find out their true symbolic meaning and significance, they present different picture. For example, among the Akan 'Disinheritance' per se is not an aspect or one of the stages of widowhood rite a widow is made to go through. It is based on one of the gender stereotypes of African societies that women are not strong and therefore do not create wealth and own large property or estate. This is supported by two Akan proverbs, thus: "Obea ton ntorewa na onnton atuduru," which translates "A woman only sells garden eggs but not gun powder." Another proverb has it that: "Obea to tu a etwere obarima dan mu," translating, "When a woman buys a gun it is kept in the room of a man." The woman is only a wife, subservient to the husband to help him create wealth

and property for the family of the man in particular. The property of the woman is her children born within the wedlock and they belong to the woman's family. Therefore, in the event of the death of the husband, the widow and her children are taken care of by the customary successor until she re-marries and moves to her new husband's house. Among the matrilineal descent group, the children of the late husband belong to the lineage of the widow, that is, the mother and therefore the maternal brothers as well as the first maternal brother cousins of the widow now assume control and care of the children. If the widow agrees to marry the customary successor, a traditional practice called 'widow inheritance' is carried out, and in this case the widow and her children remain in the house of the late husband, even if it is not his but a family property. This practice is a way of ensuring the security of the surviving wife and children among the matrilineal descent group after the demise of the husband.

As society is becoming more and more complex as a result of the introduction of western education and religion as well as other foreign religions, migration, urbanization, inter-tribal marriages, advocacy of gender equality among others, have made some customary practices in African societies out-of-date or less important. As a result of the interplay of foreign religions, western education, urbanization and others, African women's place is no more restricted to the kitchen as house wives. They go to school to any level attainable, engage in lucrative and prestigious professions, earn better salaries as men, and even more than men and therefore create wealth and own property. This in effect means that the practice where the customary successor assumes control of the property of the deceased on behalf of his family has outlived its original importance.

In Ghana, this problem has been addressed by the government through the enactment of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 111. The law provides that when a spouse dies intestate, his/her property is shared among the surviving spouse, the children and the parents of the deceased such that, three-quarters (3/4) of the property would go to the surviving spouse and children. Emphasis is placed on the fact that where the deceased owned one house, the house and the household chattels belong to the surviving spouse and children. Even, where a will is made to the disadvantage of any of the spouses, the Constitution of Ghana makes it null and void as it stipulates:

“A spouse shall not be deprived of a reasonable provision out of the estate of a spouse whether or not the spouse died having made a will. Spouses shall have equal access to property jointly acquired during marriage; assets jointly acquired during marriage shall be distributed equitably between the spouses upon dissolution of the marriage.”

This in effect means that, in Ghana, no widow or widower (surviving spouse) can be denied access to property acquired during marriage.

Whilst widows narrate their experiences, different and contrasting conclusions can be drawn as in the case of the following two experiences Korieh (1996) provide:

“every morning after the burial, my mother-in-law took me out to the back of the house. I had a bath with very cold water. This was done very early in the morning when it was still very cold. As she did this, custom demanded that I must be crying and calling my husband’s name I used to call him when he was alive. This lasted for four hours. I stayed at home for the next three months mourning him without going out.”

“in fact, several kinds of dehumanizing treatments were meted out to me. Before my husband was buried, I was locked up with his corpse for three hours with the belief that if I killed him, I would die there. I was then forced to sleep in the graveyard for two days after his burial to finally convince them I did not kill my husband.”

Even though some of the rites the widows are made to go through have some good reasons behind them, some of them are really harrowing, dehumanizing and bad experiences. For a widow to sleep at a graveyard for two days due to the fact that she has lost a husband as narrated above is indeed dehumanizing. Experiences of this nature as part of widowhood rituals must be banned outright because that may generate fear in the already grief-stricken widow who is traumatized by the husband's death. This may worsen her emotional and psychological well-being.

Again, an article which was published in the Daily Graphic on 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 under the caption “What laws regulate widowhood rites in Ghana?” by Nana Oye Lithur, said much about this cultural practice. In the article, the writer presented some varied aspects of the widowhood rites in the Upper East of Ghana as follows:

“Widows are stripped naked only to cover their private parts with leaves until the husband is buried. To determine how faithful the woman was to the husband, the widow is made to sit all night on a mat with black ants surrounding her. A bite from the ants determines unfaithfulness.”

These practices, looking at them from a different angle are dehumanizing, injurious and an infringement on the rights of the widows indeed, and constitute violence. If a widow is made to go through these rites then how supportive are these rites for her to cope with her grief? While women are perpetrating these seeming negative practices

against their own women, why should men sit down unconcerned? Social Watch Report (2004) on violence against women may perhaps explain the seeming unconcerned attitude of men towards women suffering. It says:

“Acts or threat of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, or perpetrated or condoned by the state, instil fear and insecurity in women’s lives and are obstacle to the achievement of equality. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate position compared with men.”

The question is, why should a widow unlike the widower be made to suffer unpleasant experiences, just because her husband has passed away? This is sheer discrimination against women. It is significant to realize as Galligan (1982), quoting from the statement that was made in the preamble to the American declaration of Independence reminds us that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of happiness”.

It is an undeniable fact that varied forms of cruel widowhood cultural practices continue to be perpetrated against women in some Ghanaian traditional communities. Nukunya (2003) asserts that in spite of calls to abolish the practices, they continue to be practised with impunity (page 243). With this consideration CHRAJ Report (2005) therefore appeals to all stakeholders to assist in fighting these negative cultural practices, it says:

“The Commission calls on victims of all forms of dehumanizing cultural practices to courageously report cases alleging violation of rights to the offices of the commission. The commission also appeals to the National Commission of Culture, the National House of



Chiefs, the security to step up their efforts to help eliminate cultural practices that undermine the dignity of human person.” (pg 84-85).

Why is it that in spite of legislation, cruel widowhood rites are perpetrated and victims are reluctant to report such cases? Perhaps there is strong emotional attachment to these cultural practices which makes it impossible for victims to report their ordeal or protest in the open against them. Contrary to the above, Sackey (2001) states that, widowhood rites among the Asante are less rigorous and observed by any person whether high or low (2001:60).

If widowhood rites among the Asante are less rigorous, do these pertain in other traditional sub- Akan communities of Ghana? These considerations, among others have prompted the researcher to investigate widowhood rites in the present day traditional Akan society in the Akuapem South Municipality to find out what widows feel about the practice, and why in spite of legislation they fail to report any bad treatment to the appropriate authority for the law to take its course?

## **2.5 Silence of Widows over Cruel/Dehumanizing Widowhood Rite Experiences**

Very cruel, harsh, horrifying and dehumanizing widowhood rite experiences have been reported in many communities in Africa making widowhood rites rather an outrageous practice which defeats its intended purpose of helping widows to cope with their grief and to re-integrate them to society. For this reason, international outcry has made it mandatory for countries to enact laws to curb certain cultural practices that are obnoxious and dangerous to the physical and emotional well-being of their citizens. With this in view, the Ghanaian Constitution is not silent on issues affecting the well-being of her citizens and emigrants, especially, issues affecting

women and children. For this reason, the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWAC), now known as Ministry of Children, Gender and Social Protection was established in 2001 by executive instrument (E8) (Tei-Ahontu,2008) to be responsible for issues concerning children and women. Besides, there is a special unit established under the Ghana Police Force known as Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) which is responsible for handling cases that border on domestic violence.

With all these institutions put in place in Ghana, victims of severe and dehumanizing widowhood rites do not report their ordeal. From the field work of Tei-Ahontu, a respondent had this to say:

“I think it is very bad to force someone to drink water that is used in bathing a dead body. Some families do this because they think that the woman killed the man to inherit the wealth of the man, so once you are able to drink it then it shows you are innocent. If you are in good terms with your in-laws then they will not do it to you, but if you especially like to quarrel with them when they visited the man the time he was alive then they will do it. You cannot report it because it is tradition and so when they do they do it for free. Nobody will punish them”.

From the above narration it could be deduced that some of the victims do not report their ordeal for the fact that it is their tradition which must be practiced as such.

Again, it could be deduced that the victim is ignorant of her right being infringed upon and the institutions set up to address such issues. According to the respondent, nobody would punish the perpetrator. But it is not true; once a constitutional provision is breached one cannot escape punishment because it is an offence.

In contrast to the above, a participant in the field work of Tei-Ahontu had this to say:

“...some families can be wicked sometimes. About twenty years ago people sprinkled pepper into the widow’s eyes and it happened that later she went blind as a result. The people who did it were arrested by the Police and prosecuted. Since then that practice has stopped.”

Comparing the narrations from the two respondents, it can be deduced that some of the widows do not know their rights and therefore sat down to be cheated and treated badly.

Again, some widows seem to undergo the severe aspect of the rite due to pent up feeling of anger and frustration through persistent harassment. Once she has gone through it herself she finds no reason to complain or report to any quarters or source.

Another respondent also said the following:

“It is only wicked families who continue to do this and I think just to maltreat you. Because if you fail to drink it they will harass you until you become fed up and decide to drink it to prove your innocence. I don’t think this is right because it is possible to consult traditional priest to find what caused the death of someone even these days you can get a doctor to make an autopsy and that will help.”

The respondent’s narration may still boil down to her ignorance of the existing institutions where she could go and complain her ordeal, because if she was bent on not to go through any severe or dehumanizing experience and knew that an institution could redeem her, she would vehemently resist and report the perpetrators on their insistence.

The various reasons that compel widows to go through some dehumanizing experiences could be addressed if institutions such as CHRAJ, DOVVSU, National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE), National House of Chiefs and other allied institutions effectively perform mandatory functions. As Tei-Ahontu (2008) states “The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice is provided for by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana and was established by Act 456. It is an institution set up for the protection and promotion of fundamental human rights and freedoms and administrative justice”. In quoting from the Constitution he adds the following:

“Article 218 in part states that: The functions of the Commission shall be defined and prescribed by Act of Parliament and shall include duty.

(a) to investigate complaints of violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms, injustice, corruption, abuse of power and unfair treatment of any person by a public officer in the exercise of his official duties.

(f) to educate the public as to human rights and freedoms by such means as the Commissioner may decide, including publication, lectures and symposia.”

Considering the functions of the institutions mentioned above, it is very important for Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) to be properly resourced and staffed to live up to its constitutional mandate.

Furthermore, also imperative/pertinent to state that the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) should provide intensive periodic but continuous education on civic rights and liberties and responsibilities to the people of Ghana through mobile vans, circulation of and other appropriate media that can reach the nook and cranny of the country.

Again, Article 272 clause © of the 1992 constitution enjoins the National House of Chiefs to “undertake and evaluate traditional customs and usage with the view to eliminating those customs and usages that are outmoded and socially harmful”. It is therefore significant that the National house of Chiefs which is the embodiment of our traditions and customs also live up to their constitutional mandate to ensure that our traditional and customs that are obnoxious and dangerous are abolished or modified to bring peace and sanity on our traditional societies to ensure development of the country.



## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.0 Introduction

The focus of this chapter is to describe the methods and procedure that were used to gather data for the study. The themes discussed in this chapter include:

- **Research Design**
- **Population**
- **Sample and Sampling Technique**
- **Data Collection and Procedure**
- **Data Analysis**

#### 3.1 Research Design

The researcher used a case study approach under qualitative research methods and came out with his findings. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry by which the researcher goes to a particular setting of his interest of study to collect data right on the scene through interview, observation, participant observation, among others. Such data collected, among others, are usually in the form of interview transcripts, field notes, photographs, audio and video recordings and diaries. The researcher then seeks to construct clear meaning from the data in an inductive and analytical description rather than using numerical interpretation. In this way, vivid description and explanation of an event, a people or a phenomenon is given in its richness and authenticity. In short, Merriam(1998:5) observes that “qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible”. Merriam further cites Sherman and Webb (1988:6) saying

qualitative research “implies a direct concern with experience as is ‘lived’ or ‘felt’ or ‘undergone’.

### **3.2 Research Area/Setting**

The research for this study was conducted in ten (10) settlements in the Akuapem-South Municipality. The settlements are: Otu Kwadwokurom (Otu Kwadwo), Yaw Duodukurom (Yaw Duodu), Kwame Ntow, Aburi-Amanfrom and Obosono. The others are: Nsawam, Aburi, Pakro, Sakyikurom and Pokurom.

“Akuapem-South Municipality is located at South Eastern part of the Eastern Region of Ghana. It shares boundaries to the south with Ga-west Municipality and Tema Metropolis, both of which are part of Greater Accra Region. To the north-west, its neighbours are Suhum-Krabo-coaltar, Akuapem-North and West Akim Municipal respectively.” ([www.ghana.net.com](http://www.ghana.net.com)).

It is a heterogeneous municipality with Dangme, Guan and Akan ethnic groups occupying it. Two Akan sub-ethnic groups, the Akuapem and the Akyem are the distinctive Akan group found in the municipality with the Akuapem as the predominant ethnic group.

There are towns and villages that are fast growing and becoming urbanized. The municipal capital is Nsawam. The language spoken by the people is Twi

The research area with its varied number of towns and villages would provide rich information concerning the practice of widowhood rites in a village and town setting for whatever difference there may be to come out.

### **3.3 Population**

The Akuapem-South Municipal district has a total land area of 116,346 square kilometres with a population of “123,501 of which 62,594 comprise female and

60,907 male” according to the 2010 Population and Housing Census ([www.statsghana.gov.gh](http://www.statsghana.gov.gh)).

According to Hinnah, K. (2010, 80), a population can be referred to as ‘a group of individuals or people with the same characteristics and in whom the researcher is interested.’ Or ‘it can be defined as a group of individuals that the researcher generalizes his/her findings to.’ In this case, the research involved widows and other women who had seen widows through widowhood rites and heads of the extended families or clans of the widows selected for the study in the Akuapem-South Municipality.

