

Indigenous Practices, Bereavement and Stress Management: A Critical Review of Nzveura as a Socio-psychological Support among the Karanga Ethnic people

Wilson Zivave

Mkoba Teachers College

Email: wilsonzivave@gmail.com

Abstract

Death among most indigenous Africans is a reality that has adverse effects on mental health. Notably, indigenous ethnic groups, like the Karanga of Nyajena, have their ways of coping with such calamities. The article examines the role of nzveura in offering socio-psychological support to the bereaved family among the Jena sub-ethnic group. It is a qualitative study, grounded in the ubuntu theory. Six (6) interviews were done with elders who were purposively sampled from the Karanga people in Nyajena on the value of nzveura in stress management. This was complemented by observations of five (5) funerals done on the Karanga community. The study made several observations, chief among them being that the Karanga people are aware of the mental health challenges posed by the loss of a family member. As a result, they conduct a practice known as nzveura to manage stress among mourners and the bereaved family. They use nzveura as a mechanism to cope with anxiety, stress, and depression, and the possible negative impact on mental health. The study concludes that it is essential to embrace African models of stress management, such as nzveura. It recommends that indigenous practices, such as nzveura, which are part of the intangible cultural heritage of the Karanga, be safeguarded from possible extinction as they are anchored on empathy and the “I am because we are” principle in managing stress during bereavement.

Keywords: bereavement, *nzveura*, socio-psychological support, stress management, mental health

Background

Death brings significant socio-psychological challenges for family members and close relatives, as the loss of a loved one triggers a complex array of emotions, thoughts, and behaviours unlike any other life experience (Fulton & Metress, 1995). For this reason, psychological challenges associated with death and bereavement often include stress, shock, and panic for those who remain. In the aftermath of losing a loved one, individuals grieve, seek to understand the loss, and feel the need to reorganise their private worlds and meanings in entirely new ways (Richards, 2001). Consequently, many indigenous communities in Africa have developed bereavement practices that offer essential socio-psychological support during the mourning period. This is because death is a stressful rite of passage in human life that requires various methods for managing the resulting loss. Rituals are considered rites of passage (Littlewood, 1992), that provide “formal recognition of the transition

from one stage in the life cycle to another and the changed status that transition brings” (Fulton & Metress, 1995, p. 462).

Death is viewed as ‘a tragic event but also a rite of passage’ which can destabilise the family and community of which the deceased was a member (Selepe & Edwards, 2008). It is within this context that Africans utilise various ritual practices as a means of coping with the loss. Among the Chinese, for example, there is a condolence statement which relates to coping with death that says “save the tears and accept the change” (Chan et al., 2005, p. 924). In the same vein, Africans, particularly the Shona, believe that one should not shed tears because death is an ultimate reality and a rite of passage for everyone (Mbiti, 1969). The underlying idea is that people are capable of feeling the pain of the death of a family member, which can disturb the continuation of life. As a result, *nzveura* facilitates the healing process by ensuring that those remaining behind can cope with the loss (Makgahlela et al., 2019). African ritual practices offer ways of forgetting about the loss and concentrating on the legacy left by the deceased. This is because loss of the beloved one through death is assumed to be painful and traumatic (Bento, 1994). People who experience it try to find strategies to cope with its impact, while others may try to find ways to avoid its impact during bereavement.

Bereavement is defined as a state of having suffered a loss (Rando, 1985). It involves forceful and unwilling deprivation of someone we love, having something withheld unjustly and injuriously, and a stealing away of something valuable (Attig, 2001; Rando, 1985). Attig’s and Rando’s explanations imply that during bereavement, an individual suffers socially and psychologically due to the loss. The bereaved person experiences an unexpected loss that demands socio-psychological support. Such support can reflect physical and psychosocial support to those who are bereaved (Makgahlela et al., 2019). In other words, *nzveura* appears to be a Karanga means of stress management, which offers the support that is needed to those who are bereaved. Understanding such stress management practices depends on one’s culture because different cultures have mechanisms of coping with stress that comes as a result of the death of a beloved one (Rosenblatt, 2001). As such, when Africans are mourning and bereaving, they utilise practices such as *nzveura* to cope with these situations (Muranda, 2018). This is considered heartbreaking and a threat to the psychological well-being of bereaved people, and coping with death implies a way of restoring the psychological well-being of the bereaved (Chan et al., 2005; Corr et al., 1997). As a result, Africans, specifically the Karanga of Nyajena, construct death in a manner that ensures that mourners are left in a good state of psychological well-being.

