

UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES, TAMALE

WIDOWHOOD RITES AMONG THE TALENSI OF THE UPPER EAST REGION

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BY

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DECLARATIONS

I hereby declare that this dissertation/thesis is the result of my own original work and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere:

Candidate’s Signature:..... Date:.....

Name:

Supervisor

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the dissertation/thesis was supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of dissertation/thesis laid down by the University for Development Studies.

Supervisor’s Signature:..... Date:.....

Name:



DEDICATION

To family, my wife Eugenia and my kids (Elvira, Elvis and Elsie) and all staff of Actionaid

Ghana



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I am very grateful for the invaluable support of my supervisor Samuel Ziem Bonye, Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Planning and Land Management. I am really glad I had you as my supervisor because in moments when I thought of giving up your comments gave me the confidence that I could make it and so I never gave up.

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ABSTRACT

In many parts of the world, widowhood rites are widely believed to be practices that a bereaved spouse has to go through upon becoming a widow. It is a period in which a woman transitions from her marital status as a wife to a widow in the family and community. Different societies attach different customs and values to widowhood, and these have a strong influence on how it is experienced. The study therefore sought to examine the performance and effects of widowhood rites among the Talensi of the Upper East Region in Ghana. The survey employed both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies in the gathering of data. These involved the administration of sixty questionnaire, ten key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The study revealed that 98.4% of widows undertook widowhood rites under the traditional widowhood rites; 62% of the widows undertook the rites said the performance of widowhood rites was harmful; 50% of the widows had their farm lands confiscated; 15% not supported by anybody and have no peace of mind and 13% had no recognition in the community. The following recommendations were made. Resourcing and empowerment of the National and Regional Houses of Chief to continuously review the traditional practices including widowhood rites; strengthen the capacity of relevant state agencies with the mandate to ensure social protection for widows. The government programme on Livelihood Empowerment against Poverty (LEAP) be expanded to cover all non-working widows. This will enhance their livelihood and upkeep of widows and therefore protect them against exploitation and violence.



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Acronyms

AIDS:Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

CAT:Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading
Treatment or Punishment

CEDAW:Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against
Women

CHRAJ:Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice

CSO: Civil Society Organisation

DEVAW:Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

DV: Domestic Violence

HIV:Human Immune deficiency Virus

ICCPR:International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

ICESCR:International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

NGO:Non-Governmental Organisation

OHCHR:Office of the High Commission for Human Rights

TZ:TuoZafi

UDHR:Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN:United Nations

WaLWA:Women and Law in West Africa



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background of the problem

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Human rights instruments have come a long way in the protection of women generally. This is demonstrated through the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and more specifically, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (The African Charter) and the Protocol to the Africa Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights On The Rights of Women (The Women's Protocol to the African Charter), have made progress in protecting the rights of women in Africa. The aforementioned instruments do not however make the necessary arrangements for the protection of certain specific groups of women such as the widows.

The 1992 constitution of the Republic of Ghana is an extension of these international instruments and therefore has made adequate provision for the protection of widows and vulnerable person's .This constitution however falls short of enforcement probably due to the legal plurality in the country. According to Limann (2003) in her dissertation on 'widowhood rites and the rights of women in Africa: the Ugandan experience; she expressed that the coexistence of customary laws and common law have impeded enforcement paving the way for the perpetuation of practices that may be harmful to the physical and mental wellbeing of widows.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana recognises customary law as contained in chapter 4 section (1c) in which the laws of Ghana are addressed. In enumerating the laws the



constitution made recognition of customary law under the auspices of “any Orders, Rules and Regulations made by any person or authority under a power conferred by this Constitution”. Hence the constitution defines “customary law” as the rules of law, which by custom are applicable to particular communities in Ghana. It is therefore not misplaced to say that some of the customs and practices professed in the country, though accepted by the people and sanctioned by the traditional authorities might be harmful to some groups of people particularly women and the most vulnerable. This deficiency in the constitution is evident from such practices as widowhood rites, widow inheritance, and property inheritance practices that widows are subjected to in Ghana. According to Limann (2003) this situation is further aggravated by the fact that most widows who bear the brunt of these discriminatory practices are those found in rural societies, where illiteracy is high and ignorance of law is rife.

This study among the Talensi therefore sought to establish the existence of widowhood practice, the effects on widows, examine whether the practice constitute a violation of the fundamental human rights of widows, as well as make recommendations for policy and programme development.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The practice of widowhood rites according to some Ghanaian traditions is linked to the physical being, personality and soul of man. For instance among the Akan, a man is made up of ‘mogya’ (physical being), ‘sunsum’ (personality) and ‘okra’ (soul) the life-giving force (Rutledge, 2009). Similarly Angsotinge (2002) described the concept of a man among the Dagaaba as being a person having body, intelligence, reason or spirit, vital breath, soul shadow and impurity. The component of the person known among the Dagaaba as the ‘doer’ is termed mystical or spiritual dirt and is the root cause of the widowhood rites. Atinga



(2006) mentioned the mystical dirt among the Frafra as a component of the personhood of a person as also being the basis for the performance of widowhood rites to separate the deceased from the surviving spouse as well as prevent the deceased from causing harm. Until the rites are performed and the deceased is separated, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased lingering around the house could be harmful to the surviving spouse.

Martey (2005) reiterated that in every African society, the “Saga of the widow” is not pleasure-giving. Although, there are many cultural variations within widowhood rites in the same country on the continent, the stories when told, are not different and therefore the African widow does not only suffer emotional and psychological trauma, she also goes through untold spiritual violence.

Akujobi (2009) noted that widowhood is a reality for as long as people are born and people die. Widows can be found in every community but in Africa, the experience of the widow could be such that women dread to be widows. In Africa, widows can go through a lot of hardships that stem from the society, the husband’s family and from tradition.

There is also the popularly held belief that when a man dies, it is his wife who is responsible, even if the man was old and therefore the widow must prove her innocence by subjecting herself to widowhood rites. In some communities in Ghana, it is this belief that underlines the treatment that a woman goes through upon the death of her husband. According to Akudugu(2012) there is a strong belief in communities that such a woman is likely to bury a second and a third husband, after which the fourth, if she can find one. To prevent this calamity a widow must purge herself of the ill-luck that has bedeviled her.

Widowhood rites have often been described as being cruel, archaic, dehumanizing and unnecessary(Sandys, 2001). The practice has also come under severe criticisms from

religious leaders, women groups and human rights advocates who categorize widowhood rites as being very discriminatory against women and an infringement on the rights of widows. Many people consider the continued existence of these rites as a major social problem. Hence, there have been calls for these rites to be abolished altogether, at least for those aspects that degrade women and infringe on their dignity and human rights to be modified.

The abuses that come with these practices could be more serious than physical assaults which perhaps attract public sympathy. In some settlements worldwide, including Ghana, widows may be forced to marry their late husband's brothers or enter into a polygamous marriage and may often be subjected to sexual abuse by male members of their late husband's family (Oduro, 2007). Oduro further observed that the worrisome aspect of this phenomenon is that there seems to be no sign of its stoppage because advocates and government agencies can hardly come to terms with traditions.

The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana guarantees the inviolability of the dignity of all persons (Article 15 clause 1). Again, Article 26, clause 2 of the same constitution clearly states, "All customary practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person are prohibited" (p.27). Article 39 (2) also emphasizes the above injunction. Admittedly, laws have been passed to criminalize certain customary practices that are injurious to women such as the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Trokosi, harmful widowhood rites.

Kuenyehia et al (1998) observed that widowhood rites in Ghana involved seclusion, wearing of prescribed dress codes, walking barefooted, fasting for extended periods of time, symbolic gestures directed at the corpse such as being required to hold the deceased husband's ankles or sleeping in the same room where the corpse is laid. In some cases, widows may be



required to shave their hair and endure the application of pepper to their eyes. They may be stripped naked and carried through the town to a river to be cleansed or they may not be allowed to sleep on a bed until after the fortieth day after the death of the husband (ibid).

The Ghana Human Development Report (2007) indicates that widowhood rites are harsh and cruel. According to the report the rites such as the shaving of hair is intended to make the widow unattractive for remarriage. The report therefore states that the practices are clearly discriminatory against women since widowers are hardly ever required to perform such rituals upon the death of a wife. The report concluded that the severity of such rites and the harmful effects on women have led to the introduction of a provision in Criminal Law which makes it an offence for any person to compel a bereaved spouse to undergo any custom or practice which is cruel in nature (Section 2(a) of PNDC Law 90).