### 3.4 Sample Size and Distribution

A sample refers to a representative of a group of individuals deliberately and carefully selected from a population, of which the researcher bases his findings. Hinnah, K. (2010) succinctly explains “a sub-group of the entire population studied is referred to as a sample.”

In this study, a sample size of thirty (30) persons participated in the study. The distribution of the sample is as follows:

**Table 3.1: Sample Distribution**

Participants	Number
Widows	15
Queens	5
Women who had seen widows through widowhood rites	5
Heads of Extended families/clans	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>

The widows were selected for the study because they had gone through the widowhood rites and for that matter they were in a better position to narrate the experiences they had gone through better.



The categories of respondents chosen apart from the widows were selected on the assumption that they were deep-rooted and well versed in the traditions and customs of their various communities through personal experiences, involvement in any form or oral traditions from their forebears and are therefore regarded as the custodians of culture in their communities. They were interviewed to ascertain the origins, myths, reasons, beliefs and significance of widowhood cultural practice.

### **3.5 Sampling and Sampling Technique**

According to Sheperis et al, (2010, 10), “sampling is a means of identifying and selecting a portion of the total population.” To them “a good sample is a representative segment of that population, in that it mirrors proportionately the characteristics that are present in the larger population.” Therefore, to generate a representative sample, the researcher first defines the population of interest and must design a plan for sampling that population. In selecting participants for the study the researcher made use of purposive sampling technique, specifically, making use of snowball, chain or network sampling, where the researcher asked participants already interviewed to refer him to other widows in the town or village. For the queens, the heads of families or clans and the women who had seen widows through the rites before, the researcher went purposefully to them for the information needed.

### **3.6 Research Instrument**

In conducting the study, the researcher employed conversational (unstructured) interviews for the collection of data. This conversational style of interview was more appropriate and effective because the respondents felt free to relate to the researcher their experiences in their own language and what they knew concerning widowhood cultural practice in their various communities.

The researcher lives in the municipality, understands and speaks the language of the people very well and therefore could interact freely and easily with the respondents.

The interview sessions helped the researcher to elicit information through direct person – to – person encounter. This helped the researcher to learn enough so as to formulate questions for subsequent interviews (Merriam, page 75).

### **3.6.1 Interviews**

Interviews were conducted by interacting with the respondents to tell their own stories of what they knew and what they had experienced. Interview guide in the form of twenty-six (26) questions were used in the case of widows and twenty-three (23) questions were used to get information from the queens, heads of families or clans and the women who had seen widows through the rites before.

### **3.7 Research Procedure**

One interview encounter each was conducted involving fifteen (15) widows, five (5) queens, five (5) women who had seen some widows through widowhood rites and five (5) heads of family of the widows from ten (10) settlements in the Akuapem South Municipality.

In reaching out to the respondents the researcher visited the queens in the settlements and booked interview appointments with them, and then asked them to direct the researcher to a widow, who directed the researcher to another widow. The widows in turn directed the researcher to the heads of families or clans and the women who saw them through widowhood rites as well as other women who had once seen a widow through the rites.

During interview sessions the researcher compiled field notes by putting down responses given by the respondents out of the questions posed. In addition, the researcher recorded the conversational interviews on tape using mobile phone recorder, while at the same time jotting down salient points of the conversation.

### **3.8 Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are the means by which researchers ensure that their research instruments and findings are true and consistent and reliable.

Referring to Shavelson (1996), Sheperis (2012) define validity as “the extent to which the results of a measurement or procedure actually serve the purpose for which it is intended (pp 8). Schwandt (2007, 309) explains that:

“To say that the findings of social scientific investigations are (or must be) valid is to argue that the findings are in fact (or must be) true and certain. Here, ‘true’ means that the findings accurately represent the phenomena to which they refer, and ‘certain’ means the findings are backed by evidence-or-warranted-and there are no grounds for doubting the findings.”

On the other hand, “reliability is the extent to which the results of a measurement or procedure are consistent from one measure to another” (Shavelson, 1996; Sheperis, 2002).

Sheperis further explains that “a reliable research design could be replicated and the results would not be statistically different from the original study.” This means that when the research instrument(s) is (are) applied over and over, the results will be consistent and the same as the previous ones. However, Merriam (1998, 205) indicates that “reliability is problematic in social sciences simply because human

behaviour is not static.” This notwithstanding, she justifies the use of reliability in qualitative research design as she refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985) thus’ “The notion of reliability with regard to instrumentation can be applied to qualitative case studies, in a sense similar to its meaning in traditional research.” She goes further to state that, “Just as a researcher refines instruments and uses statistical techniques to ensure reliability, so too the human instrument can become more reliable through training and practice.” Merriam then notes that” the reliability of documents and personal accounts can be assessed through various techniques of analysis and triangulation.” Wisker (2008, 322) brings the perspectives of Merriam (2008) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) on reliability in to focus when she states:

“Reliability relates to how well you have carried out your research. It is considered reliable if another researcher carrying out the same research activities with the same kind of group would be likely to replicate your findings-although their findings need not be identical.”

In sum, the question of reliability in qualitative research design is to determine how reliable and dependable the research findings are so that the knowledge constructs would be generally accepted or applied and stand the test of time. This means that appropriate research instrument(s) is (are) selected to measure what are intended to measure or elicit, by way of carefully planned research activities.

In order to ensure that the data collected for the study and the findings are valid and reliable the researcher saw to it that all questions for the interview were well structured and based on the research problem and objectives to elicit the required answer.

Again, the researcher pilot-tested the data collection instrument at a location outside the area of study to ascertain the effectiveness of the tool.

Furthermore, the researcher used triangulation to validate the findings. According to Erina Audrey (2013) “Triangulation also crosschecks information to produce accurate results for certainty in data collection” Hinneh (2012) referring to Flick (2009), triangulation “is a useful strategy for validating procedures and results/findings...” He further indicates that “triangulation is a useful technique when a phenomenon is studied through a case study approach in particular”.

In this study, the researcher made use of a type of triangulation referred to as respondent, or ‘within’ triangulation (Hinneh, 2012: 106; Bush, 2002; McFee, 1992). Referring to Bush (2002), Hinneh states that “this strategy involves the use of the same instrument to collect data from different participants.” In this case, the researcher made use of two sets of conversational interview guide to collect data from widows on one side and queens, widowhood rites supervisors and heads of family on the other side. The same interview guide produced almost similar results from this different group of respondents. This indicates that the findings were valid.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The outcome of investigating widowhood rites as a case study in the Akuapem South Municipal District as to what the widows felt about what they went through is discussed. These outcomes have been categorized under four main themes. These are myths, reasons, beliefs and significance of widowhood rites, de-humanizing, cruel and torturous nature of widowhood rites, what widows feel about what they go through and the reasons behind keeping silent over their ordeal.

The analysis of this chapter was based on the criticisms and condemnations that widowhood cultural practice in Africa in general and Ghana in particular had been subjected to, calling for legislative instrument to ban it.

#### **4.1 Background of Participants**

In finding out widowhood rites as a case study among the people of Akuapem South municipal district, thirty (30) participants were interviewed. The respondents included fifteen (15) widows, five (5) queens, five (5) women who had once seen a widow through the rites and five (5) heads of the extended families of the widows interviewed. The background information of the respondents was obtained by using the data in Appendixes A and B. The ages of the widows ranged between 35 and 75 years; those of the queens were between 55 and 95; and those of the supervisors of widowhood rites and the heads of family ranged between 61 and 80 respectively.

**Table 4.1: Age range of Widow Participants**

Age Group	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
35-39	2	13.3
40-45	2	13.3
46-49	3	20
50-55	3	20
56-59	2	13.3
60-65	1	6.7
66-69	1	6.7
70-75	1	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

The varied nature of the age of the respondents sought to find out the changes that might have occurred in the widowhood cultural practice with the passage of time as culture is dynamic, taking cognizance of how differently the various age groups went through the rites.

Out of the fifteen (15) respondents who took part in the study two (13.3%) were between the ages of 35 and 39; 40 and 45; and 56 and 60 respectively. Three, representing (20%) were between the ages of 46 and 49, and 50 and 55. The remaining (6.7%) were each between the ages of 60 and 65, 66 and 69, and 70 and 75 respectively.

The oldest of the widows, aged 75 had this to say:

“Since I was born, widowhood rites have undergone and are still undergoing changes and modifications. What was being practised ten years ago in terms of the rites is not exactly what is being practised now. What I went through was quite different from what I witnessed when I was a young woman. In my case, for example, I refused to have my hair shaved, but I was not forced to go through that rite;

however some time ago, that refusal would not be countenanced.” (9<sup>th</sup> April, 2011)

This reveals that the widows who took part in the study included young and old widows who had different experiences of their time and that proved that widowhood rites have undergone some modifications and still undergoing some modifications. As culture is dynamic, our socio-cultural practices are also going through modifications and changes. This is an indication that the traditional society of the Akuapem is evolving and developing like any other society. When there is social, political, economic and religious reforms, modifications and changes, the idea behind is to perfect the system for the general good of the people. This is so with the socio-cultural practices of the people of Akuapem-south municipality, such as widowhood rites which is going through modifications.

**Table4.2: Place of Birth, Residence and Hometown of the Widows**

Widow	Place of Birth	Hometown	Place of Residence
A	Nsawam	Sakyikurom	Pakro
B	Pakro	Larteh	Pakro
C	Aburi	Tutu	Aburi
D	Twifo Praso	Twifo Praso	Pakro
E	Pokurom	Pokurom	Pokurom
F	Nsawam	Mamfe	Aburi-Amanfrom
G	Otukwadwokurom	Nsakyee	Otukwadwokurom
H	Yawduodu	Yaw Duodu	Yaw Duodu
I	Obosono	Pakro	Obosono
J	Aburi-Amanfrom	Kwame Ntow	Kwame Ntow
K	Aburi	Aburi	Aburi-Amanfrom
L	Mampong-Akuapem	Aburi	Aburi
M	Sakyikurom	Sakyikurom	Otukwadwokurom
N	Aburi-Amanfrom	Aburi-Amanfrom	Nsawam
O	Nsawam	Sakyikurom	Nsawam



From the table, all the widows interviewed were residing in the Akuapem-South municipality. In this case, their widowhood rites that they went through in entirety, was peculiar to the people of Akuapem.

All the widows were Akans except widow B who was a Guan because she came from Larteh. Ethnically, the people of Larteh are not of the Akan stock. They speak Guan language, but having stayed among the Akuapem for a very long time, they speak Akuapem language alongside. As people with ethnic identity, their socio-cultural practice with respect to widowhood rites might be different. However, having stayed in the same district and close together, their widowhood cultural practice might have been greatly or slightly influenced by that of the Akuapem.

From the interview, it was only widow B who said that she took her ritual and cleansing bath at the town's refuse dump. In her own words she said "three days after the burial of my husband, I was ushered into widowhood. What I did was that I was made to take a ritual bath at a refuse dump for three consecutive days at dusk." (9<sup>th</sup> April, 2011) Probably that was an aspect of widowhood practice among the Guan, because none of the Akans made mention of this.

Widow D came from Twifo Praso in the Central Region of Ghana, but resided at Pakro. It is significant to note that the people of Twifo Praso are Akans by origin. As a member of the Akan stock, the widowhood rites that she went through were not different from those of the Akuapem who are also Akans. This revealed that widowhood cultural practice among the Akan ethnic group is similar to some extent, though there are slight variations, their essence is the same.

**Table 4.3: Religious Denomination of Widows**

Religion	Widows	Percentage
Christianity	15	100
Traditional	0	0
Islamic	0	0
Others	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

The religious denomination of the widows was considered. This was to find out the extent to which christianity and other religions had affected widowhood cultural practice in the Akuapem South municipal district. However, all the participants interviewed turned out to be Christians who belonged to different sects as shown below.

**Table 4.4: Religious Sects of Respondents (widows)**

Christian religious Sect	No. of widows	Percentage
Pentecost	2	13
Christ Apostolic Church	3	20
Presbyterian	4	27
Catholic	2	13
Methodist	2	13
Musama Disco Christo Church	1	7
Christ Resurrection Church	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

With reference to the table, 2 widows who belonged to the Pentecost, Catholic and Methodist, representing 13% each of the churches were interviewed. Three respondents (20%) who were members of the Christ Apostolic Church were also interviewed. Four participants (27%) who were Presbyterians were also interviewed. The rest of the respondents who were members each of the Musama Disco Christo Church and Christ Resurrection Charismatic church were interviewed.

It came to light that christian religion to some extent has influenced widowhood cultural practice in the Akuapem South municipality. To buttress this point widow D had this to say: “widowhood rites as a cultural practice has undergone numerous changes and modifications, since I was born and it is still undergoing modifications and changes. Now a days, if a widow is a christian, she may choose to go through the christian way that is through prayer sessions organized by the church.” (26<sup>th</sup> may, 2011)

Widow K had this to say in a similar vein:

“A relative of mine lost a husband, and only went through a simpler prayer session organized by the church on the day of the main widowhood rituals. She remained in black cloth afterwards till the first death anniversary. Nothing bad happened to her afterwards. If I were to go through widowhood rites once again, even though I was not treated badly, I would prefer the Christian type where prayer session is held in the house of the widow. That appears simpler because it does not involve any other ritual.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

**Table 4.5: Academic Background of Respondents (Widows)**

Academic Background	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
No formal education	5	33
MSLC	7	47
Junior High School	-	-
WASSCE/GCE ‘O’Level	2	13
Teachers’ Certificate A	1	7
Diploma	-	-
Degree	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

In carrying out the research, the academic background of the respondents was considered. Five (5) participants representing 33% had no formal education. Seven (7)

of the participants (47%) had Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC). Two (13%) had General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level and its equivalent West African Senior Secondary Certificate Education Level. Only one (7%) had Teachers' Certificate. All the respondents, irrespective of their academic background went through the rites, some reluctantly though. It shows that one's academic background had no influence on one going through widowhood rites.

