

Career advancement as a Coping Mechanism of widowers and widows in Meru County Kenya

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Abstract

Widowhood is a state of losing a spouse through death and has been on the increase in Kenya and all over the world. A spouse's death may affect the widowed persons' psychosocial wellbeing, as and may cope with it differently such as in career advancement. In Meru community, few researches have been done on career advancement as a coping mechanism of widowhood. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how career advancement as a coping mechanism is used by comparing widowed men and women in Meru County Kenya. The researcher used the *ex post facto's* causal-comparative research design. The target population was 80,332 widowed men and women in Meru County and the accessible population was 192 widows and 192 widowers in four Districts that were purposively selected making a total of 384 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires which were administered to widowed persons and two Focus Group Discussions for widowed persons were held in each of the four selected Districts; one for the widowers and another for widows. The instruments in the study yielded a reliability of 0.81 which was found suitable for the study since it was higher than the acceptable reliability of at least 0.7. Piloting of the instruments was done in Tharaka- Nithi County to establish reliability of the research instruments. Data analysis was done by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Data analyses were done by use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 17 for windows. The findings revealed variations in career advancement as a coping mechanism of widowhood where widows had lower rates of career advancement than the widowers. Finally, the findings may assist the widowed men and women to cope better psychologically and socially with their state of widowhood as they bring up their families single handedly by advancing their careers.

Keywords: Widowhood, Career advancement, coping mechanism, psychosocial wellbeing, Widow/ Widowers

1. Introduction

During the widowhood accommodation stage, the widowed person has a new way of looking at the world. Entering this stage does not mean the end of depressed feeling or an end to pain of his or her loss. The widowed person learns for instance, that he or she can laugh and live a normal life, can enjoy people and look forward to getting up in the morning. Moreover, they may begin a change in the old habits of daily living that framed their lives into developing new ones appropriate to their current situation through career advancement. Women continue to be educated at an inferior rate to their counterparts, increasing their reliance upon men and this has adverse effect more on widows. They are also limited from owning, acquiring, and controlling property throughout Kenya, regardless of social class, religion, or ethnic group. If widowed women attempt to assert property rights over men or in-laws, they are often ostracized by their families and communities. This practice of disinheritance seems to be on the rise, particularly in areas hit hard by poverty (Mutua, 2002).

Throughout Kenya's history, women have been subjected to consistent rights abuses while shouldering an overwhelming amount of responsibilities. A prominent example of this relates to agriculture, which creates over 80 percent of Kenya's jobs and 60 percent of income. Currently, women in Kenya do the vast majority of agricultural work and produce the majority of food. Yet they earn only a fraction of the income generated and own a nominal percentage of assets. Only 29 percent of those earning a formal wage throughout the country are women, leaving a huge percentage of women to work in the informal sector without any better pay. The effect is severe where nearly 40 percent of households are run solely by women and because of a lack of fair income, nearly all these homes suffer from poverty or extreme poverty (Mutuma, 2011). That is why the study sought to compare how career advancement as a coping mechanism is used by widowed men and women.

Other grave women's rights abuses continue to be practiced throughout the country. These include wife inheritance where widows are inherited by male relatives of the deceased husband and ritual cleansing (Patricia, 1995). The cleansing is a requirement of sex with a man of low social standing to cleanse a widow of her dead husband's evil spirits. These cultural practices maintain low self-esteem for women while completely ignoring the threat of HIV/AIDS. One out of every eight adults in rural Kenya and almost one out of every five adults in urban areas are

infected with HIV. The infection rate in girls and young women is exponentially higher than in their male counterparts (World bank, 1995). Since women are predominantly infected by their husbands, they are essentially left to die when their land, home, and assets are taken from them by their husband's family. The cultural norms described here affect the majority of women in Kenya; yet the government consistently try to provide resources for the empowerment of women but to a smaller extent. Despite their increasing numbers, women including widows, women have tended to enter the workforce in lower –status, lower paying jobs and remain clustered in a limited number of conventional careers hence limiting career advancement (Tinklin, Croxford, Duckling & Frame 2005)