Angsotinge (2002) in his study of widowhood rites among the Dagaaba directed his attention on the ceremonies such as the rite of separation, purification, test of fidelity, smearing of ashes or clay, wearing of rope (gana), shaving, go round the bier three times, sleep outside for three days and does not receive food or drink from people but through the mediation of the ground as well as the rationale for the practices. Similarly Atinga (2006) in his study of the death and funeral rites of the Frafra (referring to Grune, Talensi, Bosi and Nabdam) focused on the ritual re-enactment of their belief system, the meticulous nature of Frafra funerals and the way they handle the dead to portray their belief about the dead vis-a-vis their relationship with the living. Cited in his report is the elaborate widowhood ceremonies for both the widow and the widower as if is closely linked to the funeral performance of a deceased spouse. These findings are generalized for tribes that have some commonalities as well as differences; hence it was silent about what is different for the Talensi as all are.



Tei – Ahontu (2009) in his study of widowhood rite amongst the Ga sought to find out the reasons that underlie the practices, why widowhood rites still persist in Ghana and in the event a man loses his wife, how the rites are carried and if there are any discrepancies to that of the woman among the Ga. He also elaborated on the effects and human rights dimensions of the widowhood rites among the Ga.

Nabila (2009) on the origin and reasons for widowhood rites among the Mamprusi also elaborated on some of the difficulties and violations widows go through. The rites include test of fidelity to her late husband, shaving of her hair, being stripped and bath naked during the funeral, compelled to marry one of her late husband's siblings or face various reprisals such as being disowned by her family, denied certain communal rights or even lose her children to her husband's family.

Akudugu (2012) discussed the knowledge of people on the aspects of widowhood rites that violate women, variation in widowhood rites on the basis of gender as well as contribution of national and international institutions to promote the rights of widows. Unlike Tei-Ahontu and Angsotinge (cited earlier) the focus of Akudugu goes beyond the reasons and ceremonies to include human rights dimensions, the contribution of national and international institutions in the promotion of the rights of women.

The 1992 Republic Constitution of the Republic of Ghana respects and guarantees the right of persons to practice their culture provided, the practice is not dehumanizing and injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person. The National and Regional Houses of Chiefs have been mandated by the constitution to regularly review customary practices to ensure that they are in sync with current trends and for that matter do not violate the constitution. This study therefore sought to investigate widowhood rites, the reasons for the performance and the effects on the rights of widow in the Talensi District.

Harmful widowhood rites affect the physical, psychological; health and the general well-being of widows. Harmful widowhood rites therefore constitute a human rights violation. Any practice that might be harmful or injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person is an affront to the fundamental human rights of such a person, and also, a violation of the fundamental human rights and freedoms contained in the 1992 Constitution Ghana. The study therefore seeks to examine the Talensi widowhood rites to identify widowhood rites that are harmful, how the practice affects women as well as examine the reasons for the performance. There are many studies on widowhood rites among the tribes of northern Ghana but not much can be said about the Talensi people. The study of the Talensi widowhood rites will therefore add to the body of knowledge on widowhood rites in Ghana

1.2 The Main research Objectives

The main research objective of the study is to examine widowhood rites and its effects on widow among the Talensi District.

1.2.1 Specific research Objectives

- To examine the performance of widowhood rites amongst the Talensi
- To analyse the effects of widowhood rites on the wellbeing of widows and widowers
- To examine whether widowhood rites practiced among the Talensi constitute a human rights violation

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study will be useful to all stakeholders, especially those in the academia by way of contributing to knowledge. Through literature reviews and field research information will be made available on the reasons for widowhood rites, the effects of widowhood rites and the relationship between widowhood rites in the context of fundamental human rights.



It will inform and educate traditional leaders on areas of customary laws that come into conflict with common law, the 1992 constitution as well as international instruments on fundamental human rights. Through the study the adverse effect of some traditional practices will be shared with traditional leaders and therefore facilitate the reformation or transformation of such practices to be consistent with current legislations and international conventions.

Civil society organizations will find this study exciting in that it will inform their advocacy programming. The absence of or inadequacy of information on the extent to which widowhood rites violate the human rights of widows affects the quality of advocacy programming. Most civil society organizations working on widowhood rites base their evidence on social perceptions and testimonies of individual experiences that are often not empirically supported by research and therefore unable to influence policy makers and legislators. This study sought to bridge the information gap on widowhood rites with the case study of widowhood rites among the Talensi.

Policy makers will find this study very relevant for embarking on social transformation through the development of policies that socially include and respect the rights of excluded groups like the widows. The conflict between customary practice and the pursuance of human rights of widows will enable Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to influence duty bearers to develop social programmes as well as enact legislation to promote, respect and fulfill the rights of widows.

1.4 Limitations of the Study

The limitations encountered during the study were; the initial resistance of some widows to provide information for reasons of secrecy and protection of their means of livelihood.



However, it was explained to them that the survey was for pure academic work and that all information gathered was going to be confidential and that the identity of respondents was not going to be exposed. Based on these explanations the widows were confident to interact and provide responses.

Furthermore, literature on widowhood rites was not very accessible in libraries for review and therefore had to be largely obtained from the internet and other electronic sources.

1.5 Organisation of the Study

The thesis is presented in five chapters. Chapter One consists of introduction to the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, significance of the study and finally the organization of the work.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant related literature on the topic and arranges them in themes.

Chapter Three covers the Methodology which consists of the research design, population, sample and sampling techniques, instruments, and data collection procedures and data analysis. Chapter Four presents and discusses the results of the study and, finally, Chapter Five covers the summary of findings, conclusions and recommendations.



CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter examines the concept of widowhood rites, an over view of widowhood rites, its effects on women ,the concept of human rights given attention to; international human rights conventions, Regional protocols ,national legislations as well as the theoretical framework for the study.

2.1 Definition of key Concepts

Widowhood: Widowhood refers to the status of a person whose spouse has died and who has not remarried. Women in this situation are referred to as widows, and men as widowers (Nukunya, 1969; Kirwen, 1979).

Rites:ceremony performed by a particular group of people, often for religious purposes; funeral rites, initiation rites (Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary, 6th edition, p1018).

Ritual: a series of actions that are always carried out in the same way, especially as part of a religious ceremony (Oxford Advance Learner’s Dictionary, 6th edition, p1018).

Widowhood rites: refer to customs and rituals performed for and by the widow or widower following the death of a spouse (Nukunya, 1969; Kirwen, 1979).

Human Rights: Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), “Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour,



religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to our human rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.”

2.2 Global Overview of Widowhood Rites

Widowhood rites are common phenomena globally although there might be variations in the manner in which it is practiced (Sandys, 2001). During the Victorian era in Great Britain, widows were expected to mourn for two years and were allowed to wear grey and lavender only in the last six months of the ‘half mourning’. Mourning widows were confined to their homes wearing full black attire and a weeping veil for one year and a day (full mourning) after her husband’s death(<https://www.funeralwise.com>). Clocks in the homes were turned off, windows opened and mirrors turned to face the walls. During the second mourning, that is the next nine months, the widow was allowed some small ornamentation like mourning jewelry and lacy embellishments’ to her black attire. Within this period, widows must deny themselves food and amusement for an extended period. Furthermore all normal activities were curtailed, or set aside, until all obligations had been fulfilled. Ritual purification was required before the mourner could resume normal social relations). Unlike funerals in some African countries where widows are expected to wail loudly for the loss of a love one and undergo an enduring elaborate widowhood rites, in England and other Western European societies an excessive display of grief is seen as an embarrassment for both the bereaved and sympathizers (ibid).

For the past two decades, the traditional funeral rites in Britain has been in transition for various reasons such as changes in social stratification due to a declining economy and shrinking resources, increased demand for cremations, decline in religious practices and increased secular observances and a shift from ancestral to contemporary funeral rites due to its cosmopolitan nature. Funerals rites have been taken over by funeral houses with religious



bodies such as the churches performing their bid (<https://www.funeralwise.com>). This is evidently a different

scenario if compared with funeral rites in India and Africa where there is social and religious significance attached to the rites. Furthermore Atinga (2006) observed in his study of the “Death and Dying a Study of the Mortuary Rites of the Frafra of Northern Ghana in the Light of the Christian Funeral Liturgy An Attempt at Inculturation” that widowhood rites are usually performed to separate the deceased from the surviving spouse and therefore ensures that the deceased does not harm the surviving spouse. Comparing therefore the widowhood rites in Britain and that of the Asia and Africa, one would realize vast difference in relation to the social and religious significance of the rites.

Chowdhury (1994), examining widowhood rites among the Haryana in India observed that widowhood rites places restrictions on residence, dress, diet and social intercourse thus force a widow to a life in the shadows affecting both her physical and mental health. She added that cruel mourning rites may confine the widow within a designated residence for many months or years. She also stated that until the enactment of the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the life of widows was determined by reliance on local customary law, which did not permit them to inherit. Another observation was that only six states in India made amendments in their respective laws to recognize joint ownership rights of women. Furthermore laws prohibiting child marriage, ‘sati’ (widow burning) and violence against women have not succeeded in eliminating such traditions which persist mostly in rural communities or in villages of some Indian states. If “sati”, the practice of widow burning is put aside, the practice of confinement, defacement and cleansing are synonymous to widowhood rites in some African countries and among some ethnic groups particularly in Nigeria and Ghana.