Tei-Ahontu (2008) provides four reasons why widows go through widowhood rites willy-nilly, irrespective of their religious inclination and educational background and status as follows: (i) love (ii) obedience of tradition (iii) bidding farewell to the departed and (iv) blessings of the dead husband - refusal can bring bad luck.

One of the widows, K had this to say to support the second reason provided by Tei-Ahontu saying "I went through the rites without interest, only to satisfy tradition".

**Table 4.6: Number of Years the Widows were in Marriage**

Years in marriage	Number of Participants	Percentage
1-10	3	20
11-20	6	40
21-30	4	27
31-40	2	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

Consideration was given to the number of years the respondents had been in marriage. 3(20%) of the respondents had been in marriage between 1 and 10 years. 6(40%) also had been in marriage between 11 and 20 years. 4(27%) of the participants, until the demise of their husbands, had been in marriage between 21 and 30 years, whilst the remaining 2(13%) had been in marriage between 31 and 40 years.

Nothing significant was revealed which had bearing on the number of years a woman had spent in marriage before the death of the husband and how she experienced widowhood cultural practice. What the study revealed was that once legitimately married under accepted customary practice, going through widowhood rites is a must; one has to go through them irrespective of how long a woman had spent in marriage. This is in support of what Sackey (2001:60) observed among the people of Asante, a sub-ethnic group of the Akan stock. “Among the Asante, the rites are observed by any person, high or low, upon the death of a spouse.”

**Table4.7: Type of Marriage Contracted**

Type of Marriage	Number of Widows	Percentage
Customary	8	53
Consensual	1	7
Church Blessing/Ordinance	6	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table shows the type of marriage contracted by the respondents in the study conducted. 8(53%) of the respondents had customary marriage, 1(7%) had consensual marriage whilst 6(40%) enjoyed church blessings/ordinance.

It is important to state that all marriages approved and received church blessings which may also be accompanied by signing of marriage certificates to legalize them should first be preceded by customary marriage.

It is significant to note that consensual marriage between a man and a woman is not customarily recognized as a legitimate marriage. Therefore in the event of the death of the woman, in most cases, the man would be compelled to perform the necessary customary rites to legitimize the marriage before the woman is buried. In the case of the death of the man, his relatives would not see the woman to go through any

widowhood rites because she is not a legitimate wife. On this issue one of the respondents who lost her ‘husband’ in consensual marriage shared her experience:

“After the death of my ‘husband’, I went through widowhood rites, but it was supervised by my own relatives. The reason was that my ‘late husband’ had not performed the customary marriage rites to make me a legitimate wife. Even, the items I provided as a ‘widow’ to bury my ‘husband’ with were received after several pleas had been made to the relatives of my ‘late husband’. After his burial his relatives left me to my fate without seeing me through any form of widowhood rites. But my relatives ensured that I went through widowhood rites which I did.” (26<sup>th</sup> may, 2011)

All the participants, irrespective of the type of marriage contracted went through widowhood rites. The study reveals that widowhood rites are traditionally acceptable practice which is accepted willingly or unwillingly by all widows irrespective of the type of marriage contracted, even though its form of practice may vary.

**Table4.8: Employment/Occupation Status of Participants**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Teaching	1	7
Petty Trading	6	40
Farming	3	20
Unemployed	2	13
Seamstress	2	13
Hairdressing	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

The occupational or the employment status of the respondents was considered in the study as shown above. 1(7%) of the respondents was a professional teacher. 6(40%) engaged in petty trading. 3(20%) earned a living as farmers. 2(13%) had no employment. 2(13%) lived as seamstresses, whilst 1(7%) engaged in hairdressing.

The study showed that employment status had no restriction on the practice of widowhood rites with regard to any woman who lost the husband in the area studied. It is therefore established that, irrespective of the status of a woman in society in terms of occupation or profession, going through widowhood rites is a must.

One important observation was that the widows who were unemployed as well as the farmer had not fully pulled themselves together, though their husbands died five, seven and ten years ago. They still showed signs of grief and helplessness. The fact was that they were living on the bread - line, that is, not in any good position to take care of themselves and their children, because their husbands were the very persons who provided their means of support and survival. The researcher was therefore compelled out of pity to give them small amount of money for food for the day. Widow H, who was a farmer remarked:

“Since the death of my husband almost two years ago, none of his relatives, not even the customary successor has turned up to see how the children and I are faring. It is not easy taking care of three children without any gainful employment.” (14<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).

However, the widow who was a professional teacher, from observation showed good signs of self-support and self-reliance. Apart from the fact that she showed emotional pain and grief for losing the husband, from observation and in her own words, supporting herself financially was not a big problem for her, and therefore not very much bothered.

It is, therefore, important to state that, in order not to be thrown into a state of abject poverty, hopelessness and helplessness after the death of a husband, it is imperative

that young girls should have a profession or be securely and gainfully employed. This would provide security for them to be self-reliant to face any unforeseen contingencies that may occur in their life.

**Table 4.9: Membership of Clans of Respondents (Widows)**

Clan	Number of Widows	Percentage
Agona	2	13
Asona	3	26
Oyoko	2	13
Aduana	4	20
Ekoona	1	7
Bretuo	1	7
Asakyiri	1	7
Asenee	1	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>

In carrying out the study, membership of the respondents in the Akan major clans was considered to find out if the clans have different rites for their members.

2(13%) of the participants belonged to the Agona and Oyoko clans respectively. 3(26%) belonged to the Asona and 4(20%) belonged to the Aduana clan. 1(7%) belonged to the Ekoona, Asakyiri, Bretuo and Asenee clans respectively.

The experiences of the respondents, who belonged to the various clans above, did not reveal any significant difference. It is therefore revealed that, though the participants belonged to different clans located at different geographical areas within the area of research, widowhood practice is very similar. It can therefore be deduced that widowhood cultural practice among the Akans irrespective of clan membership is similar. For example, all the respondents in this category made mentioned of the ritual of touching the widows' mouth with assorted foodstuff and vegetables. Again, all mentioned the seeming harassment of forcing the widow to weep to fill a given bowl.



**Table 4.10: Age range of Queens, Widowhood Rite Supervisors and Heads of Family**

Age Range	Queens	%	Supervisors of Widowhood Rites	%	Family Heads	%
50-55	1	20	0	0	0	0
56-60	0	0	0	0	0	0
61-65	0	0	1	20	1	20
66-70	1	20	1	20	2	40
71-75	1	20	1	20	1	20
76-80	1	20	2	40	1	20
81-85	0	0	0	0	0	0
86-90	0	0	0	0	0	0
91-95	1	20	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

The study took into consideration the age of the queens, widowhood rite supervisors and the heads of family of the widows. The ages of the queens ranged between 50 and 95, that of the supervisors of widowhood rites were between 61 and 80, while that of the heads of heads of family of the widows also ranged between 61 and 80.

These categories of the participants were considered to be the custodians of culture of the chosen localities. They contributed immensely to the study by their free-will responses to the interviews conducted. Even though they fell within different age bracket, they demonstrated that they were well-versed in the traditions and the culture of their various localities so far as widowhood cultural practice was concerned. They vividly and comprehensively explained what the widows went through and the reasons behind all the rituals involved. With the exception of head of family K and L who gave almost similar account of what the queens and the women who supervised widowhood rites provided, head of family M, N and O politely insisted that the women could better provide detailed account of the widowhood cultural practices in the area, so they declined to provide any information. It is important to note that the

two heads of family who gave account of the experiences widows went through were aged 75 and 80 respectively, an indication that their age might have exposed them to the practices over the years.

**Table 4.11: Place of Birth, Hometown and Residence of Queens**

Queen	Hometown	Place of Birth	Place of residence
A	Aburi	Asikabrew	Otukwadwokurom
B	Aburi	Adeiso	Sakyikurom
C	Pokurom	Mampong	Pokurom
D	Pakro	Akropong	Pakro
E	Yaw Duodu	Yaw Duodu	Yaw Duodu

**Table 4.12: Place of Birth, Hometown and Residence of Widowhood rite Supervisors**

Widowhood Rite Supervisors	Hometown	Place of Birth	Place of Residence
F	Aburi	Nsawam	Pakro
G	Sakyikurom	Sakyikurom	Sakyikurom
H	Otukwadwo	Nsawam	Otukwadwokurom
I	Mamfe	Mamfe	Nsawam
J	Pokurom	Aburi	Pokurom

**Table 4.13: Place of Birth, Hometown Residence of Heads of Family**

Head of family	Hometown	Place of Birth	Place of Residence
K	Sakyikurom	Nsawam	Sakyikurom
L	Otukwadwo	Aburi	Otukwadwokurom
M	Aburi	Akropong	Aburi
N	Obosono	Mampong	Obosono
O	Yaw Duodu	Mamfe	Yaw Duodukurom

From the tables, the hometowns, places of birth and residence of the respondents are located within the Akuapem-South Municipal District, except queen B who was born at Adeiso, a town in the West Akyem District whose people are of the Akyem stock,

one of the sub-Akan ethnic group. This means that all the participants belong to the Akuapem stock, and are Akans and speak Akuapem or Twi, the language of the Akan ethnic group.

Therefore, the account they provided as to the practice of widowhood rites was peculiar to the Akuapem. From the account they provided, widowhood rites among the Akuapem are not harsh, cruel, de-humanizing and torturous as may pertain to some societies in Ghana. One of the women who supervised widowhood rites aged 73 buttressed this point;

“Widowhood rites among the Akuapem do not involve any harsh or painful ritual. Some aspects have been changed and modified. Now a days, no widow or members of the community complain of any aspects of the rites, so it should remain as a cultural heritage.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011)

**Table 4.14: Religious Denomination/Sects of Queens, Heads of Family and Supervisors of Widowhood Rites**

Sect	Queens	%	Supervisors of Widowhood rites	%	Heads of Family	%
Methodist	2	40	1	20	1	20
Presby	2	40	2	40	3	60
Catholic	0	0	1	20	0	0
Pentecost	1	20	0	0	1	20
MDCC	0	0	1	20	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>100</b>

The religious background of the people considered to be the custodians of culture of the people was considered. For queens two (2) Methodists and two (2) Presbyterians, representing 40% of the two sects respectively were interviewed, whilst one member of the church of Pentecost, representing 20% was interviewed.

For the supervisors of widowhood rites, (one) 1 person (20%) each affiliated to the Methodist, Catholic, and Musama Disco Christo Church (MDCC), respectively was interviewed, whilst two (2) persons were interviewed, representing 40% affiliated to the Presbyterian church.

Finally, the number of heads of family interviewed was five (5). Three (3) representing 60% were Presbyterians, whilst 2 persons representing 20% of the Methodist and Pentecost respectively.

Considering the Christian religious background and the various sects the participants belonged, none of them spoke negative about the practice of widowhood rites, except Widow K who said this: “I see the whole thing as nasty, because it is a practice which belonged to pagans. As a Christian, it is at variance with my faith. I went through it without any interest, only to satisfy tradition.” However, Queen B, affiliated to the church of Methodist had this to say in this regard:

“We are Akans, and that is part of our socio-cultural practice so we cannot do away with it. Widowhood in its entirety is good practice because after the rites, the people around the widow draw closer to her, Again, the relatives of the late husband tend to like the widow and establish good inter-personal relationship with her. Additionally, the widow after going through the rites feels mentally, emotionally and psychologically relaxed to resume her normal social life. Yes, recently, a widow went through the widowhood rites, thereafter I observed how fast she was regaining mental, emotional and psychological equipoise after going through the trauma of her husband’s death.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).

## 4.2 The Origins of widowhood rites

From the study, all the participants could not relate widowhood rites to any myth, story or historical origins among the people of their respective communities. All the respondents said that they grew up to meet it as part of their socio-cultural practices. Participant H, one of the supervisors of widowhood rites said:

“I grew up to meet the rites being practised, so I do not know any history or myth concerning the origins of those rites.” (14<sup>th</sup>, July, 2011)

Participant D also said:

“I cannot trace the origins of widowhood cultural practice as practised in the community. I came to meet it from birth, and I have not heard any myth or history about its origins.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011).

Like other socio-cultural practices such as naming ceremony, marriage, funeral and others, widowhood rites in its entirety has been practised based on beliefs held by the people, and has been an age-long practice, which had existed and had been part and parcel of the cultural evolution of the people of Akan. All these practices significantly give an identity to a people who trace their origin from a common ancestress. It is a tradition and a customary practice which has been handed over to the people by their forebears, generation to generation.

From the studies, the respondents could not for certain relate the historical origins of widowhood cultural practice, in the Akuapem-South municipal district, but aptly derived from the culture and the belief among the Akans that the soul of man continues to exist after physical death on the land of the dead called ‘asamando’. Such a spiritual realm may have different names and conceptual framework in relation to the culture and the religious belief of the people. For example, the Christians whose

religious beliefs are built on the cultural background of ancient Israel. They believe in heaven and hell, a spiritual realm where the soul of man dwells after suffering physical death on earth. To the Christian, the reward of good deeds on earth is heavenly abode, where God resides, and that of bad deeds is hell, where Satan and his cohorts reside, ready to punish entrants with perpetual brimstone of fire. Even, among the Roman Catholics, a belief is held that there is a place in the spiritual realm called 'purgatory' where the spirit of the dead with minor earthly sins reside, ready to be purged before gaining entrance to heaven. With reference to the Christian Holy Bible, Luke 23:39-43, Jesus informed one of the criminals who were crucified with him that "truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." This was a short moment before Jesus and the crucified criminal died. The implication was that the spirit of Jesus and the crucified criminal would meet in paradise, the spiritual world for ethereal bodies.

A parallel of this can be seen in Ecclesiastes 12:6 that man created out of the earth (dust) goes back to the earth after death and the spirit goes back to the abode of God, the Creator. This buttresses the point and the belief among the Akans that only the physical body suffers bodily decay after death, and that when a man dies the soul continues to exist.