It should be noted that in Western cultures, they use tranquilisers, sleeping pills, or alcohol to escape grief during bereavement. Sanders (1992) avers that using drugs masks the pain and offers a temporary or anaesthetic relief. Traditional African

communities, particularly the Karanga, have established methods for managing stress during periods of mourning. It is within this context that they utilise *nzveura*, which might offer true relief to these indigenous people. The Karanga ethnic group, in particular, employs *nzveura* to help mourners and close relatives navigate the effects of loss, including the trauma of losing a close relative or family member, which is integral to their bereavement rituals (Mwandayi, 2011; Muranda, 2018). However, many modern-day Karangas have abandoned these cultural practices due to Christianity and contemporary societal changes. Those who disregard traditional rituals often belong to churches or doctrines that strictly prohibit such practices (Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007). Resultantly, many Karanga individuals are increasingly vulnerable to various psychological challenges due to reliance on Western forms of socio-psychological support during times of loss, as they show deep sadness, numbness, and confusion, social withdrawal, loneliness, sleep disturbances, and anxiety. However, Western therapeutic strategies deal mainly with the affected individuals but not with how the relationship with a deceased person might influence their coping mechanisms (Radzilani, 2010). Consequently, *nzveura* is at risk of extinction despite its crucial role in alleviating stress during bereavement.

Research on Shona death and culture has been done by several scholars in the country, such as Aschwanden (1987), Banana (1991), Mwandayi (2011), and Shoko (2007), as well as earlier studies by Bourdillon (1976) and Gelfand (1963). However, research on bereavement and stress management from a socio-psychological perspective among the Karanga, who are a sub-ethnic group of the Shona, is scant. As such, there is a lack of information on *nzveura* as a bereavement and stress management practice, which could create more socio-psychological challenges. As a result, existing literature on bereavement and stress management predominantly focuses on other African cultures, often neglecting the Karanga (Radzilani, 2010; Rosenblatt & Nkosi, 2007) and promoting Western approaches to coping with death from a socio-psychological perspective (Chan et al., 2005; Corr et al., 1997; Lalande & Bonanno, 2006). This oversight may lead to the assumption that the Karanga construct the meanings of death, bereavement rituals, and stress coping mechanisms in the same manner as other African cultures.

The Karanga People

There are several ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, including the Kalanga, Nambya, Ndau, Ndebele, Shangani, Shona, Tonga and Venda, each with unique cultural identities. Among these, the Karanga people are primarily found in Masvingo and certain parts of the Midlands Province. They represent both an ethnic identity and a dialect within the Shona group of people, who as a whole account for approximately three-quarters of the country's population, with groups such as the Karanga in the south, Zezuru in the central regions, Korekore in the north, and Ndau and Manyika in the east (Chitakure, 2019). According to Shoko (2007), they make up about 30% of

the Shona population in Zimbabwe. This study focuses on the Karanga of the Nyajena communal area, a group that emerged from migrations and political alignments of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries (Ranger, 2004). Nyajena is located 75km southeast of Masvingo, covering approximately 136,000 acres, and borders Zaka to the east, Chiredzi to the south, Chivi to the west, and Mushawasha to the north (Chitakure, 2019). The inhabitants of Nyajena are mainly identified with the Moyo (cow heart) totem and possess a rich cultural heritage centred on ancestor intercession. They believe that death is a rite of passage that facilitates the transition to ancestorhood. Although the *nzveura* practice has diminished, it plays a significant role in coping with grief during the bereavement period. In recent years, *nzveura* has become part of an "ethnification" process which seeks to reclaim forgotten identities amidst social change and cultural instability (Schreiter, 1997). This study examines the role of *nzveura* in managing stress during bereavement among the Karanga of Nyajena. As part of the culture and religion of the Karanga people, *nzveura* is integral to their death rituals and overall religious life (Gittins, 2015).

The *Nzveura* "imitation" ritual practice

Nzveura is an imitation ritual that runs through the mourning period, continuing until the *kurova guva* ceremony concludes. Indeed, most post-burial rituals are marked by the performance of *nzveura*. The participants depend on the gender of the deceased. If a man has died, the *nzveura* is carried out by his wives (*vakadzi*), including the wives of his brothers (*vanamaiguru*) and the wives of his uncle (*vanambuya vakadzi vanasekuru hanzvadzi dzamai*). Conversely, if the deceased is a woman, the ritual is performed by her sisters-in-law (*varoora, vakadzi vehanzvadzi dzemufi*) and the wives of her maternal uncles (*vakadzi vanasarekuru kwakazvarwa mai vake*). According to Zivave (2021), daughters-in-law (*varoora*) have the liberty to dramatise anything peculiar to or outstanding about the deceased's way of life. However, among the Zezuru people, the *nzveura* is performed by an intimate friend (*sahwira*) of the deceased. After the body has lain in state, the daughters-in-law are responsible for performing a dry bath on the corpse. As the body is taken to the burial place, the daughters-in-law sweep the house where the body lay in state, and also sweep the yard.