2.3 Funerals

It is popularly said that death is a necessary evil and will come when it will come and therefore after death comes funeral. In the religions of Africa, life does not end with death, but continues in another realm. The concepts of life and death are not mutually exclusive with no clear dividing lines between them. Human existence is seen as a dynamic process involving the increase or decrease of power or life force, of living and dying, and with different levels of life and death.

The African religions scholar Placide Tempels (1959) describes every misfortune that Africans encounter as "a diminution of vital force." Illness and death result from some outside agent, a person, thing, or circumstance that weakens people because the agent contains a greater life force. Death does not alter or end the life or the personality of an individual, but only causes a change in its conditions. This is expressed in the concept of "ancestors," people who have died but who continue to "live" in the community and communicate with their families.

Atinga (2006) described Frafra funerals as a ritual re-enactment of their belief system, the meticulous nature of Frafra funerals and the way they handle the dead portray their belief about the dead vis-a-vis their relationship with the living. He noted that Frafra funerals are in two parts the 'wet' and the 'dry' funerals. The wet funerals could simply be understood as a burial rite. The rites in this part are rites that are performed shortly after death leading to the burial of the deceased. The wet funeral only paves the way for the second and more elaborate part known as the 'dry funeral' also referred to as the final funeral rites.

Angsotinge (2002) described the concept of a "man" among the Dagaaba as being a person having body, intelligence, reason or spirit, vital breath, soul shadow and impurity. The component of the person, known among the Dagaaba as the 'doer' is termed mystical or



spiritual dirt and is the root cause of the widowhood rites. Atinga (2006) mentioned the mystical dirt among the Frafra as a component of the personhood of a person as also being the basis for the performance of widowhood rites to separate the deceased from the surviving spouse as well as prevent the deceased from causing harm. Until the rites are performed and the deceased is separated, it is believed that the spirit of the deceased lingers around the house could be harmful to the surviving spouse. It is therefore conclusive to say that funeral rites are linked to widowhood rites in most traditional societies particularly in Ghana.

2.4 Widowhood Rites

The concept of widowhood rites is understood in different contexts by scholars and academicians. In many parts of the world, widowhood rites are widely believed to be practices that a bereaved spouse has to go through upon becoming a widow. It is a period in which a woman transits from her marital status as a wife to a widow in the family and community. Kirwen (1979) and Nukunya (1992) observed that widowhood rites are ceremonies performed for a person on the death of a spouse and also to ensure smooth transition of the spirit of the deceased spouse.

According to Tonah (2009), widowhood is a condition in which one loses his or her spouse through death. In the socio-cultural context, it refers to a situation where either the man has lost his wife or a woman has lost her husband through death. A widow is thus a woman who has lost her husband and has not remarried. Similarly Ayagiba (2010) explained that a widow is a woman who has lost her husband and widowhood rites are the ceremonies and rituals that the widow is made to go through. In agreement with the above definitions, widowhood rites describes the period that any surviving spouse undergoes certain cultural rites to honour the dead spouse. It is in fact believed to be the most important moment when a widow shows her love for the deceased spouse (Idialu, 2012).



The rites simply refer to prescribed customs and rituals performed for and by the widow or widower following the death of a spouse. Among many ethnic groups in Ghana, widowhood rites are prescribed and performed as part of the funeral rites of the deceased spouse source? Although prescribed for both widows and widowers, the rite for widows are much more elaborate and take a much longer time to complete than those for the widowers. Widowhood rites are generally less stringent and with less deprivation for widowers as compared with widows.

The United Nations' report on the State of the World's Population (2000) and studies conducted by the World Health Organization (2000) World Health Report and Amnesty International Annual Report (2004) all indicated that violence against women is rampant in Africa and is increasing in some areas. It also revealed that that violence against women in Africa is mainly due to the existence of discriminatory laws, prejudicial and harmful customs, traditions, beliefs and practices, and partly due to non-enforcement of gender-sensitive laws and constitutional provisions that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex.

Azumah (2010) in his presentation on "Gender and cultural based violence and widowhood rituals in Ghana and its effects on women's reproductive health rights" also explains that many cultures through beliefs, norms and social institutions legitimize the perpetuation of violence against women. He indicates that such violence cannot be understood in isolation from the norms, social structure and gender roles within the community, which greatly influence women's vulnerability to violence.

2.4.1 Widowhood rites in Africa

In Africa,

"Issues of death are generally emotive, and the situation is made worse when the process of re-adjustment to the new scenario created by bereavement is controlled by



pre-defined cultural forces that one may not understand. Widowhood rituals in the Luo community in Kenya have often taken center stage in the community's politics, especially when such practices are perceived to expose surviving spouses, particularly widows, to certain levels of indignity” (Gunga, 2009 p166).

“In many societies, widowhood is a process characterized by rituals, forced remarriages, harassment, rejection, loneliness, poverty, loss of status, fear of the future and depression” (Ntozi, 1997, pp.125-144 cited in Gunga (2009). This description by Gunga affirms the elaborate and intense rites widows undergo as well as some violence associated with it, as mentioned by Azumah.

Luo widows are not permitted to formally remarry or take other sexual partners in addition to the surrogate husband (Potash 1986a, and 1986b; Kirwen, 1979 cited in Gunga 2009). Like the lower castes of Haryana of India, Luo widows are encouraged to get a surrogate husband within the family of the deceased husband through ‘ter’ (‘culturally-sanctioned” re-marriage”), a situation that has often been controversially referred to as “wife inheritance” or “widow inheritance”. The Luo practice of ‘ter’ entails cleansing as a pre-requisite for restoring normalcy of the widow into the society, and as a means of neutralizing the assumed cultural impurity and avoiding ‘chira’ or taboo violation. The widows’ remarriage among the Luo’s can be likened to the Arapesh of New Guinea. Anthropologist Margaret Mead’s historical standing of 1935 of New Guinea suggests that Arapesh widows were frequently encouraged to re-marry, preferably to one of the dead husband’s relatives. Among Arapesh widows, 75% of them re-married by entering the home of the dead husband’s younger brother. These women had both a motherly and sexual role which they were expected to perform. Also among the Arapesh there was strong pressure for widows to remain within the husband’s family because she was judged to be a member of that family.

Whereas widows are subjected to very strenuous widowhood rites among the Luo, widowers are not taken through the same strenuous widowhood rites. In a similar fashion, Owen (1994) observed that bereaved Luo men may interact freely in the community and are therefore more likely to remarry out of choice, because their movements are not unduly restricted by widowhood rites. In the few instances where men are also required to undergo some “cleansing rituals”, the procedures are much simpler than what their female counterparts experience (Limann 2003). Also, where a man loses his wife, the man is almost immediately offered a substitution to comfort him. It has been rightfully observed that “The differentiation between men’s and women’s role among the Yoruba in Nigeria as with other societies is one of complementary and superior relationship in favour of men. It involves a hierarchy in which men are given greater leverage over decision making and resources than women (Heroy, 2009).

Ostracism is another rite performed on widows among the Edo’s and Esan’s in Nigeria (Egharevba, 1971; Okojie, 1960). The widow is seen as defiled and capable of defiling others. She may not be touched or receive a handshake and in some cases, her hands are padded. In some extreme situations such as there is enforced silence, the widow sleeps on the floor and feeds from dirty dishes (ibid). Furthermore the widow is forced to drink the water from which her deceased husband’s body had been washed to prove her innocence source (ibid).

In the Edo of Nigeria, family law permits certain widowhood practices particularly for women married according to customary rather than statutory law. The practices are derived from the belief that the beauty of a woman is her husband. At his death, she is seen as unclean and impure and therefore must observe the widowhood rites as customary law demands. There are long periods of incarceration during mourning, an obligatory poor standard of hygiene, deprivation of the husband’s property and maltreatment by his relatives,



the enforcement of persistent wailing; and the practice of demanding that a widow sit in the same room with her husband's body until burial (Sandys, 2001).

2.4.2 *Widowhood Rites in Ghana*

Widowhood rites are performed by most ethnic groups in Ghana however the rites might differ among the various ethnic groups and major religions such as the Christian, Muslim and traditional religions according to their belief or faith in both urban and rural areas of the country. Among the Akan and Ewe, custom requires the widow to undergo certain rituals as part of the demonstration of mourning (Ghana Human Development Report, 2007). These rites sometimes involve seclusion, prescribed dress codes, walking barefooted, fasting for extended periods of time, symbolic gestures directed at the corpse such as being required to hold the deceased husband's ankles or sleeping in the same room where the corpse is laid (Atinga, 2006). In more extreme cases, widows may be required to shave their hair and endure the application of pepper to their eyes (Idialu, 2012). They may be stripped naked and carried through the town to a river to be cleansed or they may not be allowed to sleep on a bed until after the fortieth day after the death of the husband, Kuenyehia et al (1998). Criticism of the severity of such rites and the harmful effects on women have led to the introduction of a provision in the Criminal Code Amendment Law (1984) which makes it an offence for any person to compel a bereaved spouse to undergo any custom or practice which is cruel in nature.