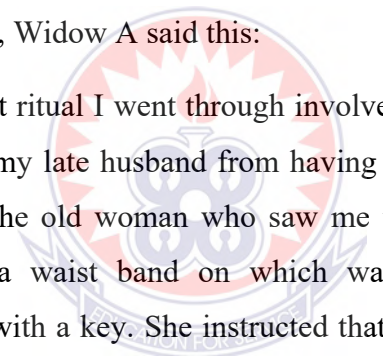
It is important to note that no religious community or culture can claim and prove the authenticity of their beliefs and practices to be the best to warrant universal acceptance. The bottom-line is that, there is a belief in the existence of spiritual realm where the dead reside, whatever name one group calls it does not matter. This determines the attitudes and the practices of the people religiously, culturally and

socially in their pursuit of life. Widowhood rites are therefore practised according to the religious belief of the people concerning life after death.

### **4.3 Significance of Widowhood rites**

#### **4.3.1 Severance of connection between the widow and the ghost of the husband**

The Akans believe that the soul of man continues to exist at ‘asamando’, the land of the dead, after physical death and it continues to interact with the living positively or negatively depending on our otherwise bad or good actions on earth. Based on this belief, when a woman loses a husband, she has to go through widowhood rites in order to sever the matrimonial link they had, because they now operate on different realms, physical and spiritual, as such they cannot marry. To sever the link between her and the late husband, Widow A said this:



“The next ritual I went through involved preventing the spirit of my late husband from having sex with me. To do this, the old woman who saw me through the rites brought a waist band on which was hung a small padlock with a key. She instructed that I should wear it until it is broken on its own. The explanation offered for this ritual was that my vagina had been locked spiritually to prevent the spirit of my late husband from having sex with me. Again, it would prevent men who have carnal desires for me from approaching me during the mourning period.” (26th May, 2011)

To explain this ritual, and buttress the point made by widow A, Queen A said this:

“In another ritual, the woman who sees the widowhood rites gives to the widow a waist band woven from a fibre of plantain tree. Three strands are selected and woven in to a single rope which the widow must put around her waist. The waist band, according to tradition

is something repugnant to the spirit of the deceased, so if the widow has it around her waist the spirit cannot come to the widow to have sex with her spiritually. It is a common belief that men who exceedingly loved their wives during their life time do follow them spiritually so this ritual is intended to sever the connection the ghost might have with the widow.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).

In narrating the rituals widows go through in her community J, one of the supervisors of widowhood rites offered the following:

“Furthermore, the widow is presented a waistband to wear. It is believed that the waist band around the waist of the widow would prevent the ghost of her late husband from having sex with her spiritually. The waistband is made of dried fibre of a plantain tree. Two or three fibres are woven in to a rope on to which a padlock is hung. With the waistband around the widow’s waist, the padlock must be placed on the widow’s vagina, signifying that the vagina is locked to prevent access to ghost of the late husband. In the weaving process, the leaves of ‘emme’ and ‘nnunum’ are put in- between the fibres. The leaves are believed to have the potency to driveaway spirits so having it around the widow’s waist would prevent the ghost from coming to have sex with the widow spiritually. The widow is instructed not to break the rope until it breaks by itself, and then she should throw it away. Since the rope is not made of any hard substance, continuous bathing over it for some days or some weeks would weaken it to break itself.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

The waist band is similar to what Sackey (66) describes as the sensempu, kuna suman (widows amulet) which is believed to have the power to drive away sasa (harmful spirits). In her words:



“According to the widows the sensempu as a whole has the power to drive away the spirit of the dead as well as evil spirits. It is believed that the spirit of the dead could have sexual intercourse with the living spouse if she were left unprotected.”

Again, the belief is held that the dead constantly visit the living; hence the likelihood is that the ghost of the husband of the widow would visit and join the widow at table when she is having her meals, especially when they ate together when he was alive. In order to prevent the ghost from dipping its hand into the food, the widow is advised to put a piece of charcoal in to her food; another way of severing connection the widow has with the late husband. To buttress this point widow A said the following:

“One aspect of the ritual was that, I was instructed not to take my supper after six o’ clock in the evening, and if that should happen, I should not forget to put a piece of charcoal in to the food, so that it would prevent the ghost of my husband from coming to eat with me.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011).

The ritual involving severance of connection between the widow and the ghost of the husband include possessing widow’s amulet and putting charcoal into the widow’s food, among others. These were mentioned by the respondents. In addition, which the respondents did not mention, was the parting ritual before the burial of the late husband. In this regard, Sackey, 75, narrates what pertains among the Asante, a sub-Akan ethnic group:

“The widows followed the corpse each carrying the kuna kukuo (pot). Inside this pot were placed heavy stones. At the crossroads to the cemetery the widows turned their back towards the corpse and threw down their kukuo breaking one after the other. Then without looking back, and as fast as they could, they returned home. When throwing the kukuo away the widow

uttered: ‘should we meet at the crossroads we should go our separate paths’. The breaking of the kukuo signifies separation and that the wives no longer have to cook (in the pot) for him. According to them this rite of separation helps the spirit to pass into the other world ‘because we have parted. We have nothing to do with each other again’. If it does not break, or the widow herself falls, it means serious trouble; ‘then he will follow you because we have not parted ways.’”

The two entities, the widow and the late husband now belong to different realms, corporeal and ethereal respectively, and therefore cannot do anything in common. It is believed that such contacts may affect the health of the widow, hence the need to sever their connection.

#### **4.3.2 Cleansing the Widow of Negativities Associated with the Husband’s Death**

Even though, death is an unavoidable experience facing every human being, its occurrence is not accepted as it is. In this light Bishop Sarpong (1974:23) states: “No matter how you view it, death is a social evil which disturbs or disrupts social equilibrium”. In the same vein, Asare Opoku (1977:134) asserts:

“But death is regarded as a wicked destroyer, a killer and a curse, which frustrates human effort. It brings about complete physical separation and constitutes a great loss not only to the immediate family in which it occurs, but also to the whole community.”

Seeing death to some extent as a curse which the entire society do not accept, the death of a husband, a dear one, and a life partner, carries something unpleasant considered as ‘dirt’ with it, as such the widow has to be cleansed of such dirt. On this aspect widow G had this to say:

“Three days after the burial of my husband, I was ushered in to widowhood rites. What I did was that I was made to take a ritual bath at a refuse dump for three consecutive days at dusk. I was informed that death of a husband is regarded as ‘mmusu’ and ‘dirt’, therefore taking bath at the refuse dump meant I was cleansing myself of anything bad, unpleasant and negative associated with the death of my husband.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).

On the same point, widow E also had this to say:

“I was confined in a room on Sunday at 6 o’clock in the evening, the day before the final funeral rites of my late husband. At dawn, the elderly woman who saw me through the widowhood rites and some women took me to a river in the town where I took my bath. After the ritual bath, I was made to discard the soap, towel and the sponge as well as the clothes I wore at that particular moment.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

There are varied forms of ritual for cleansing the widow of the negativities believed to be associated with the death of a spouse. Apart from what have been mentioned above, widow K said this:

“As part of the ritual, the woman who saw me through the entire rites instructed that my hair should be cut.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

Buttressing what the widows said concerning the cleansing ritual, Queen E had this to say:

“On the very day when the widowhood rites begin, the widow is made to take her bath at dawn in a stream, a river or at the back of the house, under the supervision of an elderly woman from the family of the late husband of the widow. This is seen as a ritual bath in that, after

the bath the widow discards all the items she has with her at that particular time, including towel, sponge, underwear and the clothes she wore. The ritual bath that she goes through spiritually cleanses her of anything bad associated with the death of the husband. She is washed clean and discards her clothes to symbolize that she has thrown away anything negative associated with the death of her husband.” (14<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).

Again, one of the elderly women 'I', who supervised one of the widows, said this:

“A widow is ushered in to widowhood rites three days after the burial of the husband, that is, on the final day when the funeral is coming to a formal end. On that day, the widow will be invited at dawn to the house where the late husband lied in state. Her hair would be cut, but if she protests it would be left uncut. The hair is cut to signify that she is being cleansed of the ‘dirt’ or whatever negative associated the death of the husband.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 2012).

It is noticed that ritual cleansing of the widows may take the form of hair cutting or taking a bath at a defined place or both. What is done among the people of Akuapem is mainly the ritual bath. The essence is to cleanse the widow of whatever is negative associated with the husband’s death which may affect her in one way or the other, according to their traditional religious belief.

Sackey (69) provides insightful explanation for pollution of the widow as a result of the death of the husband and her cleansing as she shares her field data as follows:

“During confinement, the widows could receive visitors or sympathizers, but speech was limited. The guests who came to ‘greet’ the widows, however, did not shake hands with them, instead they would bow on

courtesy or utter their word of greeting. It was explained that this behaviour was to avoid the spread of ritual pollution. Death, the agent of pollution must be stopped from taking away other people. Indeed, death is ‘dirt’ (Goody, 1962; 192) from which the widow should be cleansed through the performance of certain ceremonies, prohibitions and behaviour. According to Nana Akua Afriyie, the widow, ‘contact with anybody brings musuo (pollution), and musuo is contagious.’ Therefore, widows are under compulsion to bathe three times daily, early morning, noon and evening; this is a measure to symbolically minimize the alleged pollution.”

It is significant to note that ritual cleansing permeates almost in all the major religions of the world. For example, before every prayer is said by any moslem he/she must first perform an ablution to present himself/herself clean before Allah. Similarly, in the Roman Catholic Church service before the priest lifts the symbolism of the body and the blood of Jesus Christ in the form of the Host and Wine, he washes his hands saying God should cleanse him of all his iniquities. In Hinduism, the Hindus take ritual bath in the river Ganges as a ritual cleansing of their sins. In fact ritual cleansing, be it taking a bath, washing of hands and feet or any other form can be found in all religious practices and rites. It is therefore not surprising for widows to go through ritual cleansing in the form of taking a bath in the house or in a river or a stream. It is a traditional religious belief and should be respected as such.

#### **4.3.3 Social, Emotional and Psychological Support of Widowhood Rites**

“Social support is the hallmark of African culture, everybody is expected to be his brother’s keeper and suffer psychological buffer in times of need. With the

loss of a spouse, it is expected that the social network of the widow will spring into action to cushion the impact of loss by offering love, support, and much needed practical help and advice. And these tend to give comfort and reassurance.” (Olapegba and Chovwen, 2006: 837).

Widows therefore need social support from their various communities and close relations and friends to cope with their loss and grief.

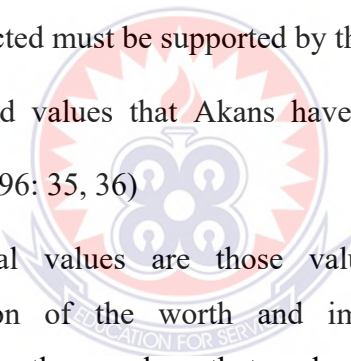
The loss of a husband generates a feeling of complete hopelessness to the widow, especially in a matrimonial relation where the husband and the wife loved each other so much so that nothing could separate them except death; or where the widow depended on the late husband for almost everything, that is, in a situation where the widow has no means of livelihood. In her state of total loss and grief, the widow is engulfed in a moment of intense emotional pain and mental agony. Some widows in this situation had ended up in psychiatric hospitals. Some who were not resilient enough to absorb those pains also die shortly after the burial of the husband. In order to avert or minimize this traumatic situation, the onus lies on the society to let the widow go through widowhood rites so as prepare the widow psychologically and emotionally to cope with her loss and grief so that she could re-integrate to society to resume her normal social life. This is premised on one of the values the Akan society or community places on the need to provide assistance to members in times of trouble, grief, loss or any calamity.

By nature, the Akan society has a sense of ‘we-feeling’ of solidarity towards its members. Two of Akan proverbs point to this value, that is, “Eka nnanti a na aka eto.” (When the heel is besmeared with anything, the buttock also gets besmeared on

squating). “Eka ani a na aka hwene.” (When an object enters the eye water oozes from the nose in reaction).

These two proverbs philosophically depict the communal nature of the Akan society and the responsibility it bears to help its members. The first proverb has it that, when one’s heel is besmeared, the moment one squats, the buttock too is besmeared. It means that when something affects any part of the body it will also affect some other part. The second proverb says that if something finds its way into one of the eyes or both, water oozes from the nose. The two proverbs succinctly provide and explain an Akan communal value that anything that affects any member of the community or society affects other members and the society in general, directly or indirectly, therefore whoever is affected must be supported by the other members of the society.

The communal spirit and values that Akans have and exhibit to its members is buttressed by Gyekye (1996: 35, 36)

The logo of the University of Education, Winneba, is a circular emblem. It features a central sunburst or starburst design. Below the sunburst, there are three stylized, interlocking shapes that resemble the letters 'U', 'E', and 'W'. The text 'UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA' is written around the top inner edge of the circle, and 'EDUCATION FOR SERVICE' is written around the bottom inner edge.

“Communal values are those values that express appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good. Examples of such communal values are sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony. In the social context of the community, each member acknowledges the existence of common values, obligations, and understandings and feels a loyalty and commitment to the community that is expressed through the desire and willingness to advance its interests. Members of community society are expected to demonstrate a concern for the well-being of others, to

do what they can to advance the common good, and generally to participate in the communal life.”

Based on this communal responsibility Widow O had this to say:

“When my husband died .I was informed by his relatives, then they gave me a black cloth to wear to identify my situation as a widow and also to mourn his demise. At this stage, some friends and my relatives kept me company and attended to my needs as a sympathetic gesture.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

In the same vein, widow N said this:

“When my husband died, it was formally announced to me by his relatives then they provided me with black cloth to wear to signify my status as a widow in mourning period. Some women were detailed to be with me, provide me with my needs and monitor my movements; however the very person who accompanied me wherever I went was also a widow who had gone through the rites before. She provided my food and the water I used to take my bath.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 2012).