During the *nzveura*, participants imitate the deceased's mannerisms, speech, and daily activities. Those imitating the deceased are permitted to wear the clothes of the departed, humorously mimicking her/him to ensure that the mourning period is interspersed with laughter and fond remembrance of the late's positive qualities. Thus, for Omoregie (2008), *nzveura* serves to lighten the sad and sombre atmosphere usually associated with death. Furthermore, during the *nzveura* practice, the imitators clear the path leading to the graveyard. These imitators are compensated by the sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters of the deceased when they perform this ritual. In the case of a deceased woman, the sons, brothers, sisters and wives of the brother of the departed provide the required payment. The money

given to performers of *nzveura* is used to purchase essential goods for funeral assistance (Zivave, 2021). Omoregie (2008) believes that *nzveura* is a way of financially sustaining the ceremonies, since anybody approached by the daughters-in-law, “*varooru*,” has to pay a certain amount. They are then given the forequarter of a beast (*bandauko*) to cook and provide food for the bereaved family members.

Problem statement

Death is said to be now a frequent tragedy among the Karanga community as compared to the past, and it has resulted in several socio-psychological challenges. However, Western ways of dealing with stress management do not resonate with African moral philosophy in offering socio-psychological and economic support that is relevant to the Karanga cultural needs. The *unhu* moral principle that is embedded in *nzveura* is often neglected in preference to professional counselling offered using Western paradigms. This article thus also aims to explore the role of the *nzveura* in developing effective stress management skills which are culturally responsive.

Research question

The question is:

How does *nzveura* practice offer socio-psychological support during bereavement among the Karanga ethnic group?

Research objectives

In view of this question, the study was guided by the following objectives which were to:

1. Determine the effects of death among the Karanga people.
2. Identify the Karanga ways of coping with stress during bereavement.
3. Critique how *nzveura* provides socio-psychological support during bereavement.

Justification of the study

In light of the above research questions, the role of *nzveura* ritual in stress management during bereavement has emerged as a crucial topic within the broader fields of Religious Studies and mental health. This study contributes to the ongoing mental health discourses, focusing specifically on the Karanga ethnic group of Masvingo in Zimbabwe. The choice of the Karanga is particularly significant due to the limited ethnographic research conducted on the relationship between *nzveura* and stress management during bereavement within this ethnic group. By analysing this ritual practice in relation to stress management during bereavement, the research seeks to highlight the value of *nzveura* in contemporary socio-psychological

discourse during bereavement, ultimately contributing to culturally relevant methods of addressing stress and promoting mental health during and after bereavement.

Theoretical framework

Death prevalence in the Zimbabwean context is very high due to a collapsed health system and the proliferation of many diseases, some that are lifestyle linked. It is in this context that an emotional and psychological support mechanism for bereaved indigenous people need to embrace Afrocentred methods like *nzveura*, because there is a shortage of professional social workers in the country. This study is premised on the African *unhu/ubuntu* theoretical framework as a model for stress management that corresponds with the African culture. *Unhu/Ubuntu* needs to be embraced within the world's knowledge systems. *Unhu/Ubuntu* is an African moral philosophy applied in sub-Saharan Africa to deal with a lot of challenges. *Unhu/Ubuntu* also refers to a pattern of interconnectedness between people through a worldview or philosophy of oneness (Van Breda, 2014). Thus, *Unhu/Ubuntu* is the worldview of the Black Bantu (people) of Africa from which they derive relational, communal, societal, environmental, and spiritual knowledge, values, and practices (Mugumbate et al., 2023). It is summarised in the adage *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu / munhu munhu navanhu*, which means a person is somebody through others (Mugumbate et al., 2023). Hence, the African worldview is premised on the understanding that 'an individual exists only because others exist' (Mbiti, 1975). It is, thus, important to utilise this African philosophy during bereavement. It provides bereaved Africans with mechanisms that ease grief and pain even in the absence of professionally trained individuals using Western practices. This theory was developed as a way of having empathy and sympathy for others. The Karanga people need to treat each other during bereavement grounded in *unhu/ubuntu*. *Nzveura* creates oneness of humankind, leading to effective stress management.

Literature review

This section provides data on the psycho-social support needed during bereavement and explores African ways of stress management and the role of *nzveura* in alleviating pain and grief during the mourning period. It aims to assess the existing information and misinformation on indigenous ways of managing stress caused by bereavement while sifting through appropriate data related to the discussion. Literature confirms that when a loved one dies, bereaved survivors need psycho-social support from family, friends, professional psychologists, and even morticians (Beckera et al., 2022). However, some scholars advocate for the return to traditional funeral rituals as a means of supporting bereaved families (De Stefano et al., 2021; Beckera et al., 2022). This is because funeral rituals can offer positive psycho-social health and stability.

It is widely believed that during the first hours after a loved one passes, it leaves the survivors with deep impressions and memories (Beckera et al., 2022). The indigenous people resort to family and relatives for empathy. This is done through rituals, which help survivors to overcome these critical moments, lowering their risk of developing complicated grief (Cardoso et al., 2020). Bereaved families in indigenous society appreciate the role of family members and friends in alleviating stress through practices like *nzveura* during funeral attendance. *Nzveura* helps mourners to come to terms with the death of their loved ones. It reduces stress and anxiety during the time of loss. Imitating the deceased appears to lighten the stress among mourners. It contributes to the acceptance of death as a reality and a rite of passage for all. *Nzveura* reduces pain and stress among most mourners.