Widowhood rites are performed as part of the funeral celebration for a deceased spouse (Tonah, 2009). The rites are usually done after the first funeral rites (okulafemo) of the deceased person have been performed but before the second funeral rites (yalafeemo) is organized and usually lasts for a period of one week. In recent times however this period of one week has virtually been reduced to three days to accommodate persons working in the



formal sector. This has also been further shortened to between one and three days depending on the health of the spouse concerned.

Widowhood rites are considered an act of purification which results in the ultimate severance of the marriage bond between the two people, that is, between the living and the deceased spouse (Tonah, 2009). It is also a period during which the spouse publicly shows his/her grief for the loss of a marriage partner. Hence the widow denies herself pleasurable things and lives in sorrowful conditions.

Similar to the widowhood rites in Nigeria and among the Luo of Kenya, the widowhood rites among the Ga involves rites of confinement, cleansing and the outdooring of the widow into her new status. The widow cleansing among the Ga involves the preparation of chewing sponge, herbs and water in an earthen pot or bowl and which process can go deep into the night by an elderly woman who herself has undergone the rites before (Atinga, 2006). When the preparation is over the officiating woman carries the pot or bowl and followed by other widows and women who have reached menopause to a refuse dump in the outskirts of town where the cleansing is performed through the washing of the widow. After this the widow is returned to the house and ushered into a room where she spends her seclusion. No one is allowed into the room except those who conducted the cleansing rites. The widow sleeps alone on the mat she is supplied and uses a stone as a pillow (ibid).

The widow goes through a period of confinement in which she receives no visitors; no one is allowed to talk to her standing face-to-face. She is supplied with drinks (gin) and fed once a day. The widow comes out only in the night to bath after which she smears her body with clay. The widow stays in the room for six days after which she is led early in the morning to the sea by the same group that led her to the refuse dump. However, on this occasion she is accompanied by a male so that if the sea became turbulent the man will rescue her. The



widow is thoroughly washed in the sea. After this the officiating woman uproots a herb from the sea and hands it over to the widow and anyone who wishes to speak to the widow has to pick one of the leafs she is holding .On arrival she dresses and takes her seat in the yard where she receives congratulations from well-wishers who make donations to her (Tonah, 2009).At the end of it all the items she brought are given to the officiating woman (ibid).One remarkable difference between the widowhood rites of the Ga from other widowhood rites is the flexibility of time which takes care of the health and working needs of the widow. What however remains the same as other ethnic groups in the sub region of Africa is the differential treatment in the rites for men and women. Whilst women undergo an elaborate widowhood rite, the process is not the same for the men.

2.4.3Dagaaba Widowhood rites

Angsotinge (2002) observed that the Dagaaba believe that the spirit of the dead has a waiting period before it finally departs to the other world and that during this period it can harm those closely related to him or her. The ceremonies of the widowhood rites therefore serve as a reason to separate the disturbing spirit of the dead person from his or her spouse.

Widows therefore undergo rites of purification that allow one to pass from a status of married woman into that of a widow. This process when completed allows the woman or the man the legitimacy to remarry and is very important for social identification. The widow also goes through a test of fidelity to her husband. This however is not done for widowers. A Widow who successfully go through this process is declared as faithful to her husband but also exonerated from possible accusation of being the cause of his death.

The process of the widowhood rites among the Dagaaba include the smearing of ashes or clay (yagra), wearing of rope (gana), and the shaving of the widow. After the burial when the bier



(paala) is left standing, it means widowhood rites will take place. The widow is made to go round the bier three times after which she is taken to the funeral house. This gesture symbolizes the significance that she has been faithful to her deceased husband and is then ready to go through the purification and separation from him.

Within the Dagaaba traditional set up the widow is made to sleep outside for a period of three days and does not receive any food or drink directly from people but through the mediation of the ground (i.e. items are put on the ground for her to pick). This is the stage of symbolic separation from society in that she is not allowed to do ordinary things as before. After the third day she is allowed to enter the house. Women who refuse to undergo the rites incur the wrath of their in-laws and might face ejection from the house of their deceased husband.

2.4.4 Widowhood rites among the Frafra

Atinga (2006) explained the importance of the widowhood rites as a component of the funeral celebration of many African communities including the Frafra and their neighbours. Though with minor variations, the widowhood rite forms an integral part of the funeral celebration of all the neighbouring communities of the Frafra.

Anafo (2010) in agreement with Atinga mentioned that widowhood rites are both traditional and cultural practices that are performed on a woman who loses her husband with the belief that it keeps off the spirit of the spouse. This belief, however, varies from one community to another. The rites are normally performed during the final funeral rites of the deceased and they have both religious and social connotations. The religious factors influencing widowhood rites, she said, has to do with the belief system of the people. The people of the Zuarungu area, for example believe when somebody dies his or her spirit does not go straight to the ancestors until the final funeral rites are performed.



Atinga (2006) and Anafo (2010) observed that widowhood rites among the Frafra are very similar to other traditions. These included, setting the widow or widower apart, holding the calabash, shaving and bathing the widow and re-integrating the widow into the family and community.

The ritual begins immediately after the death of a spouse. As soon as he or she dies and the body is dressed and laid in state in the ritual room, the widow is separated and sent to another room where other women as consolers and supporters stay with her but with a designated woman whose duty is to guide her and provide her needs. Immediately, a calabash is prepared for her to handle. She remains in that room till burial takes place and if she wants to attend to nature's call she has to be accompanied by one or two women. This separation is effective until the final funeral rites are performed and the widow is re-integrated. As a symbol of this long period of separation the calabash the woman is given is taken away from her after burial has taken place and is sealed in a big pot waiting for the day the final funeral rites would be performed. During the final funeral rites this calabash is brought out and she will use it for the rest of the rites.

In the case of a widower, he is handled differently. A widower is not separated at this moment. He, however, sits outside and also surrounded by some elders who make sure they give him the support that he needs. This rite is similar to the confinement practiced by many African societies typically among the Luo, the Akan and the Dagaaba.

2.4.5 Christian Widowhood Rites

When the husband of a Christian woman dies the widow has the options of mourning for forty days, six months or one year as a general practice among Christians world over. The widow would usually clothe herself with colors such as black, white and nanny blue. Kuenyehia (1998) observes that custom plays a major part in dictating the mourning rites in many societies. For instance it is a usual practice for a woman in a Christian marriage to stay



for a period of one year mourning before entering into another marriage. In the period of mourning the woman puts on black for the whole period of mourning, wears a special chain on her neck, and engages in limited social activities.

The Catholic Church of Ghana has incorporated some of the customary widowhood rites into the Christian rites for widows (Mawusi, 2009). This liturgy takes care of the needs of the Christian women owing to the fact that Ghanaian women feel obliged for deep religious reasons to undergo the rites. Mawusi (2009) following the Christian widowhood rites developed by the Liturgical Commission described the processes of widowhood rites in the Keta-Ho Diocese of the Volta region to include initiation into widowhood, clothing of the widow and finally the outdooring of the widow.

According to Mawusi (2009) on the third day, the priest goes to the house of the widow and blesses the clothes to be used by her. The prayer for that occasion mentions protection against assault or temptation of wicked spirits. After three months, a day is fixed for the taking off of the mourning clothes. During the period of three months of widowhood, it is recommended that the widow lead a modest and chaste life, meanwhile consultation of diviners as done in the traditional performance is forbidden.

On a day, preferably Saturday, the widow presents the new (white) clothes to the priest to be blessed in Church to be worn the following Sunday. This process eliminates the rigorous rites that widows undergo under customary practices. The point of departure between the Catholic Liturgy on widowhood rites is the stressful manner in which the various rites associated with the customary practices, are made in a very convenient manner when using symbolic ceremonies in the liturgy while prohibiting the aspect of consultation of diviners Mawusi (2009).



2.4.6 Muslim mourning rites

Iddah' (pronounced as 'Iddat' by Urdu linguists) literally means to keep a count. In Islamic terminology, it is known as 'the waiting period' i.e. the period a woman should wait before she can re-marry. A woman whose husband dies should observe Islamic funeral rights as stated by the Qur'an.

"And those of you who die and leave wives behind them, they (the wives) shall wait for four months & ten days, then when they have fulfilled their term, there is no sin on you if they dispose of themselves in a just and honourable manner. And Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do." (Aayah No. 234, Surah Al-Baqarah, Chapter No. 2, Holy Qur'an).

Therefore, a woman whose husband dies should observe 'Iddah' for a period of four months and ten days. This is required to be followed even by those women who become widow even before their marriage could be consummated i.e. a case where the husband dies without having made a sexual relation with his wife. During the period the woman is not allowed to wear or adorn herself with any clothing or ornaments that could render her attractive to men.