With the company of some friends, relatives and some members of the society, the widow is consoled and prepared emotionally to cope with her loss and predicament in order to pull herself together to re-integrate back to society to resume her normal social life.

Again, the widow goes through another ritual which prepares her psychologically to resume her normal social and economic life. On this note, widow K said this:

“I was told to bring an exercise book and a pen, which I did. The elderly woman said some prayer over them asking for strength and prosperity in my career for the



rest of my life. The elderly woman further stated and assured me that as a teacher, the death of my husband should not psychologically affect my career, so following the ritual I should know that my late husband is no more to assist me so I should resume work and work very hard to provide for my needs.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

Similarly, widow J had this to say:

“A basket containing a hoe, machete and broom was brought and placed before me. One member of my late husband’s family stood before me and told me that all restrictions that were associated with widowhood were going to be removed. I was told to resume my normal house chores, whereupon a broom was placed before me. Again, I was told to go to farm, by virtue of my occupation as a farmer. In this regard, a basket containing a machete and a hoe was put before me and then the woman touched my head three times with it.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

Furthermore, Widow L said this:

“On the first day of the first death anniversary of my husband, I got up at dawn and wailed. At about 9 o’ clock in the morning, the relatives of my late husband and mine met at his house and poured libation, and asked for strength for me and prayed that the ghost of my late husband should stay away from me to let me resume my normal social life.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011).

In an explanation to the experiences of widows provided above, supervisor of widowhood rites G said the following:

“At one stage of the widowhood rites, the widow is encouraged to resume her normal social activities and

house chores. The ritual that is performed depends on the occupation of the widow. If the widow is a farmer for instance, a machete, hoe and other farm implements are put into a basket and placed before her. The supervisor then would tell her to resume her normal work. At this juncture, special prayers are said for her for renewal of strength so that she would be successful in her occupation to earn a living for herself and children.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

Furthermore, as a social support instrument to prepare the widow to re-integrate into society, widowhood cultural practice prepares the widow psychologically to re-marry. The final ritual which is performed usually at the first death anniversary of the husband is the case. On this issue, widow G had this to say:

“The ritual bath which I took at dawn and dusk every day, and the wearing of black cloth continued for a year, that is, up to the first death anniversary of the death of my husband. On that day the old woman who supervised the rites made me take my usual early morning bath and dressed in white to signify the end of the entire widowhood rites. Then a simple Christian prayer was said in the presence of some relatives, friends and church members. Thereafter, I was told that I could re-marry.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

Similarly, Widow F said the following:

“On the first death anniversary of my husband I was accompanied to his grave by some members of his family and those of mine. Over there, a final prayer was said to bid him goodbye. On my return from the grave yard, a ram was slaughtered and my feet were sprinkled with small blood to cleanse me finally. After that I took a bath and put on white cloth to show that I have

finished the entire widowhood rites. I was then informed that I could re-marry or take a concubine.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

Moreover, widowhood cultural practice does not only prepare the widow to re-marry, but it also serves as a platform upon which the widow who depended mostly on her late husband for survival should be supported materially and financially, until she re-marries. This is typical in a situation where the widow is too old to re-marry, or in rural and sub-urban areas where women education and economic empowerment are very low. Widow E, a pensioner, whose educational level was primary six and relatively, too old to re-marry said this:

“On the first death anniversary of my husband, I got up very early in the morning and I was made to take a bath. After that the relatives of my late husband presented white cloth to me which I wore. After libation prayer, I was informed that the entire widowhood rites had ended, and for that matter I could re-marry. In my case, I told them that I would not re-marry, considering my age at seventy. So I am still married to the family. I stay in my late husband’s house together with his relatives. The customary successor of my late husband supports me materially and financially, and I am living peacefully with them.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

#### **4.4 Cruel and De-humanizing (Negative) Aspects of Widowhood Rites**

The study sought to find some aspects of widowhood rites among the people in the Akuapem-South Municipal district which apparently are described as de-humanizing and cruel. In answering the question posed to the widow respondents as to which of the stages or aspects of the widowhood rites they did not like and why? The following responses were made: Widow K said this:

“I cannot say I do not like this ritual or that because none of the ritual was harsh or severe or dehumanizing which demanded any complaint, so I have nothing bad against the entire widowhood rites. Besides, I have the belief that those rituals were meant to cleanse me of any negativity associated with the death of my husband, strengthen and sever the connections I had between me and the spirit of my husband so that I can re-marry. With this belief and the nature of the rites, nothing concerning the rites bothered me.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

In the same vein, widow L had this to say:

“Even though, I did not go through any harsh treatment, I see the whole thing nasty, because it is a practice which belongs to pagans. As a Christian, it is at variance with my faith. I went through it without any interest, only to satisfy tradition. One aspect I detested was my hair that was to be shaved, but when I objected, it was stopped.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011)

One of the queens, C, observed that,

“Widowhood rites in this town do not involve anything harsh or inhuman; it is always smooth and peaceful.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

Again, widow supervisor G also said:

“Widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem do not involve any harsh or severe ritual. It is only some few hours of ritual within a day, so I have not heard any compliant whatsoever against the rites.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2011)

From the respondents, it is observed that widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem are not harsh, torturous or dehumanizing. This observation is similar among the people of Asante as Sackey (2001: 60) states, “Among the Asante, the rites are

observed by any person, high or low, upon the death of a spouse and are less rigorous.”

However, in some communities, there are several reports of some widows being treated severely by their sisters-in-laws and some other relatives of the late husband of the widow. The apparent severe treatment is not part of the widowhood ritual package, but a time of settling scores with the widow once and for all, due to the kind of behaviour she had exhibited to some of the family members of the husband or a kind of treatment meted out to the husband during some time in his life time. In this regard, queen A had this to say:

“Widowhood rites among the Akuapem is not rigorous. However, if any widow would be maltreated while going through the rites would stem from bad relationship she had established with the relatives of the late husband, for example, when the widow constantly frowned on the visit of any of the relatives of the husband to their matrimonial home. Besides, there are some married women who engage in secret affair with other men apart from their husbands which are secretly known by some of the relatives of the husbands. Upon the death of the husband, then they would use it as a basis to maltreat the widow concerned, but that may be insults and refusing her certain privileges she is customarily entitled to receive from the late husband’s relatives, such as clothes for the funeral and financial upkeep during the funeral of the husband. Good wives are never badly treated by the relatives of their late husbands when they become widows, but they are very well assisted to cope with their grief and situation. Even, when the late husband and the surviving wife were residing patrilocally or avunculocally, the widow is

allowed residence until she chooses to re-marry another man.” (16<sup>th</sup> July 2011)

This may perhaps confirm what widow A said concerning the bad relationship she had with the relatives of her late husband resulting from the accusation that she was not providing food for the husband.

“My husband fell sick and died in the course of treatment, but I was accused of having a hand in his death by his relatives. The fact was that my husband was a drunk and as a result of that he fell sick and died out of hunger. They branded me wicked and insulted me very well which created some tension between us. However, they saw me through widowhood rituals, but on the first anniversary of the death of my husband, neither the woman who ushered me into widowhood rites nor any one of the relatives of my late husband showed up. Upon the advice of my own relatives, I took the last ritual bath and I dressed in white clothes provided by myself. Thereafter, a meal of ‘fufu’ with ‘fowl soup’ was prepared for me and those present to enjoy, and that ended the widowhood rites. There was a conflict between me and the relatives of my late husband that is why they did not turn up to see me through the final stage, I think so, and I have never seen any one of them ever since.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011).

Perhaps this may be one of the reasons why in some communities, widows were made to swear that they had no hand in the death of their husbands (Goody, 188; Olapegba and Chovwen, 837).

It is important to note that in Ghana in general and among the Akan in particular, marriage is not a union between two individuals, a husband and a wife, but between

two families, the family of the husband and that of the wife. Gyekye (1996:79).

Gyekye further explains this statement thus:

“the statement means, according to my understanding and personal experience, is that the man should-and is expected to show interest in the affairs of his wife’s lineage, and the woman in those of her husband’s lineage, to the extent possible. If the couple becomes cocooned in, consumed with their own affairs-the affairs of their nuclear family or household-they would be branded as selfish. The couple could, by their egoistic conduct, not only invite the moral and social disdain of their lineages, but also cause a denial of the good-will and needed help that could come to them from their lineages.”

Within this context of marriage definition, it is important for married couples to establish good inter-personal relationship between the families of their spouses so that there will always be the good-will to come to the assistance of every one financially, socially, emotionally and psychologically where the need be. It does not necessarily mean that married couples should succumb to any unnecessary pressure of demand or unacceptable behaviours from relatives without any question.

Complaints are rife in our communities concerning wives who frown on genuine demands of assistance made by their in-laws and brothers and sisters of their husbands or the visits to their matrimonial homes to the extent that they quarrel and strain their hitherto good relationship they had built. However, the in-laws, brothers and sisters of the wives are warmly welcome to their matrimonial homes for any length of time, or the demands they make do not provoke any question from the wives. Wives with this kind of attitude towards the relatives of their husbands may

not be properly supported socially, emotionally and financially in the event of going through widowhood rites.

It is important to note that among the Akans, a widower may be given another woman to replace the late wife so that the two families can still maintain their conjugal union. This happens when the family of the late wife sees the surviving husband as a very good person by all standards, to all the family members of the late wife, that is, showing much interest in the affairs of the family of the late wife with selfless and concerned gesture. This is how Akan marriage is supposed to be; anything less than that depicts the egoistic nature of whoever it is coming from and it is frowned upon by the entire group or community.

While we condemn any kind of violence or anything untoward meted out to widows during widowhood rites, it is important to stress that women should be open, courteous and respectful to the family members of their husbands in order to maintain good and cordial relationship always, so that each one should be his brother's keeper; this is one of the cherished values Africans in general, and the Akans in particular, espouse.

In a verbal confrontation of anger between a woman and her sister-in-law, of which I was an eye witness, the woman in an effusive vituperation said: "My absence from this country for three years created the chance for your brother to build this house for you stupid and good-for-nothing people". It was an open secret that the wife was preventing the husband from putting up a building for his parents, even though the husband was well-to-do. That confirmed the suspicion of selfishness the family members of the husband had of the woman towards them. The woman's abusive words offended the entire family members of the husband to the extent that traditional



arbitration was consulted to settle the case in order to appease the family members of the husband. Once a conflict of this nature has been provoked and established between the wife and the relatives of the husband, the woman should expect little or no social support from the relatives of the husband in the event of the death of the husband as a widow.

Olepegba and Chovwen (2006: 834,840) state that:

“Widowhood cultural practices have significant effect on the perceived social support of widows; widows who experienced lenient form of widowhood practice have more positive perception of social support than those who experienced harsh form of practice. Widows who experienced very severe and dehumanizing forms of rites tend to see those around them as hostile and unconcerned.”

This statement of finding is significant, in that there are certain conditions in which a widow can receive a lenient form of widowhood practice which correlates positively with her perception of social support provided by those around her to the extent of making her overcome her grief and situation faster. The question then arises, under what conditions would a widow receive severe form of practice from the same group or community? This may boil down to the relationship that existed previously between the widow and the relatives of her late husband before his death, whether good or bad.

It is significant to note that good and cordial relationship between a wife and the relatives of her husband before his death reflect in lenient form of widowhood rites which is more supportive for the widow to cope with her situation and re-integrate her into society. I see and term this as cause - and - effect reaction or boomerang - effect

of social interaction, where good actions attract good reaction and bad actions likewise attract bad reaction. From this point of view, it is important to note that in all our dealings and actions in various capacities and responsibilities in social interactions and relationships, good actions in the form of respect, honesty and selflessness must guide our conduct.

#### **4.4.1 Consequences for Failing or Refusing to go through Widowhood Rites**

Widowhood cultural practice among the people of Akuapem-South municipal district is tagged optional for women who lose a husband, but the study revealed that whoever lost a husband irrespective of her educational, occupational and religious background went through willy-nilly. The participants went through the rites under different compelling reasons, which apparently made it compulsory in nature. Widow O gave her reason for going through the rites as follows:

“I am a Christian, but I went through widowhood rites to satisfy traditional and cultural demand.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).

Widow N also gave her reasons as follows:

“When my husband died, I made up my mind not to go through widowhood rites, because I considered it as a ritual at variance with my Christian faith, however, a close friend of mine advised me to observe it. She explained to me that there are hidden negative consequences for refusing to observe it, so I went through the rites.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 2012).

In the same vein, widow’ I’ had this to say:

“I had the belief that the rites would cleanse me of anything bad associated with the death of my late husband. Again, I believed that it would break the spiritual

connection I had with the spirit of my late husband so that when I re-marry his spirit would not torment me.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 2011).

Expressing her reason differently, widow L said:

“I loved my husband very much so I felt I was going through the rites in his honour, and I did so without any worry at all.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011).

Widow F also shared a first- hand experience she gathered from a widower friend who refused to go through the rites. She recounted:

“A widower friend told me his experience that when he lost one of his wives he refused to go through widowhood rites. After the wife’s burial, any time he tried to have sexual affair with the other surviving wife he lost erection. He then attributed that experience to his refusal to perform the rites. So he said he was making the effort to go through the rites. I have not met him ever since to ask of the outcome.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011).

The people who were regarded as the custodians of the culture of the various localities where the study took place variously spelt out the consequences that might befall a widow who failed to observe the rites. On this note Queen A said that:

“A widow can choose to avoid the widowhood rites completely because no widow is forced to go through them. However, if any bad omen befalls her, which is likely to happen, she alone bears it.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).

In the same vein, Queen D recounted:

“If a widow refuses or fails to go through the rites, unpleasant and negative consequences follow her. For example, she may fail in most of her undertakings for a reason that she had disgraced the husband, and his spirit (ghost) would not back her in

almost everything she does; typically, failure in trading, subsequent marriages and so on.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011).