Most societies have rituals such as prayers and memorial services that serve as a public acknowledgement that a death has occurred (Cook & Oltjenbruns, 1989; Selepe & Edwards, 2008). Studies in Japan (Taniyama & Becker, 2014) and Hawai'i (Ando et al., 2015) have shown that rituals reduce grief for bereaved caregivers and families. Japanese chants to Amida (the Buddha who welcomes the departed to the next world) can be powerful salutary rituals, individually as well as collectively (Gillson, 2019). While the vast majority of the bereaved perform some sort of individual rituals, more than half also engage in collective rites; both are considered helpful to the bereaved (Mitima-Verloop et al., 2021). Conversely, the prohibition of mourning rituals like funeral ceremonies or cemetery visits may worsen the bereaved survivors' complicated or prolonged grief (De Stefano et al., 2021). Research also shows that bereaved individuals with tendencies to depression or complicated grief show more interest in using memorial websites or subsequent bereavement support services (Mowll et al., 2016). A major scoping review found that rituals allow expressions of grief to be controlled and packaged, and help participants to feel grounded and interconnected in their cultural traditions (Wojtkowiak et al., 2021).

The African worldview interprets death and stress associated with bereavement to emotional, psychological, and spiritual domains. Stress management is embodied in African culture, which is reflected in their religion and social life. Diverse cultures in Africa have different understandings of bereavement and stress management. According to Myerhoff (1982), African societies believe that there are many ways of stress management, which should be understood from a cultural context. These ways include ritual practice, rites of passage, and social life. Studies in Africa indicate that rituals are how the bereaved can express the prescribed and acceptable emotions that are considered to ease their pain (Myerhoff, 1982). In performing the rituals, the bereaved also call for community support and the acknowledgement of the process of mourning. These traditional bereavement practices allow friends and neighbours to express their condolences, while they also help the bereaved to come to terms with the reality of the loss. Rituals, therefore,

allow supportive interpersonal interactions to occur (Corr et al., 1997). Some bereavement rituals are silent, spontaneous, symbolic statements that represent unique feelings related to the deceased. Conley (1987) believes that the tucking of sealed letters underneath the casket pillow, a farewell salute, or, in Western culture, placing a single rose on the casket are some of the ritual practices that show bereavement. For the Karanga, *nzveura* is used to relieve pain and stress associated with the loss. It is within this context that *nzveura* plays a crucial role in offering a socio-psychological support to the bereaved among the Karanga. Van der Hart (1983) maintains that rituals provide healing, continuity, and balance if the griever believes there is meaning in them. However, at this point, one cannot ignore the role of *nzveura* in stress management during bereavement. This is because it offers healing or recovery during the time of the loss. One of the socio-psychological supports of *nzveura* is that it is embedded in the socio-cultural practices of the Karanga people. The role of *nzveura*, given its nebulous nature in stress management among the Karanga, is to provide comfort and support to the bereaved family.

Studies in Zimbabwe have shown that stress resulting from the death of a loved one is rising, largely due to the decline of traditional ritual practices that help indigenous communities cope with grief and loss (Mwandayi, 2011). During mourning, bereaved individuals often remain at the home of the deceased, where women may express their grief through crying, wailing, singing, and dancing, while men typically gather outside around a fire (Swift, 1989). Grief is openly expressed, with emotions and verbal sentiments shared among the mourners. Women, in most cases, are affected when the body is carried to the grave site. In this context, *nzveura* is performed by a family friend, referred to as "sahwira" or by daughters-in-law (*varoora*), depending on cultural practices to lighten the atmosphere and alleviate tension (Zivave, 2021). There is engagement in humorous antics, sometimes imitating the deceased in clever and witty ways (Swift, 1989). This laughter serves as a powerful antidote to the heavy and sombre atmosphere that can arise during a burial. Swift (1989) notes that the release of tension through laughter helps balance the mood and provides mourners with renewed energy to complete the burial process. *Nzveura* can also be performed alongside singing during the procession to the graveyard.

Be that as it may, *nzveura* studies in connection with stress management during bereavement are scanty in the Zimbabwean context. This suggests that there are significant gaps and challenges in stress management during bereavement in Africa and, in particular, in Zimbabwe. There is an overreliance on Western mechanisms at the expense of African ways. Stress management during bereavement is often Europeanised, making it distant from African culture for individuals in rural communities. Additionally, Zimbabwe has very few professionals who can deal with stress during the bereavement period. Borrowing from Makgahlela, Sodi, Nkoana,

and Mokwena (2019), who conceive that bereavement rituals are related to psychosocial significance in an African cultural setting, I also note that *nzveura* among the Karanga has therapeutic benefits during bereavement. The practice is sensitive and respectful of the Karanga culture.