Muslim scholars agree that weeping for the dead is permissible, whereas crying out loud and wailing are not. The Prophet (s.a.w - *salle alaa hu alaihi wa sallim*) said: "The one who is wailed for is tortured on account of it." Abu Musa is reported to have said: "I declare my disavowal of all that Allah's Messenger disavowed. The Messenger of Allah disavowed publicly a woman who mourns loudly, one who shaves her head, and the one who tears her clothes in mourning." It is permissible for a woman to mourn for a period of three days over the death of a near relative. The Islamic term for mourning is Hidaad. Mourning for more than three days is not permitted except in the case of her husband's death. The Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) said: "It is not permissible for a woman who believes in Allah and the Last Day



to mourn over a dead person more than three days, except for her husband, where she mourns for four months and ten days." A woman whose husband has died must observe what is known as the 'Iddah - The waiting period before she may remarry, which is four month and ten days. During this period a widow is not permitted to use any adornment, such as jewelry, kohl (eye-makeup), silk, perfume, or henna dye on her hands and feet.

A widow during her 'iddah is permitted to leave her home to fulfill her economic and social needs. If for example she works to sustain her family, she may continue to leave her home daily for the period of work. Apart from leaving the house for necessities and social visits to relatives and friends, a widow during her 'iddah should pass the night in her own home until her term lapses, that is, she is not to sleep outside of her house. Hence the observation by Women and Kuenyehia (1998) that the widow is confined to the home and is inactive for forty days is contrary to the stipulation of the Hadeeth for a widow during her 'iddah'. Widows are allowed therefore to fulfill their economic and social needs such as work to sustain and may continue to leave for work.

The similarity between the Islamic and Christian widowhood rites is the specified period of time for mourning for the woman and not the man. On the other hand the practice of confinement, the non-adornment of ornaments in order not to be attractive to men as well as the widow remaining chaste for the period of mourning are the point of similarities between the customary widowhood rites and that of the Muslim widowhood rites.

2.4 Factors Affecting Widowhood Rites

Many authors (Atinga, 2006; Tasie, 2013) have identified factors affecting widowhood rites as social, cultural and religious. Indeed Tasie (2013) stated thus "African widowhood rites are the products of the instinct of self-preservation which society has created to protect and safeguard the widow against the vengeful ghost spirit of her deceased husband". Tasie's



claim was supported by Frazer in his publication “The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion”(1933) which had produced a convincing argument to support the claim that a deceased person is believed to be more malevolent to his living descendants than he was during his life time.

2.4.1 Religious factors

Among the Frafra, religious factors play a significant role for the performance widowhood rites hence has become part and parcel of their belief system. As it has become abundantly clear above, the Frafra believe that when somebody dies his/her spirit does not go straight to the ancestors until the funeral rites are performed. In this sense then the spirit of the deceased is hovering around and may be of danger to the living (Atinga 2006)

The widow or widower who shared with the deceased in a very intimate way would probably be the first target of the deceased who may want to take her along for the companionship which they shared on earth. Connected to this is also the belief that the thread that united them in marriage is not broken by death but by the funeral celebration of the deceased the widow or widower still remains the ‘property’ of the deceased spouse. It is, therefore, the widowhood rite, that is performed during the funeral celebration that officially severs that link that exists between the deceased and the living spouse. Once this is broken it leaves the widow or widower free to return to his or her normal life without his/her deceased partner. Anafo (2010) also indicates that a woman who loses her husband remains in separation as long as the funeral of the spouse is not performed. That is, she cannot re-marry nor have sexual intercourse until she is integrated into the public through the widowhood rites.

According to Atinga (2006) the ‘mystical dirt is a unit of the personhood of the person’ in the concept of the person among the Gurune. This mystical dirt in a very complex way is shared with the intimate person not through blood relations but the sexual intercourse in which their



most intimate and private sexual organs come into contact and during which they shared their sexual secretions. Therefore, part of severing the link between the deceased and the spouse is to cleanse the widow or widower of this mystical dirt through the widowhood rites. Anafo (2010) in agreement with Atinga added that the mystical dirt is a unit concept of the people of Zuarungu area which is shared with the immediate person. It is shared with one's spouse not through blood relations but through sexual intercourse. As part of breaking the connection between the deceased and the spouse, the widow is cleaned of this "mystical dirt" through the widowhood rites.

2.4.2 Socio-cultural Factors

In the first place the widow who has undergone a ritual of separation at the death of the spouse remains in that situation of separation as long as the funeral of the spouse is not performed to allow her to go through the widowhood rites. In this case the widow or widower cannot fully exercise her normal role in the community. In other words he or she cannot remarry until she has been re-integrated into the community during the funeral through the widowhood rites. In the case of a widow, she is not even allowed to engage in sexual intercourse before her husband's funeral is performed. Therefore, the widowhood rites are intended to re-integrate the widow or widower into the community so that she can become once again a 'normal' member of the community and be able to exercise her normal social responsibilities. Atinga (2006) focus was on examining the death and dying rites of the Frafra, thus the study did not examine into detail the human rights implications and the effect of the widowhood rites on women which previous writers in their literature have described as harmful to the dignity of the widow.



2.5 Effects of Widowhood Rites

Many authors Angsotinge (2002), Atinga (2006), Tei-Ahontu (2008) and Tonah (2009) stated in their studies of Dagaaba, Gurune, Ga respectively, agree on the common factors accounting for the reasons why people go through widowhood rites. These include factors such as separation, integration, love, farewell, blessings, proof of innocence with respect to causing the spouse's death, and the obedience of tradition.

Tei-Ahontu (2008) in examining traditional practices against human rights, failed to analyze the socio-cultural, economic and political effect of the rites on widows. Though Tei-Ahontu further agrees with some of the practices meted out on the widows as enumerated by other authors (Angsotinge, 2002; Atinga, 2006 and Tonah, 2009), his focus however was on human rights. Atinga (2006) on the other hand focused on the spirituality and the processes of the rites. In both cases notwithstanding, no examination was made on the effects or consequences of widowhood rites on widows in their respective traditional areas.

Nabila (2009) stated that among the Mamprusi widowhood rites was intended to appease the soul of the departed. In addition the rites also tested the fidelity of the widow to the husband when he was alive. Other rites, the widow undertakes include the shaving of hair, stripping and bathing naked during the funeral rites of her husband. She may eventually be compelled to marry one of her late husband's siblings or face various reprisals such as being disowned by her family, denied certain communal rights or even lose her children to her husband's family. For all intents and purposes, the widow is treated as part of the property of her late husband and passed on to some relative or other. If the widow is fortunate to have male children who inherit her late husband's property then she might be able to benefit from her son's inheritance. Female children on the other hand do not inherit any of their father's property. They inherit only the property owned by their mothers and this brings a lot of



hardship to a widow with only female children. Nabila's primary focus was on customary law and the consultative role of traditional leaders in the reform or abolishment of negative/harmful cultural practices. Hence customary law is based on beliefs, values and morality which largely is not in sync with common law or fundamental human rights principles, thus causing harm or violating the rights of the widows. On the other hand Nabila (2009) agrees with Atinga and Tei-Ahontu (2008) on the reasons and processes of the rites and goes further to examine the socio economic effect of widowhood rites on the widow and the orphaned children. The Ghana Demographic and Health Survey report (2006) confirmed Nabila's findings on treatment meted out on widows as it stated that 6 percent of women between 15 and 49 years of age were widows, half of whom had been dispossessed of property, which is an obvious right violation.

Tei-Ahontu (2006) concluded that the fate of victims of abuses of widowhood rites rest largely in their own hands. This is because there are no institutionalized sanctions if they decide not to go through the practice. Though this sounds plausible, every society has its own belief systems and values that regulate and control the way people behave. The alleged killing of the husband or exposing the infidelity on the part of the widow are some of the reasons given for the performance of the widowhood rites to enable the widow exonerate herself or prove her innocence. Refusal to undertake the widowhood rites may result in banishment from the community, the denial of inheritance and probably children taken away from her according to customary law.

Angsotinge (2002) in his study of widowhood ritual among the Dagaaba of Northwestern Ghana concluded that the widowhood rite of purification serves to integrate widows into society and also to give an appropriate psychological and emotional healing to women who lose their husbands. Contrary to Tei-Ahontu (2006) observation that there were no institutional sanctions if the widow refused to undertake the rites, Angsotinge stated that due



to societal pressure and fear of stigmatization, some women give themselves up for the rite. He also added that because of the strong belief in the mystical dirt many women including Christian women voluntarily undertake the widowhood rites. The rites he emphasized in this case are modified to meet societal expectations.

Whiles acknowledging some good sides of the rites, Angsotinge (2002) recommended that some cultural elements needed to be reformed. These he said included the elements of fear which society has about dead people and their continuous interaction and influence on the living. Secondly he observed that gender based discrimination especially against women is seen by women's rights movements as gross injustice against women and must be condemned or eliminated.