Widowhood rites supervisor ‘I’ said this:

“It is believed that if the rites are not performed the matrimonial and spiritual bond between the wife and the late husband would be intact which would keep the spirit of the deceased close to the surviving wife, sometimes giving her sepulchral feeling of the presence of an unseen entity, when alone.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 2012).

Widowhood rites supervisor G also said:

“There was a young woman who refused to go through widowhood rites. After the funeral of the husband, she began to behave like a lunatic until she died. Most people attributed her lunatic condition and death to her refusal to go through widowhood rites.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012).

The belief of respondents F and G were that the conditions of the widow and the widower were their refusal to go through these widowhood rites. This notwithstanding, there could be a physiological cause of the widows lunatic and the widower’s erectile dysfunction conditions which had nothing to do with their refusal to go through the rites, but that is beside the point. It is a belief which hinges on the unknown as pertains to almost all religious persuasions, that certain occurrences are acts of God for omission or commission of a responsibility which no one dares to question for fear of blasphemy. Matters of religious beliefs are sacrosanct in religious domain, therefore for one to condemn the practices deep- rooted in the beliefs held by a particular group of people while one holds one’s beliefs sacrosanct and superior to other group, is prejudicial. African beliefs and practices such as widowhood rites have suffered much of these.

## 4.5 How the Widows Felt About the Experiences They Went Through

### 4.5.1 Dress code/Ritual for Widows

When the death of a husband is formally announced to the widow, she is then identified as a widow by wearing black cloth or any other colour depending on what is acceptable among a particular society, community or ethnic group. Among the Asante, the widow wears *kuntukunu*, a black cloth (up) and *kobene*, red cloth (down), *dansinkran* hairstyle and carries *sensempu*, widow's amulet. The black cloth is a symbol of mourning, after having suffered the loss of a loved one, and the red depicts intense grief (Sackey pp 66).

In the case of the Akuapem, the widows wore black clothes symbolizing the mourning of the loss of a dear and the intense grief they had been thrown in to. The widow is expected to be in this kind of dress until the final rite which takes place on the first death anniversary of the husband during which time the widow would wear white clothes. Whilst in the mourning clothes, the widow is not expected to have any sexual intercourse with any man. On the dress code, widow C stated:

“When my husband died, it was announced to me by his relatives, and then they provided me with black cloth to wear to signify my status as a widow in mourning period.” Widow G also indicated “When my husband died, it was announced to me formally by his relatives, though I was aware of it. They then gave me black cloth to wear to signify that I was a widow.” (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011)

As what pertains among the people of Akuapem, a supervisor of widowhood rites H, said this: “As custom demands, as soon as the announcement of the death of the husband has been made to the wife, the widow must appear in mourning cloth, usually black until she is formally taken out from widowhood at the first anniversary of the death of the husband.” (14<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).

Queen C also had this to say:

“When woman loses a husband in this community, the relatives of the late husband officially inform the widow of the death and then present to her black cloth. She is expected to remain in black as a sign of mourning her husband. Also to signify that she has lost a husband and therefore a widow, she wears black beads around her neck and wrists.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011).

This dress code/ritual of the widow does not place her in any mode of derogatory or discriminatory identification. It is a way of identifying her as a woman who has lost a dear husband and therefore in an intense grief. She is in a complete state of hopelessness and therefore needs public sympathy and support to cope with her situation.

As pertains in all cultures and religious practice, colour symbolism plays significant role in the life and affairs of all peoples in the world, in times of grief and happiness, and at different occasions of their socio-cultural life.” With reference to Catholic Priests they wear traditional cloth of violet to signify sadness at funerals.” Amoako-Atta Fosu (2000). It is therefore not strange that among the Akuapem black apparel and beads serve as identification symbol of grief and mourning of a dear one, a husband, wife, mother, father or any member of the society. However, the length of time to be in mourning apparel depends on the closeness of the kinship tie or the relationship, as in the case of mother, father, wife and husband. In the case of husband and wife, the surviving spouse must be in mourning cloth for one year.

It is noteworthy to mention that status or position identification in the form of dress code is not only peculiar to widows. In almost all religious organizations of the world, various dress codes are used to identify the status or the position held by the members

of the group. In the Roman Catholic Church for example, different dress codes are worn by the priests, the bishops and the Pope. The nuns wear the habit and the veil to be identified as such. Similarly, in the protestant, pentecostal and charismatic churches, the priests wear different types of attire and cassocks and white clerical collar as their identification mark.

In some religious organizations such as Buddhism and the Hare Krishna Movement, monks are given identification hair cut to differentiate them from ordinary members. From these examples given apart from spiritual reasons, if widows subject themselves to be identified for a period of time by wearing a particular kind of dress or cloth so that the members of the society could accord her the necessary sympathy and assistance to cope with her loss how can it be described as an act affecting her psychological wellbeing as some people tend to describe widowhood rites? Olapegba and Chovwen, 2006. From the study none of the respondents complained of the dress code/ritual. This suggests that the people had no aversion to it, as nothing offended them in this regard.

It is significant to note that even though the widow is aware of the death of her husband, she must be informed officially of it by the relatives of the late husband. This announcement prepares the widow for the process of widowhood ritual which is their onerous responsibility to carry it out and supported by the widow's family. This is premised on the fact that it is the man and his family who contract marriage between the wife and her family, therefore on his demise official announcement has to be made to prepare the wife to go through widowhood so as to sever the matrimonial link forever. In a situation where there is a grudge between widow and the family of

late husband, the family may refuse to see the widow through the rites, in this case, her own family have to see her through the rites to sever the matrimonial link.

#### **4.5.2 Confinement of Widows**

From the study, it was revealed that confinement of widows for the widowhood rites ranged between one and three days. On this aspect, widow E had this to say:

“I was confined in a room on Sunday at six o’clock in the evening, the day before the final funeral rites of my late husband. At dawn, the following day, the elderly woman and some other women who saw me through the widowhood rites took me to a nearby river where I took a ritual cleansing bath.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

Widow H also said this:

“When my husband died I was confined in a room for three days before I was ushered into widowhood other rituals.” (14<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

All the respondents were confined in a room upon receiving the announcement of the death of their husbands. Close friends and relatives were then detailed to keep them company and provide their needs. One of the respondents, Queen D had this to say:

“After the burial of the husband, the widow is confined in a room between one and three days before she is ushered into widowhood rites, which begins and ends on the same day. While in confinement, the widow is consoled by her close friends and family members as well as some widows who had gone through the rites. This prepares her psychologically to cope with the situation.” (9<sup>th</sup> April, 2011)

Confinement of widows has been a subject of criticism as an act which affects the well-being of widows and to some extent an infringement on their rights. The study revealed that confinement of the widows was intended to be a period when some widows who had gone through the unpleasant experience of losing their husbands get



the opportunity to talk to the newly bereaved widows and share their experience so that those going through the ritual for the first time could take consolation from their experiences and cope with their gloomy situation.

With the exception of Widow C, who did not like the number of days confined, none of the widows complained about it. On this note she had this to say to show her feelings about it:

“The stage I did not like was confinement. For the confinement, I think three days was too long for me.” (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011)

Widow C did not altogether condemn confinement as part of the widowhood rites, but the period. In her opinion, one day was sufficient. This meant that confinement which was part of widowhood ritual did not affect the widows' sense of well-being, not to the extent of hurting them. I think the word 'confinement' associated with widowhood rites gives different interpretation to people who do not fully understand and appreciate African socio-cultural practices. To such people, confinement may erroneously connote a house-arrest situation where the widow who has not committed any heinous crime is detained. The widow is not kept under any lock and key. She only remains indoors with the company of sympathizers, family members, and friends to be consoled.

In almost all rites of passage of Africans, a period of confinement is part of the ritual. For instance, during girls' puberty rites, the girl to be initiated is confined. Under confinement, she is taught to understand the situation, that is, the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood, the implications, the problems and the responsibilities associated with that period. The young girl is made to understand fully

her physical body changes, her emotional, mental and psychological developments as well as the implications of engaging in pre-marital sex. Similarly, a newly wedded wife under traditional marriage ceremony is confined and taught the implications, problems and responsibilities of marriage so that the marriage could endure.

It is important to appreciate that the period of confinement associated with rites of passage in Ghana in particular and Africa in general serves as a platform for providing counselling service to those who go through them so that they would understand and be fully prepared emotionally, psychologically, socially and culturally to enter and come out of the rites positively different than they entered them.

#### **4.5.3 Mouth-touching of Widows (Anoka)**

One of the rites the widows experienced was ‘mouth-touching’. This rite, according to the respondents took place in the morning in the house where the husband lay in state. The rite involved the elderly woman who supervised the rite touching the mouth of the widow with assorted food stuff while at the same time whispering some words. This rite is predicated on the fact that the widow being ushered into widowhood rites is not supposed to eat anything that is harvested beneath the earth, that is, root crops such as cocoyam, cassava, yam and ‘fufu’ (Sackey:2001). It is important to realize that plantain is not a root crop and it is not pounded alone into ‘fufu’, it is always mixed with cassava to give the required palatable taste. It is in the form of ‘ampesi’ that is, cooked plantain and stew that the widow can eat. A widow in this situation is said to be fasting. Therefore, to break the fasting, there must be a rite to perform, that is, touching the mouth of the widow with the foodstuff as well as others. Widow C narrated her experience:

“I responded to the call at dawn made by the woman who saw me through widowhood rites, that was the third day after the burial of my late husband. On reaching there, some members of their family had gathered and I was made to sit down before a display of assorted foodstuff and vegetables such as cocoyam, cassava, plantain, garden eggs, palm nuts and some salt. Except the salt, each of the food substances had been cut into two, and the elderly woman took each, hovered it over the salt and touched my mouth with it three times, each time asking me to repeat after her some words I have forgotten. Then the old woman said I could now eat any of the traditional dishes of the Akuapem, especially ‘fufu’ without any let or hindrance.” (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011)

On the same rite, widow J stated:

“Two days after the burial of my husband, the woman who saw me through widowhood rites woke me up at dawn and told me that she was going to see me through widowhood rites. She made me sit on a stool and brought some cassava, cocoyam, plantain and some vegetables in their raw state before me. She took each of the food stuff and touched my mouth with it while whispering some words I did not hear clearly.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011)

When asked why they went through that rite, they answered that was meant to break the food taboo placed on the widow for not to eat the main dish of the Akuapem, ‘fufu’. One of the widows, M, explained why she went through the above-named rite.

“The old woman who saw me through the rite explained to me that, the food items she used to touch my mouth signified that I should endeavour to overcome my grief and

develop an appetite for food and eat our main traditional dish, ‘fufu’ so that I would not fall sick from hunger.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

To ascertain the veracity of the narration provided by the widows, one of the queens

A said this:

“At the moment, wake-keeping and burial take place on Fridays and Saturdays respectively, followed by funeral and family gathering on Sundays and Mondays. Among the Akuapem, Tuesdays mark the end of the funeral of any ordinary man. From the Friday when the funeral starts, the widow is in intense grief and does not feel like eating. She is therefore presumed to be fasting. During the night of the second day of the burial of the husband, the widow is ushered into widowhood. After taking a ritual bath at dawn the widow is summoned to the house where the late husband lay in state. The widow is made to sit on a stool and assorted foodstuff and vegetables are displayed before her. The elderly woman picks each of the food stuff and touched the widow’s mouth with it. As she touches the mouth of the widow with the food stuff, she says something like this, ‘henceforth, if you eat say, garden eggs may your cheeks not swell, if you eat pepper may you not speak words that are hot like pepper’, until all the foodstuff and vegetables brought have been used. This is done to signify that the widow can now eat anything including ‘fufu’, that as a result being in widowhood she was ‘forbidden’ to eat.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

In trying to find out what widows felt about the food taboo, none of them complained about it as having placed them under compulsory fasting. Apart from ‘fufu’ they were

allowed to eat other food substance such as kenkey and fish, rice and other food substances that are not indigenous to the Akuapem.

The explanation offered by 'D,' one of the supervisors of widowhood rites succinctly provides an answer as to why widows did not complain of the seemingly compulsory fasting they were placed under. She has this to say:

“While in confinement, and during the funeral rites of the husband, the widow does not eat ‘fufu’, the main dish for dinner among the Akuapem. This signifies that the widow is fasting. It is important to note that, the woman in intense grief as a result of having lost a dear husband loses appetite and refuses to eat. However, if it is ‘fufu’ that she would not eat, she is given any other type of food and she is encouraged to eat so that she does not fall sick. Among the Akan failure or refusal to eat ‘fufu’ means one is fasting.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011)

From what the respondents said, the widow is not compulsorily placed under fasting as some people allege and see African widowhood cultural practice as something that does not augur well for the widows and therefore infringing on their fundamental human rights. I have never heard any criticism against fasting in Christianity where a devout member beseeching God to grant a request is put under a number of days of fasting. Christians and Moslems as well as some other religions are enjoined by their scriptures and tradition to fast at certain times of the year, yet that does not affect their wellbeing. It is therefore prejudicial to the sanctity of African religious beliefs and practices which determine their socio-cultural practices for anyone to believe that widows undergoing widowhood rites are forced to go through a period of fasting against their will and therefore affect their wellbeing and infringing on their rights.

As a matter of fact, when one is traumatized and therefore in psychological and emotional turmoil, one loses appetite and eats very little or nothing at all. This is the exact situation of a widow who has lost a dear husband, a life partner for good, never to meet again. She would automatically lose appetite and may refuse to eat, especially, the food that she is used to as a main daily dish. In order to whet the appetite of the widow so that she could at least eat a little, if nothing at all, to preserve her energy and remain healthy, other food substances not the main traditional dish are introduced and allowed to be eaten, for example, tea and bread, kenkey and fish and so no. This may offer an explanation to the submission made by Sackey (70) that:

“...meals made from imported food items such as wheat, bread, and tea are not prohibited and the widows, even though they are ‘fasting’ can partake of such foods. This means that the ‘fast’ allows only non-indigenous food items which the Asante do not consider as ‘food’.”