Research methodology

The study is an ethnographic one. It employed cultural interviews to generate data from Karanga experiences on stress management during bereavement. Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 82) assert that culture interviewers elicit the meanings the people give to events and behaviours, to generate a cultural classification. This inquiry focused on descriptions and the significance of *nzveura* on stress management during bereavement among the Karanga of Nyajena as understood by some interviewees. This means that the study is qualitative because it utilised interviews and observations in understanding the role of *nzveura* in offering socio-psychological support during the bereavement period. It utilised ethnographic interviews with six Karanga elders who were purposively sampled because their expertise and experiences in stress management from the indigenous perspective are greatly affirmed, valued, and appreciated. There are numerous ways used by the Karanga to deal with stress during the bereavement period. The researcher planned and was guided by open-ended questions. This was in line with Merriam and Tisdell's (2016, p. 120) encouragement to researchers to use open-ended questions, which they claim to yield more descriptive data and stories about the phenomenon under scrutiny. Even though the researcher had key guiding questions, which all the interviewees were encouraged to answer, responding to all the interview questions was not obligatory. More questions were produced as discussions progressed with interviewees. The researcher attended five Karanga funerals in the Nyajena communal areas to gain reliable insights into participants' actions during rituals, rather than relying on their verbal accounts. The funerals attended by the researcher included those of the family as well as those in the community in Nyajena. This is because the researcher is a native of Nyajena, where s/he was born and is familiar with the topography, demography, context (social, political, and historical), and mentality of the people (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 44). Moreover, the area of research was relatively manageable and almost similar in terms of cultural practice. It was during these funerals that the researcher paid particular attention to the *nzveura* ritual, and video recordings were made. Explanations on the role of *nzveura* in offering socio-psychological support were sought through interviews with the old funeral attendees during the funeral or at times well after the funeral itself. Desktop research was further done to substantiate the data obtained through interviews.

Findings and Discussion

From the analysed data, *nzveura* is a bereavement ritual practice performed among the Karanga in the Nyajena community, which is associated with psychosocial

factors, and its implications for stress management were extracted. Data from the six elders are presented as E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, and E6, respectively. Furthermore, data from the five funerals is coded as F1, F2, F3, F4, and F5.

Death and its effects

In the Karanga ontology, death is considered a transition from the physical world to the spiritual world. According to E1, “*MuchiKaranga tinoti waenda kwete, kuti munhu afa nekuti munhu anoenda kunyikadzimu*” (In Karanga tradition, we say someone has gone and not he or she is dead because dying is a journey to the spirit world). E2 also underscored that death is an event that marks the journey to the spiritual world. It does not mark the end of being, but catapults one into another state of being, which is spiritual. It is in line with Gundani (1988), who says that death is a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology, where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors’ realm. Death in an African culture, therefore, involves not just the physical loss of life of a person but the transition of that person into the non-physical realm of existence (Zivave, 2021). The above meaning attached to death among the Karanga is therefore consistent with the Africans’ cultural and religious conceptions of the afterlife. The views of death in the Karanga are based on their religious worldviews.

When the participants were asked about the effects of death, they expressed various sentiments. E2 lamented that death is a sad reality that affects the family dynamics because it affects family harmony and its organisation. A family is left without its head and provider, destroying its organisation. This suggests that death can distort the family structure by creating a vacuum. In support of this, Fisher (1998, p. 95) contends that the disruption brought about by death makes it an evil that interrupts the harmony of family life. E3 and E4 shared the same view as they underscored that death is not a family affair but a community event. This means that death affects the community by creating a leadership vacuum if one is the village head, headman or chief. This suggests that death can affect the community governance system and the indigenous practices, which are transferred from one generation to another through oral transmission. Thus, death affects the cultural continuity of the Karanga community, and it has a social effect. Mbiti (1969) rightly observes that death disrupts the orderly flow of life in society. Gundani (1998, p. 198) shares the same sentiments that death terrifies both the family and the community, and it “destroys relationships that hold the family or clan together as well as its stability.”

E1 underscored that death causes one to be afraid, stressed, and suffer from psychological imbalance. This emphasises the psychological effects of death among the Karanga as a result of the loss that comes through death. Death is bad for the Karanga because it whisks away the treasured family members and friends without any notice. Chitakure (2020) believes that although the Karanga people believe that the human soul continues to live in a spiritual form after death, it is difficult to

embrace the thought of dying because of the mysteries surrounding it, and the lack of indubitable knowledge of what happens after (Chivaura, 1965, pp.12-13). As a result, the loss of a loved one causes grief and ultimately stress to those remaining behind.