In the modern society, views about how a recently widowed man or woman should behave have been altered immeasurably over the years. Long gone are the set periods of time for mourning a spouse, and the biblical notion that a widow is obliged to marry her deceased husband's brother has all faded from today's modern society (Ngunga, 2009). Marriage Missions International Reports (2011) that once the pain of loss subsides, widows and widowers, are often uncertain about what their future holds. Friends and family may urge them to look for another partner or encourage them to never find another mate. Once a possible partner has been found, the anxieties arise again where one begins to wonder about other people's views and expectations about the career advancement. It is surprising how other people perceive remarriage and career advancement since the widowed persons develop fears of being considered unfaithful to a loved husband or wife who has already passed on (Scolt & Allen, 1990).

Study Objective

To determine whether there are differences in career advancement used by widowed men and women to cope with widowhood in Meru County of Kenya.

Research Problem

The widow or widower may genuinely feel blameworthy, usually their self-blaming thoughts are unrealistic since they are overly harsh on themselves. They stretch their imaginations to believe they would have prevented death. They feel as guilty as if they had intentionally brought

themselves or others harm which is rarely the care. However, all people feel guilty during a time of loss. What widowed persons do is to get a support system to help them sort out these feelings by minimizing the unrealistic guilt. For example, career advancement can help to separate realistic from unrealistic guilt by asking questions during the recoil stage, where many widowed persons are not prepared for the negative feelings that are experienced. As a result some widowed persons advance their careers in order to cope with their state of widowhood that has diverse challenges.

2. Methodology

This section presents a description of research design, location of the study, population of the study, sample size and sampling procedures, instruments, data collection and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

Ex post facto's causal-comparative research design was utilized because two groups of widowed persons (widows and widowers) were compared in order to find out how career advancement as a coping mechanism of widowhood is used. The study was carried out in Meru County Kenya.

Sample of Research

The researcher used simple random sampling technique to select four districts from the eight districts in Meru County, Kenya. According to Ogula (1998), a sample size of 384 respondents is acceptable for a descriptive research with a population of 100,000. In this study, the target population is 80,332 and therefore a sample size of 384 is deemed appropriate. Out of the 384 widowed persons that were selected, 192 were widows and 192 were widowers who were purposively selected. From this number, 48 widowed men and 48 widowed women were sampled in each District by use of purposive sampling technique.

Instrument and Procedures

The study utilized questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions to collect data from the respondents. The items in the questionnaires were open and closed-ended. Furthermore, Focus Group Discussions helped to capture the in-depth information by probing further on career

advancement as a coping mechanism used by widowed persons. The issues raised were recorded in a recording list for reference and in order to assist the researcher in data analysis.

Data Analysis

Career advancement as a coping mechanism of widowhood was explored to establish whether differences exist in career advancement of widows and widowers. The data that was collected from the questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages was used and inferential statistics included the t-test to compare means of widows and widowers in Meru County, Kenya. Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) notes that t-test is an ideal statistical tool when comparing the means of two groups. Career advancement as coping mechanism was established and compared in widowed men and women. The significance level was set at $\alpha=0.05$ and Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17 was employed in the entry and analysis of data. According to Borg (1996) SPSS is the commonly used set of computer programme in social science research. The programme is comprehensive, integrated collection of computer programmes for managing, analysis and displaying data. The results of the data were presented in summary using frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts that enhanced clarity and brevity. Furthermore, from the Focus Group Discussions, some excerpts giving the responses of widowed men and women were presented in themes and summaries. These were very useful because they gave more in-depth information about career advancement as a coping mechanism of widowhood.

3. Results of the Research

Comparison of career advancement Widows and Widowers

Career advancement refers to a widowed man or woman going to pursue further his/her education in a higher institution of learning after the loss of a spouse. The results are as indicated in Table 18.