This explanation does not negate what Sackey said concerning another reason for the food taboo which is more of spiritual significance, that is:

“The taboo on root crops could have certain symbolic meanings, two of which come to mind, namely, that the earth is sacred and contact with the widow who is a symbol of pollution is irreconcilable. Secondly, the earth as the abode of the dead, should not be disturbed until the dead have been put away” (p70).

From the study, none of the widow respondents complained of the food taboo as a rite which affected their sense of well-being. It is therefore unacceptable for anyone to brand or generalize widowhood cultural practice as a platform for making widows suffer hunger against their will.

#### 4.5.4 Taunting of Widows

Another rite which the widows went through following the ‘mouth-touching’ was how they were taunted to induce them to weep bitterly. Widow ‘B’ narrated her experience:

“On the day that marked the final funeral ceremony when the customary successor to my late husband was to be shown to me by his relatives, I met a section of his relatives including his brothers and sisters. At the gathering, they demanded money from me insinuating that when my husband was alive, I was the only person who benefitted mostly from his income and hard work, so as they are seeing me through widowhood rites, I should pay a fee. At this juncture, some accused me falsely of being rude to them when my husband was alive. They demanded from me in the old currency, two hundred thousand cedis (¢200,000.00). However, after pleading for reduction, I was made to pay one half of the amount earlier demanded. That amount was used to buy a fowl, some food stuff and vegetables to prepare fufu for me. After eating the food, I was informed that the rites have come to an end until the first death anniversary of my husband.” (9<sup>th</sup> April, 2011)

When I asked the widow to explain why she went taunted and provoked she could not offer any explanation. Widow C also shared her experiences:

“Three days after the burial of my husband, I was invited by his close relatives to the house where my husband lay in state. Over there they insulted me saying I was wicked and selfish because when my husband was alive I was unwilling to admit any of his relatives to our matrimonial home so that they too could enjoy some of

the fruits of his labour. Then a big bowl was brought and placed before me and I was asked to weep into the bowl until it was full of tears. I felt I was being maltreated and in fact. I wept bitterly for some time. After that they asked me to provide some money to be used to prepare some food for me to end my fasting and the widowhood rites. I provided one hundred and fifty old Ghanaian cedis (¢150,000.00) which was used to buy some cassava, plantain, fish and other ingredients for preparation of ‘fufu’ for me. After eating, I was informed that, I had finished with the entire widowhood rites. However, I should remain in black clothes and take my bath at dawn and dusk until the first anniversary of the death of my late husband.” (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011)

When I inquired for the reason why she was taunted she could not offer any tangible answer. However, the queens and the women who saw the widows through the rites recounted similar experiences and responses. Widowhood rites supervisor ‘G’ had this to say:

“After the mouth-touching rite, some close relatives of the widow’s husband create a mock-confrontational scene in order to collect some amount of money from the widow to prepare ‘fufu’ for her. What is usually done is that some of the relatives of the late husband would falsely accuse the widow of being rude to them when the husband was alive. Some also would say that the widow was the sole beneficiary of the late husband’s wealth, so as she is being seen through widowhood rites by them she must pay a fee.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)



When I asked the specific amount, she said that was negotiable. She further explained that the mock-confrontational scene was done without any malice. It was just to create justifiable grounds to collect an amount of money from the widow to prepare nice meal for her to signify that she was out of widowhood rites, and that she should eat any type of food to maintain sound health so as to resume her usual social activities.

On this ritual Queen B had this to say:

“The widow is summoned to the house where the husband lay in state. Over there, she is taunted by the relatives of the late husband saying, ‘when your husband was alive you were the prime beneficiary of his earnings, so upon his death, as we are cleansing you by way of seeing you through widowhood rites, you should pay us an amount of money’. Someone may say that the widow is maltreated in this case, that is not so. The taunting is only a mock-confrontational scene of creating a justifiable way to charge to provide an amount of money for the preparation of festive meal for the widow and the close relatives present in order to break the food ban placed on her before the burial of her late husband. The relatives of the deceased then charge a negotiable fee.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

The queen further intimated that the amount of money taken from the widow served two purposes. One purpose was to prepare food for the widow in order to break the food ban placed on her. The other purpose was to give the remaining amount of money to the widow after undergoing another ritual which she described as follows:

“The woman who is supervising the widowhood rites takes the remaining amount of money and puts it into the widow’s right palm three times, each time saying, ‘if you work and get money, do not waste it, keep and use it frugally for your upkeep because

your husband is no more.’ The third time, the widow keeps the money.” (17<sup>th</sup> April, 2012)

From the experiences narrated by the widows, I got the impression that the ritual was tantamount to extortion, but the explanations offered by the queens and the women who saw the widows through the rites proved otherwise.

#### **4.5.5 Sexual taboo (Restrictions) for Widows**

The widow is placed under sex taboo, that is, not to have sexual relation with any man until the first death anniversary of the late husband during which time the final funeral rites would be observed and the widow would shed the black apparel she has been wearing since the death of the husband (Goody, 194, 196: Sackey 60). The last ritual observed at this stage finally severs the matrimonial link the widow has with the late husband’s relatives with respect to the responsibilities they have for the widow’s financial and social support as well as the control of her sexual activity. After the final ritual during the first death anniversary of the husband, the widow dons white apparel signifying successful passage of widowhood rites and her readiness to re-marry.

From the experiences of the respondents, none of them complained of what they went through, as to staying sex-free for one year, except widow ‘C’ who had this to say:

“I do not have any aversion for staying one year without sex in bitter remembrance of my husband; however, if a widow is very young then staying one year without sex may be too long for her. In my case, one year came without my notice that I have stayed without sex for that period following the death of my husband.” (10<sup>th</sup> December, 2011)

In response to the sentiment expressed by widow A, 92 year old, the oldest of the queens (Queen A) said the following:

“If any widow complains of abstinence from sex for a year for the main reason of mourning the late husband, then the widow did not love her husband or she was engaged in extra marital affair when the husband was alive. I have had the opportunity of counselling many widows to re-marry after several years of the death of their husbands. What I gathered from the interactions I had with them was that they really loved their husbands and doubted whether they could get other men as compatible as their husbands. Some had never had sex with any other man several years after the death of their husbands. So to stay one year without sex after the death of a husband is not any ordeal or an inhibition a good woman who really loved her husband cannot bear.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

#### **4.6 The Reaction of Widows about the Experiences they went through**

Widowhood cultural practice has generally been described as dehumanizing, harsh, cruel, torturous and other derogatory words which connote barbarism on the part of those who see the widows through it, coercive practice forced on voiceless women and uncivilized nature of the society which practise it, that is, a society that does not have advanced culture. Whether to justify the description or not it is very significant to listen to those who go through them and the custodians of the culture of the society so as to find out the rationale behind the practice and then pass fair and objective comments.

From the study, participants did not meet any of the negative and derogatory descriptions such as de-humanizing, cruel and so on. Therefore, they did not see the

need to do away with widowhood cultural practice completely. In view of this, Widow 'E' reacted:

“None of the rites was harsh, severe or de-humanizing which demanded any complaint so I have nothing bad against the entire widowhood rites.” (12<sup>th</sup> August, 2011).

Widow 'D' also said:

“I did not experience anything bad so it should be continued for posterity, because after the rites I felt psychologically and emotionally relieved.” (26<sup>th</sup> May, 2011)

Widow 'L' also said:

“Even though, I did not go through any harsh treatment, I see the whole thing as a nasty practice, because it belongs to pagans. I only went through it to satisfy traditional demand.” (9<sup>th</sup> June, 2011).

Widow L did not go through any harsh ritual which should warrant any negative and derogatory description, that is, an important point to note. However, in her opinion, it was nasty practice which belonged to pagans. Really, she should have refused to go through the rites because she was not forced to do so. It could be inferred that she was not very strong in her religious faith as to the protection she would get from refusal to go through the rites. She was only afraid of the unknown consequences for refusing to go through the rites. On the other hand, going through the rites to satisfy tradition and at the same time saying it belonged to pagans, is an indication of assuming self-demeaning posture, because, in true sense of the word, she would be seen as a pagan, by her own description. Whatever compelling reason that made her go through the rites was beside the point. It indicates that there are very strong reasons behind it that

that make refusal to go through them a very difficult decision, and therefore seen as a compulsory practice for anyone who loses a spouse.

To add to what the widows felt about widowhood rites, Head of Family ‘L’ said:

“Widowhood cultural practice among the Akuapem does not involve any harsh or cruel ritual to make any widow get hurt or deepen her already painful experience of losing a husband. Widowhood rites practised some years ago are not what are being practised now. The rites are constantly undergoing changes and modifications to meet the exigencies of the time so we should maintain and practice them as a people.” (16<sup>th</sup> July, 2011)

In trying to find out how the people viewed widowhood cultural practice one of widowhood rites supervisor ‘I’, had this to say:

“Widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem do not involve any harsh or repugnant practice which is inhuman to injurious to the widow so, as a people we must practise it. At present, I do not think any aspect should be changed, because the practice itself is always undergoing some modifications. Widows who go through the rites do not complain so it must be practised. Even though I am a Christian, I do not see widowhood rites a bad practice so we should practise it.” (25<sup>th</sup> February, 1012)

One of the queens, D aged 73 also said: “Widowhood rites have gone through several changes since I was born. The practice does not involve any ritual which affects the widow. I want it to be done as it is in the Christian way or the traditional way.” (9<sup>th</sup> April, 2011)

From the study, respondents saw widowhood cultural practice as a good cultural heritage which should be practised because it did not involve anything negative.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter deals with the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the research findings. The main objective of the study was to find out what widows in the Akuapem-South municipality felt about widowhood cultural practice and what they went through as widows. The summary is sub-divided into four main themes, that is, the origins of widowhood cultural practice, the reasons and significance of widowhood rites, negative aspects of widowhood rites and what the widows felt about the experiences they went through and why they failed to complain of what they went through.

#### 5.1 Summary of Research Findings

From the study, it was found out that widowhood cultural practice among the people of Akuapem-South municipality cannot be traced to any mythical or historical origins, even if there is, none of the respondents made mention of it. According to their knowledge, it is based on their traditional religious belief that when a person dies it is the physical body that suffers death but not the soul or the spirit. After death, the spirit travels to 'the spiritual world', the land of the dead,' or the under-world', called 'asamando' (by the Akan), where it continues to reside until it is re-incarnated. Based on this belief, when a married persons dies his/her spirit must have smooth and peaceful passage to the land of the dead. To have this manifested spiritually, elaborate funeral is organized for the dead and the surviving spouse must go through widowhood rites. Widowhood cultural practice is therefore one of the most important

socio-cultural practices among the people of the Akuapem-South municipality which any person who loses a spouse must go through.

Even though, the study revealed that going through widowhood rites is optional for anyone who loses a spouse, the compelling reason or reasons for one to go through the rites is or are strong enough, making it compulsory in nature. The various compelling reasons that made the widows go through the rites were:

- (i) The fear of unknown consequences that might befall one who refuses to go through the rites.
- (ii) To satisfy cultural demand.
- (iii) To honour the dead husband (spouse) for the love the wife (spouse) had for him/her.

Any one or combination of these reasons makes widowhood cultural practice compulsory for every woman (spouse) who loses a husband (spouse). However, the form of widowhood rites a widow goes through depends on whether one chooses the customary widowhood rites or Christian form of widowhood rites. The Christian form of widowhood rites involve prayer sessions which differ from one sect to the other.

Whatever compelling reasons that will make a widow go through widowhood rites has underlying significance which the study revealed. In the first place, the ritual bath the widows took has the significance of cleansing them of 'pollution' resulting from the death of the husband. Even though death is inevitable to human beings, it is seen among the people as unpleasant occurrence, bad omen, and 'dirt' which pollutes the person who loses a spouse. For that matter, the widow is cleansed of the bad omen so that those she comes into contact with are not so affected. That is why in some communities the hands of the widow are padded before giving a handshake to



sympathizers (Olepegba and Chovwen: 837). Also, the widow undergoes ritual cleansing so that such tragic experience would not happen to her if she re-marries in future. It is therefore necessary for all widows to take ritual bath for self-cleansing purposes.

Again, widowhood cultural practice severs the earthly and spiritual matrimonial link between the widow and the dead husband. This paves the way for the spirit of the dead husband to enter 'asamando', the land of the dead peacefully.

Furthermore, widowhood rites in its entirety is a means through which the widow is prepared emotionally, psychologically and socially to cope with the traumatic experience of losing a husband, so that the widow can re-integrate to society so as to resume her normal social, economic and cultural life. Relatives and friends keep her company, provide her basic needs, and console her to pull herself together in order to cope with her emotionally disturbing situation.

Moreover, observance of widowhood rites preserves and perpetuates the cultural heritage of the people, thereby giving them an ethnic identity as one people with a common destiny.

Additionally, through the observance of widowhood rites, the widow is seen in the eyes of the society as not carrying any bad omen and therefore is accepted in their midst. To the men in the community she could be taken as a wife without any fear of incurring the wrath of the ghost of the late husband. Besides, the relatives of the late husband see her as an ideal woman who loved her husband when he was alive. This makes the family members of the late husband and other members of the community

continue to have good and cordial relationship with the widow even if she re-marries another man.

African widowhood cultural practice has been described as cruel and de-humanizing. However, the widows who were involved in the study did not show any aversion to what they went through, because they did not go through any harrowing experience. They did not suggest or complain in any way that the practice should be banned or abolished outright. Nonetheless, only three widows preferred to go through the 'christian way' which to them involved only prayers. Again, it was only one widow who complained that she was taunted to weep to fill a bowl with tears to the brim. According to her, she saw the relatives of her late husband who compelled her to go through that experience as wicked. This confirms the finding of Olapegba and Chovwen in agreement with Nwoga (1989) that "widows who experienced very severe and dehumanizing forms of rites tend to see those around her as hostile and unconcerned' (pp840). However, the custodians of culture, that is, the queens and the women who supervised widowhood rites in the various localities where the widows resided explained that, that very experience was mock confrontational scene meant only to induce the widow to weep so that the pain of losing a husband would go out from her. Besides, her weeping would attract visiting sympathizers at that particular time so that they would donate money to be used to prepare delicious meal for the widow to end her seeming fasting. Whatever amount of money left after preparing the food would be given to the widow. It was discovered that the widow who recounted this experience did not understand that particular ritual she went through because the rationale behind was not explained to her afterwards. Perhaps, this may be a similar case in the field work of Olapegba and Chovwen and Nwoga.