Karanga ways of coping with socio-psychological challenges during the time of bereavement

When the participants were asked about the Karanga ways of coping with stress during mourning, various views came out. They identified venting of emotions through wailing, music, dance, drinking beer, talking, and the most affected is always accompanied by someone close to him or her, as well as *nzveura*. Firstly, E1 stated, “*Kupangura mhere inzira inoshandiswa nevanhukadzi kuti vasanyanyoshungurudzika. Saka kuridza mhere kunodzora kurwadziwa kunoita kuti vafirwa vasashungurudzika*” (Women wail to cope with stress. Wailing reduces the pain that causes stress). The participants view women as the most affected by death, and in indigenous funerals, they are expected to vent their emotions through wailing. This is believed to help them cope with the stress caused by the loss of a beloved one. This was observed during all funerals that women wail and engage in emotional antics. It was also observed that men do not generally wail. Most men just shake their heads with some sobbing, particularly during burials. This finding aligns with Swift's (1989) observations which concluded that women among the Shona typically express their grief through crying, wailing, singing, and dancing, while men are generally not involved in these forms of expression of grief.

Furthermore, E2 indicated that indigenous people play music and dance so that those who mourn are relieved of their pain. Songs like “*Tipeiwo nguva yekuchema gamba redu*” (Give us time to mourn our hero) are critical in giving solace to the mourners. This was also observed in all funerals, that singing, drum beating and dancing are done mainly by the young people, like *varoora* (daughters-in-law), children, and other people from the community throughout the funeral proceedings. This suggests that music and dance have therapeutic value in managing stress caused by the loss of a beloved one. According to Banda (2014), the Shona people, in terms of experience and knowledge, subtly, through songs, believe and accept the sad reality of death. The songs and dances are done throughout the night until the burial. The playing of songs and dances allows people to reflect on the legacy left by the deceased as he or she transitions into the spiritual journey. Some of the songs depict an accepted belief among Karanga people that death is inevitable. This is in line with the findings by Muranda (2018), which reveal that singing about death brings solace and comfort to those experiencing grief and pain. The Karanga songs that are sung during the night vigil help mourners to understand and accept the reality of death.

Drinking beer and smoking cannabis

E3 underscored, “*Varume vazhinji tinomwa doro nekusvuta mbanje kuti tisanyanyogwadziwa nekurasikirwa nehama neshamwari. Asi kushandisa zvinhu izvi kudzivirira kurwadziwa nekushungurudzika kune mhosho yekuti kana usisina kudhakwa unogona kuzonyanyofungisisa.*” (Most of us men take beer and cannabis to cope with the death of relatives and friends. But using intoxicants such as beer and cannabis has shortcomings in that when you are sober, you will always think about the loss in a way that is dangerous to your health). The participants revealed that drinking beer and smoking dagga can be used as a coping mechanism for death-induced grief and in dealing cases of sudden or traumatic loss. It was also observed during funerals 2, 3, and 5 that condolence money was used to buy beer for men who would be doing tasks like cooking and digging the grave of the deceased. This is in line with findings in some Western countries, where Pilling Konkoly, Demetrovics, and Kopp (2012) concluded that alcohol use is higher in men who are bereaved than in women. While alcohol and substance use may offer a temporary sense of relief, they are associated with socio-psychological challenges. In this respect, Drabwell et al. (2020) believe that bereavement is associated with an increased risk of psychiatric morbidity and all-cause mortality, particularly in younger people and after unnatural deaths.

Humor

The study through E4 further revealed that, “*Kutuara nemunemo inzira yakajairika kusunungura vanhu vari kuchema mufi. Izvi zvinoitirwa kuti vanhu vasashungurudzika. Shamwari yemufi ndiyo inoita madawo nemunemo kurerutsa kurwadziwa kunenge kuri muvanhu,*” (Talking and joking are common ways used to ease the tension of people who are bereaving. This is done to cope with stress, and humour is led by the family friend). These words suggest that indigenous people utilise family friends in engaging in humour to cope with stress caused by death. This was corroborated by the observations made from F1 that the *muzukuru* (nephew) engages in humorous acts. The study found that in this culture, talking, joking, and light-hearted interactions are common practices to comfort those grieving. These actions, often initiated by a family friend, aim to alleviate stress and emotional pain. This aligns with research in Zimbabwe (Moyo, 2013), which highlights the *sahwira*'s role in uplifting the bereaved through joyful moments and ensuring a smooth funeral process to lessen grief. More broadly, these findings resonate with cross-cultural studies (Warren & McGraw, 2016) recognising humour as a vital social tool for stress reduction and emotional support during bereavement. As Swift (1989) notes, the *sahwira* often leads mourning ceremonies with lighthearted antics to encourage acceptance of the loss. Moyo (2013) further argues that humour during funerals helps ease tension and sorrow, allowing mourners to temporarily set aside their grief and celebrate the deceased's life.

The study also revealed through E6 that “*Mai vemufi kana mukadzi wemufi kana kuti murume wemufi, semuenzaniso, vanosungirwa kuwana chitsama chevanhu vanovarinda vachivanyaradza nekuita kuti vasashungurudzika.*” (The bereaved is always in the company of elders who can control and manage stress by talking to him or her, always showing the bereaved that death is the passage for all). This was also observed in Funerals 1 and 3 that the people close to the wife of the deceased sat with her in the hut throughout the morning period. This means that the Karanga allow the accompaniment of the most affected person as a way of coping with stress. The widow or children of the deceased are the most affected, and the Karanga ensure that these bereaved people are always in the company of a group of people for socio-psychological support. This support is offered by community members, family, or friends and can help individuals cope with grief so that they navigate the changes associated with widowhood or orphanhood easily. They offer counselling and advice related to loss. These people are mostly close people and friends who offer the socio-psychological support needed by the widow and orphans left by the deceased. The support given through accompaniment creates a sense of community and belonging among the affected members of the society.