Table 1: Responses of Widowed Men and Women on Career Advancement as a Widowhood Coping Mechanism

Category	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
Widows	34	26	3	29	100	192
Widowers	27	83	0	14	83	192

It is evident in Table 1 that 34 widows strongly agreed and 26 agreed to the items in the questionnaire that they advanced their careers after the loss of their husbands through death. However, 27 widowed men strongly agreed and 68 agreed to the same. This was an indication that men outnumbered the widowed women in going to higher institutions of learning due to socio-economic problems widowed women had compared to widowed men. It was further noted that 29 widows disagreed and 100 strongly disagreed with going to advance their careers in order to cope with the state of widowhood. As noted earlier in the social-economic status, widowed women were not as financially stable as widowed men. They also experienced more problems with in-laws, discrimination and issues of wife and property inheritance that affected their psychosocial lives. To shed more light, means, SDs and Independent Sample t-test analysis, on career advancement as a widowhood coping mechanisms was computed as shown in Table 19.

Table 2: Comparison of Career advancement as Widowhood Coping Mechanism

Category	N	Mean	t-value	df	p-value
Widows	192	2.29	17.37*	1	0.000
Widowers	192	1.61	41.10*		

*denotes significance at $\alpha=0.05$

The results in Table 2 show that mean differences existed between widows and widowers joining higher institutions of learning as a coping mechanism of widowhood. Widowers outnumbered the widows in career advancement. The mean for widows was 2.29 whereas that for widowers was 1.61 points. This implies that widowers were turning to education as a coping mechanism more than widows. Therefore, a look at the mean scores and standard deviations (S.Ds) should provide substantive difference. The obtained t-value ($t=41.10$, $P < 0.05$) is indicative of statistically significant differences in career advancement of widows and widowers in Meru

County. Moreover, from Focus Group Discussions, Some widowed men talked about career advancement as a coping mechanism better than widows as in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1.

Researcher: Do you find career advancement a better coping mechanism after the loss of your spouse?

Francis (Widower): I have thought seriously going back to college since I lost my wife six months ago. I feel I need to keep myself busy though I fear that my two children are young and require my attention. Anyway, I have already applied to join a masters course and when I am admitted to the University my parents will be left with them. It will help me overcome my grief when I get busy.

Joyline: (widow) I think advancing my career would not work for me now. I am thinking about my children career advancement first now that I am alone. My in-laws would bring issues in my inheritance and may view the idea as waste of resources

Richard (Widower): My friend has grieved his wife for a couple of months, but after telling him to further his education like I did, he is better. When one changes the home environment and meets new friends one overcomes the grief faster.

Jolly: (widow) On going to further my diploma I wouldn't like because who will take care of my children? Secondly no finances since my children are young.

From the excerpts widowed men who are educated considered career advancement as the best coping mechanism. This is because it gives them a newer and better environment than home. It also makes them always busy in class which makes the grieving process fade away faster with time. However widows were of contrary opinion that they had no finances, in-law support and gave priority to their children Education first. Ntozi (1997) also observes that, because widowers use strategies that tend to be more cognitive than emotional in nature, they do well with books and other educational resources that help them help themselves. Because of the unique problems widowers have assuming new responsibilities, they can benefit from programmes that focus on skill-building and self-care education to help them successfully manage those tasks of daily living important to health, functioning, and independence. Issues of greater concern for

widowers might include meal planning and preparation, housekeeping, and doing laundry (Ntozi, 1997).

4. Conclusion

Differences existed in widowhood coping mechanisms among widowed men and women. Widowed men coped better than widows in their state of widowhood by advancing their careers. The study established that young widows were not supported by their in-laws and educated widowed persons practiced live apart together kind of remarriage relationships and advanced their careers secretly as one widow noted. Old and semi-illiterate widowed persons were against career advancement as a coping mechanism.

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