In sum widowhood rites among the people in the Akuapem-South municipal district are not harsh. The widows involved in the study did not complain about what they went through. They maintained that the practice should continue to exist as a cultural heritage. However, those who want to go through the Christian way should do so as well as those who want the traditional way. The humane nature of widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem-South accounts for the reason why widows do not make any complaint to any institution such as The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice or Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit of the Ghana Police Force. However, if any widow in the Akuapem-South municipality would go through any dehumanizing experience, it meant the widow was seen as an adulterous wife and a bad wife who derided the relatives of her deceased husband, and at that critical moment those she had once had bad encounter with would seize that opportunity to settle final bitter scores with her and therefore let her go through certain rites which are not part of the ritual per se. Even if the processes are part of the rites, wicked intentions form the basis for letting her go through the rites which are not the fundamental reasons for going through the rites. Outsiders who are not conversant with the practice will then equate it with wickedness, but they are not.

The study further revealed that over the years, widowhood rites have been going through modifications and changes according to exigencies of the time, thus emphasizing dynamism of culture.

## **5.2 Conclusions**

A particular group of people who are bound by common culture share common cultural traits that give them a distinct idiosyncratic identity. They share common socio-cultural practices such as festival, funeral rites, marriage, and widowhood rites

and so on. Sometimes the form such practices take are based on their religious beliefs or are traced to a particular land mark event in the affair of the people which makes its celebration or observation a cherished event in their lives and affairs, festivals are examples of these.

Widowhood cultural practice therefore forms part of socio-cultural practices of the people of Akuapem-South municipality. It is a practice based on the traditional religious belief of the people and therefore deep rooted in their culture. It is important to note that beliefs and practices of the Akan are part and parcel of their religious life and affairs, therefore whatever they do in all aspects of life has religious significance, as such they see it as sacrosanct, something approved by the Supreme Being, the ancestors and other deities. Like all other religions, rituals are based on the beliefs held by the practitioners and are also considered sacrosanct.

Widowhood cultural practice has been criticized and described as outmoded and that it should be done away with. A practice based on traditional religious belief, how different is it that is, taking a widow to a river or a stream to cleanse her of the negativities associated with her husband's death from taking someone to a river or a stream and immerse him/her into it in the name of baptism? Baptizing one in a river for the sake of baptism is akin to cleansing a widow in a river or a stream. They are both rituals based on different religious beliefs. It is therefore prejudicial to state that rites in widowhood cultural practices are outmoded and that they should be banned or abolished.

The study further revealed that widowhood rites among the people of Akuapem-South municipality are not rigorous and do not involve any harsh, de-humanizing, cruel and torturous experiences. It is therefore out- of- place and prejudicial to lump

widowhood cultural practice in Africa in general and Ghana in particular as one and condemn it outright as had appeared in some literature and commentaries all over the world. To do so suggests that African traditional societies are conservative and always clinging to the status quo, a society which is always primitive, backward and does not evolve. But no society in the world has ever remained in its primordial state to the present day. Every society undergoes changes, grows and develops with the passage of time.

Widowhood cultural practice has gone through years of transformation and is still going through such changes as pertains to all societies, their institutions and religious organizations considered as advanced. This is an indication that the traditional society of the Akuapem-South municipality and all its institutions and practices are evolving to meet and adapt to the demands of contemporary society. It is therefore erroneous to condemn the practice of the people based on their traditional religious belief as outmoded.

This notwithstanding, it is generally accepted that criticisms form part of social life of human beings for growth and developmental purposes. It is not out of ordinary for widowhood cultural practices to be subjected to criticisms, but over the years criticisms against widowhood cultural practices in Africa in general and Ghana in particular has been harsh and atrocious to covertly indicate that:

- (i) Widows in Africa are voiceless to be forced into a practice they detest.
- (ii) Those who see widows through widowhood rites are callous and heartless to inflict pain on their fellow human beings.
- (iii) The African society is backward and conservative to an extent that even their culture is static.

It is pertinent to note that some people who have studied African culture and traditional values do not highlight the positive aspects but only negative aspects. They tend to distort and exaggerate information about African way of life. From their biased spectacles they portray the African personality to the whole world as conservative and backward in all aspects of human life. Such position is likened to the well-known sayings that “give a dog a bad name and hang it”.

In this connection I disagree with Olepegba and Chovwen (2006) when they stated that among the Igbo people of Anambra State in Eastern Nigeria, widowhood cultural practices include scrapping of the hair of the widow with razor blade to make her unattractive. It could be inferred that the physical aspect of shaving the widow is what they highlighted, but not the spiritual side or the symbolism it represented. They only looked at one side of the coin. The essence of the scrapping of (shaving) the hair of the widow could not be the fact of making her unattractive. Such has been the way some Africans have described their own beliefs and practices to the outside world to be seen as negative. The practice of homosexuality has been predominant among the whites in Europe and the United States of America. Considering how unnatural it is and the health hazards involved the whites do not condemn its practice. They defend it by saying it is their fundamental human rights as such, they reserve every right to practise it. If the African has been so assertive to defend his culture and practices a kind of society would be created that others would learn from rather than condemning it all the time.

Most of the widows displayed crass ignorance of the rationale behind the rites they went through and therefore saw the rites as unnecessary and some of those who were Christians saw the practice as satanic. If the widows could not explain the reasons

they went through the rites, what about those who have never gone through any of these rites? With the introduction of Christianity and Islam in to the country, our socio-cultural practices such as widowhood rites which are based on our traditional religious beliefs have been condemned to the extent that African Religion has been removed from the curriculum of second cycle institutions while Christian and Islamic religious studies have been maintained. It is important to note that the religious beliefs and practices of Christianity and Islam are deeply stuck in the culture of the places where they originated and came from. Therefore to supplant African traditional religious beliefs and practices by Christian and Islamic religious studies in the school curriculum is a smack at the back of African personality and identity.

Article 26 clause 1 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana provides that “every person is entitled to enjoy, practise, profess, maintain and promote any culture, language, tradition or religion subject to the provisions of *the* (this) Constitution.” This is at the level of the individual. However, the Constitution goes beyond the individual rights to the national level to state in Article 39 clauses 1, 2 and 3 that:

“Subject to the clause (2) of this article, the State shall take steps to encourage the integration of appropriate customary values into the fabric of national life through formal and informal education and conscious introduction of cultural dimensions to relevant aspects of national planning. The State shall ensure that appropriate customary and cultural values are adapted and developed as an integral part of the growing needs of the society as a whole; and in particular that traditional practices which are injurious to the health and well-being of the person are abolished.”

It is therefore imperative that as a people, our cultural heritage that are not injurious should be practised and upheld so that we would be properly socialized to the highest

standards of what the culture provides and demands. In this way, we would maintain a common identity as a people. There is a proverb in Akan which says: “Dufokye da nsu mu sen ara a erentumi nnan odenkyem.” Translated as, (If a dead stem of a tree floats on a river for ages, it will never turn into a crocodile.”). The philosophical meaning is that no matter how long we practise the religion and culture of other group of people, we would never assume their true identity. Of course, some aspects of foreign culture and religion could be practiced, but to supplant entirely foreign culture and religion in our soil and do away with ours would affect our national psyche as a people, for there would be diverse conflicting moral, social, religious and cultural values which would negatively affect the fabric of society.

Besides, if the rationale for going through the rites was explained to the widows they would not see the rites as unnecessary and those who saw them through as hostile. This is based on the assumption that when the rationale for going through a pain or an unpleasant experience is explained to the one going through it, the pain is borne with much understanding and endurance without complaint. This assumption may perhaps explain the reason one could undergo painful religious penances without complaint. For example, some people could fast for religious reasons for days without food; and weeks on very little food and water without seeing the ritual as hazardous to their health or something affecting their physical well-being.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Widowhood cultural practice is part and parcel of the socio-cultural life of the people of the Akuapem-South municipal district. It is deep-rooted in their traditional religious beliefs as such it is an important ritual which should be encouraged. Even though strong voices have criticized its practice to the extent of calling for its



abolishing, it continues to be an important support instrument for widows to cope with their grief. From the study the following recommendations are made:

1. Chiefs, queen-mothers, and other opinion leaders through the National House of Chiefs should make use of the various local platforms such as festivals, durbars and electronic media such as the FM Radio to educate the people on our socio-cultural practices so that they can help modify some aspects that have outlived their importance and explain the essence of those in practice, thereby giving cultural re-orientation to the people.
2. The women who see widows through widowhood rites in our various communities must explain the rationale behind those rites so that they will understand and appreciate what they go through. In this case, they will not see the rites as unnecessary and those who see them through as hostile.
3. The Ministry of Education should re-introduce African Traditional Religion and Cultural Studies in the school curriculum at the basic and secondary/high school level. This will pave the way for the study of African philosophical thought based on our socio-cultural practices and their values and help portray African personality positively to the outside world as unique.
4. During pre-marriage counselling, pastors, heads of families and other opinion leaders who play key role in marriages must define and emphasize African marriage as a union between the two families of the spouses as such both spouses must show respect and treat all members of the families as their own. In this case, cordiality and harmony will be created among the family members.
5. The National House of Chiefs in collaboration with the Ghana Media Commission must ensure that our culture and other customary practices are

properly presented in their true perspective, especially in films so that our cultural practices are not distorted and misrepresented to the outside world.

#### **5.4 Suggestions for Further Research**

Having provided the findings and recommendations of Widowhood rites in the Akuapem traditional society; A case study from Akuapem-South municipality, the researcher holds the view that similar research should be conducted in the following areas:

- (1) Comparative study of widowhood rites among widowers and widows. A case study from Akuapem-South Municipal District. This would find out different experiences widows and widowers go through and how the practice is tilted against widows or otherwise.
- (2) Comparative study of widowhood rites in the traditional Akan and Dangme societies. A case study from Nsawam-Adoagyiri and Yilo-Krobo Municipal Districts. This study would find out the differences and similarities of widows experiences, their reactions and the rationale behind those experiences they go through among two distinct ethnic groups. This would help to have a wider perspective of as a positive, but not a negative heritage from our forbears.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR WIDOWS

This is an academic work aimed at studying widowhood rites in the Akuapem-South Municipality. The objective is to find out the nature of widowhood rites in the district and how the widows feel about the experiences they go through. I would be grateful if you would respond to the following questions.

All information that is provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

#### SECTION A: PERSONAL DATA

1. AGE/DATE OF BIRTH :
2. PLACE OF BIRTH :
3. HOMETOWN :
4. RELIGION :
5. SECT/DENOMINATION :
6. LEVEL OF SCHOOLING :
7. AGE WHEN GOT MARRIED :
8. TYPE OF MARRIAGE CONTRACTED :
9. NO. OF WIVES HUSBAND HAD :
10. EMPLOYMENT STATUS :
11. CLAN :
12. How long were you in marriage before your husband died?
13. (a) How did your husband die? 14(b) Did you go through widowhood rites?
14. Who saw you through the entire widowhood rites?
15. Describe the stages you went through for the performance of the entire widowhood rites including what was done at each stage.

16. Could you explain the reasons why you went through those different rites?
17. Which of the stages of the widowhood rites did you not like and why?
18. If you were to go through the rites once again, how differently would you like them to be performed?
19. Do you know a widow who went through the widowhood rites quite different from yours? If yes help me to find her.
20. Do you know a widow who did not at all go through the widowhood rites? If yes direct me to her.
21. Have you ever heard of any incident where a widow going through the rites was badly treated or hurt?
22. If your answer to the above question (21) is yes, how did it happen?
23. Did she report her ordeal to any authority be it traditional or governmental? If no:
24. Why did she not report the case?
25. Is this unreported case common?
26. If any of the rites affects your physical and emotional well-being and you feel hurt where will you report your case?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR QUEENS, WOMEN SUPERVISORS OF WIDOWHOOD RITES AND HEADS OF FAMILY/CLANS**

This is an academic work aimed at studying widowhood rites in the Akuapem-South Municipality. The objective is to find out the nature of widowhood rites in the district and how the widows feel about the experiences they go through. I would be grateful if you would respond to the following questions. All information provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

#### **SECTION A. PERSONAL DATA**

1. AGE/DATE OF BIRTH:
2. PLACE OF BIRTH:
3. HOME TOWN:
4. PLACE(S) OF RESIDENCE:
5. RELIGION:
6. DENOMINATION/SECT:
7. LEVEL OF EDUCATION:
8. CLAN:



#### **SECTION B. GENERAL DATA.**

- (1) Narrate the origins of widowhood rites in your community.
- (2) What stages do women go through in the performance of the entire widowhood rites?
- (3) What are the reasons or significance assigned for each stage of the entire performance of the widowhood rites?
- (4) Can a widow decide to avoid the rites? If yes or no:



- (5) Why and how?
- (6) What are the consequences if a widow fails or refuses to go through the rites?
- (7) Have you ever heard or seen an incident where a widow going through the rites was badly treated or hurt? If yes:
- (8) How did it happen?
- (9) Did she report her ordeal to any authority be it traditional or governmental? If no:
- (10) Why didn't she report it?
- (11) Is it common for widows not reporting their ordeal to any authority?
- (12) Has any woman or a widow in your community complained about widowhood rites?
- (13) If yes, what did she complained about?
- (14) What are your views concerning retaining widowhood rites as they are?
- (15) What aspect or aspects of the widowhood rites do you want to be changed?