Lastly, all the participants highlighted that *nzveura* is a way of coping with stress. E5 raised an important view by saying that *nzveura* is important in addressing the traumatic experiences associated with death. This finding confirms that *nzveura* is a method of coping with stress during bereavement among the Karanga (Zivave, 2021). *Nzveura* allows the Karanga people to engage in humorous antics, imitating the deceased in clever and witty ways (Swift, 1989). Thus, *nzveura* serves as a powerful mechanism of uplifting the heavy and sombre atmosphere through laughter during bereavement.

Nzveura

When the participants were asked about the role of *nzveura* as a Karanga way of providing socio-psychological support, the informants highlighted several views. E1 observed that *nzveura* makes one accept that death is a reality, and this is achieved by the support that is given to the bereaved through the ritual practice. When one imitates what the deceased was doing humorously, it is a form of psychological support which encourages those bereaved to accept death as a reality. This suggests that *nzveura* offers psychological support as those left behind are made to accept death as a reality and the need to move on through humour. The Karanga use *nzveura* to take care of the bereaved and make them accept death as an inevitable event. Alao et al. (2010) observe that people may use humour to help themselves deal with difficult and stressful situations. In the same context, Paneru (2024) asserts that death rituals are a form of psychosocial therapy during bereavement. This means that *nzveura* offers a socio-psychological therapy to the

bereaved. This is cemented by the observation made on Funeral 2, where the humour and joyful interactions that happened between daughters-in-law and the mourners assisted the bereaved in experiencing feelings of restoration and hope. Hence, *nzveura* offers support when the bereaved reacts to the loss of a loved one by assisting them to overcome or lessen particular emotional, mental, or social difficulties associated with the sudden loss.

The other psychological function of *nzveura* lies in the reduction of mental stress associated with death. From E3, it emerged that *nzveura* eases mental tension when people imitate the deceased with some fun associated with it, it has a psychological role. This means that *nzveura* reduces psychological tension and provides psychological support to the bereaved ones to accept loss and make them ready to continue with life without overthinking. *Nzveura* is thus essential to aid recovery and adjustment after the loss of a beloved one. Chandran (2020) argues that humour during funerals provides crucial opportunities for releasing emotional tensions, which aligns with the principles of the dual process model. Paneru (2024) in his study rightly observed that rituals are cultural tools that help maintain social order and give insight into the complex and contradictory features of human existence in a particular socio-cultural setting. On the other hand, rituals reduce negative grief reactions, which may result in the bereaved person suffering physical or psychological ill-health (Alao et al., 2010).

E5 underscored that when bereaved members start to reflect on the legacy of the deceased, there are chances of reducing nightmares that may be associated with the loss of the beloved one. This suggests that nightmares are a form of psychological instability which can be mitigated by *nzveura*. If *nzveura* is not performed, it can increase anxiety, depression, sadness, despair, anger, guilt, loneliness, exhaustion, hallucinations, apathy and disorganisation (Worden, 1995). After the loss, the bereaved may suffer from sleepless nights, anxiety, fear, and a general sense of being out of control. *Nzveura* assists mourners to be active and helps the bereaved to have a sense of normalcy because it assists in reducing psychological stress temporarily. Thus, there is a form of psychological support that is offered by *nzveura*, which comes through the reflection of what the deceased did, which will be mirrored by the *nzveura* ritual.

E4 also underscored that *nzveura* offers social support by saying that it promotes social inclusion by making the bereaved family part of society. This is because the contributions of the family friend or daughters-in-law during bereavement make death be viewed as a community event, which offers social support to those who are grieving. They cook food that they source with the money they generate from the ritual performance. Zivave (2021) attests that they are given the forequarter of a beast “*bandauko*”, which they cook for the bereaved members of the family. It is in this context that Thuen (1997) suggests that people in various stages of

bereavement receive emotional and social support largely from family and friends. This is in line with the observation of Worden (1991), which concluded that social support reduces stress and stimulates the development of coping strategies and thus contributes to recovery and healthy well-being. This was supported by observations from the five funerals, where soon after the announcement of death, family members, villagers, and members of the chiefdom gathered at the homestead of the deceased, and the *varoora* began to run around to assist during bereavement. This suggests that *nzveura* creates a contextual platform for friends and the bereaved family to exchange emotive tightness through humour and imitation, which helps the bereaved manage their affective state. *Nzveura* is, therefore, a means of dealing with powerful feelings about the loss. Thus, the moments of laughter during mourning are needed as a means of recovering from death-related illness. Thus, it is used to explain the social existence and power of religious concepts, which were based on either emotional experience, pseudoscientific reasons or the mythical (Bell, 1992).