Brukum et al (2009) observed existence of widowhood rites among the Kassena, the Nchumuru, and the Ga tribes in Ghana. Widowhood rites are observed to be more elaborate for females than males and that men are made to take part in a few rites while detailed and lengthy, harsher rites are performed on the women. They also added that the cruel aspects of the rites have been recently abolished but that this change has come so slowly. A drastic transformation of widowhood rites was found among the Ga in the coastal, urbanized and multi-ethnic, modernized and secular environment where kin and clan networks have been considerably weakened.

Brukum et al (2009) in agreement with Angsotinge (2002) observed that the practices of widowhood rites have come under intense criticisms in recent times because several individual women and human rights groups, religious organizations and non-governmental organizations have highlighted what they consider to be numerous harmful practices associated with widowhood rites and called on governments to sanction those who compel widows to undergo widowhood rites.



It is worth noting that unlike in Asia and Africa, where there are elaborate widowhood rites, the case is not the same with the widows from Eastern and Central Europe. Widows in these areas are more concerned about the social welfare systems and how widows are treated. Though there are variations in the widowhood rites in Asia and sub Saharan Africa, it is important to acknowledge the extreme forms of widowhood rites such as the 'seti' or widow burning in Asia and sexual cleansing in Kenya, have not been observed to be practiced in Ghana.

2.6 Gender and Cultural based violence

Gender and cultural based violence takes many forms - physical, sexual, psychological, restricted freedoms, coercion and threats occurring in both the public and private spheres. It encompasses a wide range of human rights violation, including sexual abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault and harassment, and several harmful traditional practices. Azumah (2010) in his study on Gender and cultural based violence and widowhood rituals in Ghana and its effects on women's reproductive health rights observed that several women had encountered an individual, interpersonal and community violence. He mentioned physical, emotional, psychological, sexual violence and exposure to harm which are criminal as some of the violence encountered by women. Physical and mental violence, including sexual violence and rape, is a common accompaniment to the onset of widowhood. Sometimes as part of the mourning rite, or associated with some of the ceremonies (for example, having to sit naked, having to take off all clothing by the river, being left alone and destitute), widows are frequently vulnerable to extreme sexual abuse. The mental anguish caused by such physical abuse, the sudden destitution, homelessness, starvation and insults leads a considerable number of widows to commit suicide Azumah (2010).



Cultural based violence includes a wide range of traditional values and practices that are considered harmful to both men and women. According to Article 1(g) of the Protocol to the African Charter, "Harmful Practices" means all behaviour, attitudes and/or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education and physical integrity" (Art1(g) Physical violence revealed acts which include pushing, shoving, confinement/seclusion and torture and diverse forms of exposure to harm- walking bare footed, throwing substances on women to cause harm or pain, restriction of personal hygiene, tiring a rope around the neck and object around the waist and ankle, shaving of hair, and drinking of concoctions (Azumah ,2010).

The emotional forms of violence: includes humiliation (bathing in public, throwing water on victim), belittling one in front of others, and the various forms of confinement (left alone to sleep, sitwith, without the corpse in a room in the home, and restraint from communication as well as all forms of verbal abuse. Widows performed most of these acts out of fear of spiritual predicaments that might befall them and their children.

The widows according to Azumah (2010) on the contrary did not regard the performance of these rites as infringing on their human rights, but just a means of honouring their husbands and avoiding any spiritual consequences that characterized non-performance of such rituals. This is so because customary law is based on values, morality and beliefs of the people which have associated benefits, sanctions and consequences if not adhered to.

Idialu (2012) in her write up on the Inhuman Treatment of Widows in African Communities, published in the Current Research Journal of Social Sciences cited that among the Ashanti of Ghana, widowhood rites are strictly observed and wife inheritance is considered the appropriate thing for an heir to do when the father dies leaving a wife and children (Rattray, 1956). If these rites are not carried out it means that the man has not been given a befitting



burial. Widowhood rites in Ghana, according to her amounts to emotional violence on the widow citing from Okoye (1995) she mentioned that there is always a high level of violence against a woman who has just lost her husband among the Ashanti's of Ghana in the sense that all her husband's properties are eventually taken away from her without considering her situation and circumstances. After the funeral ceremony the widow is expected to choose which man to marry. In practice she may have no real choice; if a man succeeds in sleeping with the widow he will tell a close relative and the man then takes the widow as his wife. Any children she bears him will be the children of the dead husband (FGD 2012) . This is what is called a "levirate" union.

Even though fundamental human rights and freedoms in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana stipulates that 'All cultural practices which dehumanize or are injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person are prohibited,' the issue of widowhood rites and other negative cultural practices are still matters of great concern in some regions of Ghana. This study therefore sought to examine the traditional widowhood rites of the Talensi in the context of the processes involved, rights violations and the effects on the wellbeing of the widow as reviewed in the literature.

2.7 Fundamental Human Rights

The General Assembly of the United Nations in 1948 adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Assembly also proclaimed the UDHR as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective

recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

UNICEF (2014) defines Human rights as those rights which are essential to live as human beings basic standards without which people cannot survive and develop in dignity. Human rights are inherent to the human person, inalienable and universal. This therefore implies that human rights are rights inherent to all human beings irrespective of the nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. All human beings have equal human rights without discrimination, and that these rights are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

Stanford encyclopedia (2003) defines human rights as international norms that help to protect all people everywhere from political, legal, and social abuses. Examples of human rights are the right to freedom of religion, the right to a fair trial when charged with a crime, the right not to be tortured, and the right to engage in political activity. These rights exist in morality and in law at the national and international levels. They are addressed primarily to governments, requiring compliance and enforcement.

The difference between the fundamental human rights and the other rights are that all rights are equal and no right is superior to any other; there are no 'small' rights. Human rights are indivisible and interrelated, with a focus on the individual and the community as a whole. Furthermore human rights are inalienable, inviolable, non-negotiable, interdependent and above all non-discriminatory on the basis of sex, gender, disability, class, race, ethnicity, religion and political affiliation. Although human rights are often divided into two categories, civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights, rights cannot be treated separately or in distinct categories because the enjoyment of one right usually depends on fulfillment of other rights. People who are denied civil and political rights, such as political



participation, have no means to protect the economic, social and cultural rights covering such needs as education and health care. Similarly, where basic survival needs are not met, civil and political rights may be meaningless as people become overwhelmingly concerned with getting adequate food and shelter.

2.7.1 Instruments of Fundamental human rights

The instruments of the international human rights framework that deal with women are the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW 1979) and the Declaration on the Elimination of forms of Violence Against Women (DEVAW, 1993). Every country in the world has ratified at least one of these, and Ghana has ratified most of them. These treaties are important tools for holding governments accountable for the respect for, protection of and realization of the rights of individuals in their country.

United Nations ,since 1964, the has mainly dealt with the rights of women through specialized treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and the Declaration on Violence against Women (DEVAW, 1993).

CEDAW defines discrimination against women as any "distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of marital status, on the basis of equality between men and women, of human rights or fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field." CEDAW condemns discrimination in all its forms and to ensure a legal framework including all laws, policies and practices that provides protection against discrimination and embodies the principle of equality. States are therefore called upon to take action in all fields-civil, political, economic, social, and cultural-to guarantee women's human rights.

2.7.2 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa provides for strong protections against gender-based violence and incorporates its elimination under the scope of women's rights to life, integrity and security of the person and the right to dignity. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child includes protection from sexual abuse under the scope of "torture, inhuman or degrading treatment." Each of these instruments places affirmative duties on the States parties to take affirmative action to eradicate violence, including by means of legislative, social and educational measures.

2.8 Human Rights Legislations in Ghana

Following the ratification of international conventions and protocols, the 1992 republic of Ghana Constitution makes provisions for the respect, protection and fulfillment of fundamental human rights. Under the Directive Principles of State Policy, the obligation of the state are; to protect all her citizens, promote just and reasonable access to own property either individually or as a group as well as to cultivate among all Ghanaians respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and the dignity of the human person.

The entire chapter 5 of the 1992 constitution of the republic of Ghana is dedicated to fundamental human rights and freedoms. In line with the international human rights framework, the constitution of Ghana states that, every person in Ghana, whatever his race, place of origin, political opinion, colour, religion, creed or gender shall be entitled to the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual but subject to respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest. Furthermore every person according to the constitution shall be entitled to his personal liberty and no person shall be deprived of his personal liberty (The Republic of Ghana, 1992).



The constitution goes further to state that the dignity of all persons shall be inviolable implying that the rights of persons are indivisible, inter-related and must be respected a such no person shall, whether or not he is arrested, restricted or retained, be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; any other condition that detracts or is likely to detract from his dignity and worth as a human being.