The E3 findings reveal that during funerals, daughters-in-law (*varoora*) engage in humour as part of the *nzveura* ritual, which plays a crucial role in managing stress and anxiety for bereaved families. This practice allows for a balance between sorrow and joy, providing temporary relief from the pain of loss. Alao (2010) emphasises that a healthy grieving process involves oscillating between these emotions, and *nzveura* facilitates this transition. Observations from multiple funerals indicate that humour helps the bereaved process their grief and fosters emotional release, supporting claims by Swift (1989) that it aids physical relaxation. *Nzveura* also serves a practical function; daughters-in-law raise funds during this ritual to alleviate the economic burden of bereavement. Contributions from family members such as *vazukuru* (nephews and grandsons) and *vakuwasha* help provide food and refreshments for mourners, addressing the financial strain of death. Tarusarira (2018) notes that these funds not only offer social but also economic support, reducing distress for the bereaved family. The humour shared during mourning strengthens bonds among mourners, fostering a supportive environment. This social connection enhances psychological well-being, promoting resilience and optimism amid grief, as highlighted by E1. This aligns with Kaguda (2012), who found that the interplay of humour and sorrow aids in emotional balance. Thus, *nzveura* is essential for facilitating healing and coping with the emotions associated with loss, underscoring its importance in the grieving process.

Some Important Insights

This study explored the role of *nzveura* in offering the socio-psychological and economic support during bereavement within the Karanga ethnic group through data collected through interviews with Karanga elders and observations of five funerals. It

focused on three main aspects: (1) the effects of death among the Karanga people, 2) the Karanga ways of coping with stress during bereavement. 3) The role of *nzveura* in providing socio-psychological and economic support during bereavement.

Although death is not the end of life, but is a new beginning in another state. It results in grief, stress, and psychological imbalances. Death is a natural event, but it has many psychological effects. This results in fear, stress, and suffering among the bereaved. While the Karanga family is glued around strong family dynamics, death distorts these dynamics because it affects household harmony and its organisation. Many families are left without their head and provider. This means that death affects the family and the community at large by creating a leadership void. It is for this reason that death is viewed as an enemy of harmony because it takes away family members and friends. As a result, death breeds grief and stress for those remaining behind.

There are several Karanga ways of coping with stress during bereavement, such as wailing, music, dance, and social interaction. There is the importance of the cultural context in stress management, particularly within Karanga societies during bereavement (Tamara, 2022).

The study findings align closely with previous research on bereavement, particularly the work of Lunds, Edvardsson, and Nilsson (2008), who examined the experiences of recently widowed individuals in the United States and concluded that humour significantly influenced the grief of mourners during the bereavement period by offering a strong socio-psychological support system. This means that humour helps the bereaved realise that life goes on and brings closure to grief. In the context of this study, there is a strong connection between humour, laughter, and positive grief adjustments during and after the Karanga mourning practices. The humour employed by *varoora* during funerals alleviates tension and sorrow among the bereaved. This is also consistent with Yule et al. (2017), who noted that humour during funeral rites allows mourners to temporarily set aside their grief and celebrate the deceased's life. Thus, integrating humour and joy during Karanga funerals serves as a therapeutic approach in overcoming grief.

The significant role of *nzveura* in providing the socio-psychological support among the Karanga during bereavement cannot be underestimated. The findings reveal that *nzveura*'s primary function is to elevate the spirits of the bereaved family members by introducing moments of joy.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the significant role of *nzveura* in helping the bereaved to cope with stress and other socio-psychological challenges that emanate from the death of a beloved one. Death is viewed as a painful event that results in the transition of the deceased from the human world to the spirit world. The Karanga believe that death leaves a trail of negative effects that affect the social and psychological well-being of the deceased. As a mechanism of coping with grief and managing stress, the Karanga have many ways of dealing with stress, which include wailing, music, dance, drinking beer and smoking cannabis, humour, and *nzveura*. *Nzveura* is a notable *rite de passage* that is done during bereavement by the Karanga. *Nzveura* is a practice that is done by the Karanga by a family friend, which brings laughter and lightens the tense atmosphere. Through *nzveura*, family members, relatives, neighbours, and friends can provide support and comfort to those affected by death during times of grief. The humour that characterises *nzveura* eases the tension that will arise among the bereaved and mourners. It helps to divert attention from sorrow and pain to acceptance, laughter, and comfort. It offers socio-psychological support to the Jena-Karanga during bereavement before the burial of the deceased because it offers emotional, practical, and informational support to help people cope with the heartbreaking, social, and psychological challenges associated with death and loss. The support is necessary in ensuring that there are emotional and social tools for the bereaved to cope with the loss. *Nzveura* is thus a Karanga practice that is beneficial for people struggling with a stressful loss of a dear and loved one.

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