The Constitution states clearly also that all persons shall be equal before the law. A person shall not be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, colour, ethnic origin, religion, creed or social or economic status. The constitution defines "discriminate" to mean, to give different treatment to different persons attributable only or mainly to their respective descriptions by race, place of origin, political opinions, colour, gender, occupation, religion or creed, whereby persons of one description are subjected to disabilities or restrictions to which persons of another description are not made subject or are granted privileges or advantages which are not granted to persons of another description.). However it is not sufficient to rely on the constitution that no one will be discriminated against on the basis of sex, religion, race, and ethnic identity and so on, in a society where the belief in superiority of male is taken for granted and often reinforced by cultural practices and religious beliefs.

The literature indicates that widowhood rites are practiced among many ethnic groups in Africa and particularly in Ghana. Widowhood practices involves periods of confinement, separation, shaving of hair, confinement ,stripping naked ,denial of food and in some cases sleeping with the deceased .The review also revealed that some of the practices constitute a violation of the rights of the widow or violence against women. Some of the rights affected include health, food, psychological ,freedom of movement, speech ,freedom of association as well as the freedom to engage in economic activity within the period of the funeral .These rights violations therefore bring untold hardship on widows ,affects their dignity ,livelihood, brings upon them physical harm and psychological torture. This notwithstanding the literature



also acknowledges that not every widowhood rite is harmful or violates the rites of a widow and that such rights are laudable as they seek to unite families and ensure continuation of the lineage of the deceased. Widowhood rites are customs and traditions that should be preserved and practiced in a more dignified manner as a cultural heritage.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the methodology employed for the study on widowhood rites in the Talensi traditional area. It consists of the research design, population, sample size, sampling technique, and data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.2 Research Design

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. This approach was selected because it allows for in-depth analysis and interrogation into social issues such as widowhood rites and is particularly suitable for the study of a specific issue among small population or geographical areas. Lamnek(1988) describes qualitative research as interactive, naturalistic, communicative and reflective. Also Karen (2001) observed that qualitative research is the type of research which aims at getting personal views and options from people. It aims to look at things in-depth and therefore is more concerned with the quality of responses given rather than quantity. It is less about how much, and more about what and why. On the other hand quantitative research allows the researcher to measure and analyze data. The relationship between an independent and dependent variable is studied in a detail. This is advantageous because the researcher is more objective about the findings of the research. Quantitative research can be used to test hypotheses in experiments because of its ability to measure data using statistics. The quantitative studies provide data that is expressed in numbers for example, allowing us to capture a snapshot of a user population.

Qualitative data provide a detailed understanding of a problem while quantitative data provide a more general understanding of a problem. This qualitative understanding arises out



of studying a few individuals and exploring their perspectives in great depth whereas the quantitative understanding arises from examining a large number of people and assessing responses to a few variables. Qualitative research and quantitative research provide different pictures, or perspectives, and each has its limitations. When researchers study a few individuals qualitatively, the ability to generalize the results to many is lost. When researchers quantitatively examine many individuals, the understanding of any one individual is diminished. Hence, the limitations of one method can be offset by the strengths of the other method, and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data provide a more complete understanding of the research problem than either approach by itself (Bryman 2006).

These are all situations in which using only one approach to address the research problem would be deficient. Hence, the study therefore employed both the qualitative and quantitative methods in the data gathering.

3.3 Study Area

This study focused on the Talensi in the Talensi District in the Upper East Region of Ghana. The Talensi district is well known for its rich cultural heritage and adherence to traditional cultural practices such as widowhood rites, funerals and festivals. Whereas some of the practices may be good, others have the tendency to infringe on the fundamental human rights of women. This formed the basis for the selection of three communities for the study in Talensi by names Tenzug, Shia and Winkogo.

Talensi District, formerly known as Talensi-Nabdam District forms part of the thirteen (13) Municipalities and Districts in the Upper East Region. The Administrative capital of the District is Tongo. The District shares boundaries with Nabdam District to the North, Bolgatanga Municipal to the West, East Mamprusi District to the South East, West Mamprusi District to the South West and Bawku West to the east. The district lies between latitude 10.15° and 10.60° north of the equator and longitude 0.31° and 10.5 (Ghana Statistical



Service,2014).The district has 81194 population representing 7.8 percent of the region's total population of the Upper East region . Males constitute 49.7 percent and females represent 50.3 percent. Eighty four percent of the population is rural. The district has a sex ratio of 101.2. The population of the district is youthful (41.2%) depicting a broad base population pyramid which tapers off with a small number of elderly persons (7.0%). The total age dependency ratio for the District is 99.0, the age dependency ratio for males is higher (96.7) than that of females (89.5) (Ghana Statistical service 2014).

There is one paramountcy (Talensi) under the Talensi Traditional Council. The paramountcy and the traditional councils are supported by sub-chiefs who administer specific areas of jurisdiction. Each village/community has a chief. Apart from the chiefs, there are Tindanas who are the custodians of the sacred traditions as well as the administrators of the ancestral lands, which they hold in trust for the living and the dead.

The population is dominated by people who practice traditional religion (46.6%), followed by Christianity (43.4%) and Islamic religion (3.7%) which is practiced in few communities particularly among migrant(Ghana Statistical Service ,2014). The district is blessed with rich cultural festivals such as Golbo, Daa, Tenlebgre and Tingan; which are laden with traditional rites and rituals that could be appealing to tourist. The Golbo festival occurs before crop planting season, while the other festivals occur after harvesting of crops. The district has a three day market cycle, the markets are held mostly in the evenings.

3.4 Units of Analysis

The unit of analysis of the study involved all widows, non-widows, widowhood ritualists, traditional leaders' opinion leaders and key informants in the Talensi District irrespective of age and level of education or religion.



3.5 Sampling and Sample Size

In statistics and survey methodology, sampling is concerned with the selection of a subset of individuals from within a statistical population to estimate the characteristics of the whole population. The study therefore sampled sixty two widows in Talensi who were interviewed during the study. This is because of the difference in population of the study communities, hence not equal numbers were interviewed in each. Interviews were also conducted for 10 key informants, such as traditional leaders, heads of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) and selected state departments and agencies with the mandate for the protection of women's right.

3.6 Sampling Technique

Sampling strategies adopted for selecting the sampling groups to participate in the study was by purposive and snowballing sampling techniques. Snowball sampling, also known as chain-referral sampling, is a method of collecting qualitative data from new people using the referrals of the people who have already been included in the study. The previous widow interviewed is asked if she knew another widow who may have some kind of helpful insight or information that may help in the study. If she does, then the researcher is put in contact with that person. This technique is often used to access people who are a part of a "hidden population" or those that are often not represented in other samples (Atkinson and Flint, 2001). Hence widows in Shia, Tenzug and Winkogo were selected per purposive and snowball sampling. After identifying the first widow to be interviewed in the community, they identified other widows for interview as well in the community enabling the enumerator have representation of widows across the scattered settlements of the Talensi.



3.6.1 Purposive sampling

The study sought to interview widows and key stakeholders who were knowledgeable and adequately informed on widowhood rites and fundamental human rights, knowledge of traditional practices in the study area and therefore respondents were purposefully selected to participate. Snowball sampling which is a special nonprobability method for developing a research sample where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances was also employed. The identification of the first widow in the community, she provided lead to the next widow and so on and so forth till the last widow was selected.

3.6.2 Simple Random Sampling

Simple random sampling was employed for the identification of the study communities. Out of a total of thirty communities in the district balloting was conducted for the selection of three communities representing 10% of the total number of communities to participate and that is acceptable in research. Names of communities were written in pieces of paper, folded nicely to ensure no one could identify a community until when the paper is unfolded. The folded pieces of paper were then mixed up in a box and random selection was done to select Tenzug, Winkogo and Shea.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

For the purposes of the study primary and secondary data was collected through the administration of qualitative data collection instruments and semi-structured questionnaire which was quantitatively analyzed.



3.7.1 Primary Data Collection

This study employed various instruments in the collection of primary data. These included semi-structured questionnaire, in-depth interviews via Focus Group Discussions and key informants interviews and the non-participant observation were used as the method to collect relevant data in relation to the subject matter. Questionnaires were administered to 62 widows in the Talensi District from three communities (TND). The respondents were selected on the basis of location and their status as widows.

3.7.2 Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Three different Focus Group Discussions were conducted with each session made up of not more than 15 widows in Shia, Tenzug and Winkogo. Each focus group session lasted for about an hour focusing on the origin and practices of widowhood rites, the effects of the rites, and differences in the rites for men and women and possible human rights violations. The Focus Group Discussion was interactive, allowed widows to tell their story and express how they felt going through the rites and above all to confirm data analyzed from questionnaire. It was moderated in a manner that ensured that no one person dominated the discussion.

3.7.3 Key Informant Interviews

In-depth interviews were designed for key personalities who are believed would have a good knowledge of widowhood rites in Talensi, the implication of the rites on widows and fundamental human rights. They included traditional leaders, human rights organizations, department of women and opinion leader. The process for identification and selection of respondents was purposive. It was based on the knowledge of the respondent on widowhood rights in the Talensi area and women's rights or human rights.



3.7.4 Non-Participant Observation

To assume that the presence of any researcher's in the field would not exert an influence on the data is unrealistic (Strong 1974 cited in Silverman, 2005; 29). The researcher adopted non participant observation as part of methods for gathering the data. The study took particular interest in funeral performances among the Talensi as the time of gathering data coincided with the peak of funeral performances. This study particularly took interest in the treatment given to widows such as confinement, dressing, food they ate, who was around them. The non-participant observation provided this study the opportunity to observe how widows were treated for comparison to be made with other ethnic groups. The information obtained through this process, in the form of observation personal reflection and analysis were recorded in field note books. Non-participant observation supplemented data from the Key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and the use of questionnaire.

3.7.5 Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Semi-Structured Questionnaires was administered to 62 selected widows from six communities in the Talensi district within the study area. The semi-structured questionnaire contained pre-determined responses for widows to select what was applicable in their situation or suggest what pertains in their situation. This approach adopted to enable quantification of responses to complement qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions. Questionnaire for the study was developed and pre-tested to ensure accuracy and consistency in the use of language and understanding by respondents. Enumerators' were therefore trained to administer the questionnaire to respondents in their local language in situations where the respondent was not literate. The questionnaire was applied only to widows selected through the snow ball technique in the three selected communities. The questionnaire were therefore administered in the morning daily and on non-market days in



the communities .The timing was particularly important because the widows were not exhausted by work and could devote ample time to provide quality responses.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data analysis employed both qualitative (descriptive) and quantitative approaches to examine key issues at stake. In the light of the above, qualitative data analysis was made during the data collection process and after the overall data collected. This is in line with Yin's (1993) view that data analysis should not be a separate step coming after data collection but a continuous and simultaneous process. However, the SPSS analysis was done in the office and inferences cross-checked in the field.

In the data collection process, qualitative field notes captured on daily basis on historical events, conversations, interviews and stories on widowhood rites and practices during group discussions and interactions with specialised groups were analysed daily after each day's work. The rationale was to keep track of important events/ issues that cropped up in the days work and prepare adequately for the next day. It was also to look for consistencies and inconsistencies between knowledgeable informants and to find out how informants could agree or disagree on important issues on the subject matter (Bernard, 1990).

In quantitative analysis, simple quantitative operations from questionnaires were tabulated and processed using SPSS. To enable the use of SPSS, questionnaires were pre-coded by assigning numbers to pre-determine responses. This was done to avoid descriptive responses which make it difficult to manage quantitative data. The analyses were done by first, developing a template. This process involved creating variables of key issues from the questions such that specific questions can be noted. I then entered the codes onto the SPSS template according to the variable created. The overall data analysis was a combination of the two approaches (qualitative and quantitative) which reflected the sum total of the daily



experience of widows in the Talensi. Development of data collection tools, training of enumerators, pre-testing of tools, datagathering, screening, storage, analysis and presentation lasted for a period of about two Months.

Data analysis involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the raw (Miles and Huberman, 1984; 21, cited in Silverman, 2000; 177). Qualitative data analysis involves working with data, organizing it, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is or what is not important and deciding what needs to be told or reported. Analysis of data on widowhood rites in Talensi was subjected to both qualitative analysis.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

In many traditional areas people are very careful with the kind of information they pass to outsiders. In order to gain their confidence and collect the right information, the purpose of this study had to be explained over and over again for the understanding of the respondents.

Every researcher has personal perceptions, beliefs and values that can influence the decisions making process during research and the data analysis process. Weber (1946) has pointed out that all research is contaminated to some extent by the values of the researcher. The conclusion and implication to be drawn from the study are also largely grounded in the moral and political beliefs of the researcher (cited in Silverman, 2000; 257). I had my own perception about widowhood rites, however I had to put aside what I perceived in order to conduct a scientific research so as to become open to new ideas. The ethical issues that came up during the study included been emotional about some of the stories told by widows, been judgmental and condemnation of traditional



widowhood practices. However enumerators were trained on data collection and ethics which helped to minimize or eliminate biases.



CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an empirical analysis of widowhood rites with specific focus on the widow among the Talensi in the Talensi District of the Upper East Region. This chapter presents and analyses the socio-demographic characteristics of Talensi in the Upper East Region of Ghana and therefore the relevant aspects of the characteristics that hinges on Widowhoods rites are discussed. These include confinement, shaving of hair, holding of a stalk, holding of calabash and sitting on a local mat.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

According to Women's Health USA (2011) population characteristics describe the diverse social, demographic, and economic features of the Nation's population. Demographic factors such as sex, age, race and ethnicity can serve a number of purposes for policymakers and program planners. The study took into consideration the following demographic characteristics; age of respondents, number of children of respondents and the religious background of the respondents.

4.1.1 Age of Respondents

The respondents were within the ages of 26 to 51 with 58 percent of them age between 46-50 years; followed by respondents with age between 41-45 being 21% then the remaining age groups 26-30, 31-35 and 50 plus were less than five percent .



Table 4.1: Age of Respondents

Age Cohort	Frequency	Percentage
26-30	2	3.2
31-35	3	4.8
36-40	5	8.1
41-45	13	21
46-50	37	59.1
51+	2	3.2
Total	62	100

Source: Field Survey, 2016

Table 4.1 above provides the breakdown of respondents by age cohorts. The data illustrates that there are fewer younger widows as compared to the older widows. For instance the widows between the age of 41-45 and 46-50 are in the majority. This could implies that younger widows are most likely to remarry within to one of the brothers of the decease or move on with their lives .Widows who most often than not have many children would prefer to stay and look after their children.

4.1.2 Number of Children of Respondents

The study revealed that 45.2% of the widows had more than five children, 26% had 3 children, 11% had four children and the remaining had less than two children.



Table 4.2: Number of Children of Respondents

Number of Children	Frequency	percent
1	1	1.6
2	5	8.1
3	16	25.8
4	11	17.7
5+	28	45.2
Missing	1	1.6
Total		62100

(Source: Field Survey 2016)

The number of children per widow provides a revelation of some of the hardship widows go through in order to provide for the better upkeep and upbringing of the children. After the demise of their loved ones the responsibility to shelter, feed, educate provide health care lies squarely with the poor widow who mostly are vulnerable and categorized among the poorest in the community with limited economic resources such as farm lands, birds and animals in the community .

4.1.3 Religious Background of Respondents

The study also found out that 59% of the respondents were practicing Christians and 41% practicing traditional believers.

Table 4.3: Religious Background of Respondents

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Traditional	25	40.3
Christianity	36	58.1
Missing	1	1.6
Total	62	100.0

(Source: Field Survey 2016)

Although in the literature review segment, Islamic widowhood rites was examined in detail, the people of Talensi are predominantly Christians and traditional believers and this is manifested in the responses of the respondents as illustrated in table 4.3 above.

4.2 Length of Time of Widowhood

The study revealed that, 22.6% of respondents have been widowed between 11-15years, while 19.4% between 5-10years and less than five years respectively. Furthermore 16.1% have been widowed for over 20 years while 11.3% have been widowed between 16-20years in Tenzug, Shia and Winkogo communities.

Table 4.4: Number of Years Living as a Widow

Years	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5yrs	12	19.4
6-10	12	19.4
11-15	14	22.6
16-20	7	11.3
More than 21	10	16.1
No response	7	11.3
Total	62	100

(Source: Field Survey 2016)

As illustrated by Table 4.4 above the implication of the length of time women live as widows is an indicative of the growing number of widows in communities. It also gives an indication that many widows are not remarrying because of their children and sometimes because of their age. Older widows are not attractive for remarriage amongst the deceased siblings and are also not ready to go into marriage outside the community. This in many instances is to ensure security for their children in relation to property inheritance and social protection.

4.3 Performance of Widowhood Rites amongst the Talensi

The study revealed that all 62 respondents have undertaken the widowhood rites and that the majority of them constituting 98.4% did it under the traditional widowhood rites while the remaining 1.6% under the Christian religion.

Besides the traditional widowhood rites, various religions have developed their own mode of widowhood rite. For instance the Christian religious denominations have their own forms of widowhood rites which are recognized, respected and accepted during funeral performances among the Talensi. Hence widows who opt for the Christian widowhood rites are not obliged to undertake the traditional widowhood rites.

However in interrogating why a large percentage of the widows went through the traditional rites despite being Christian through focus group discussions and key informant interviews, it came to light that if one of the spouse is not a Christian, particularly the man and happens to die, it was compulsory for the woman to undergo the traditional widowhood rites. Due to modernism or recent development however, there have been some modification to meet the religious needs of the Christian congregation in attendance or in the community.

Angsotinge (2002), in his study of widowhood among the Dagaaba sought to find out why Christian women volunteer themselves to undertake traditional widowhood rites. These questions have duly been responded to in this study of widowhood rites among the Talensi.



The process of the Christian widowhood rites are not an escape route for widows for avoiding the performance of the traditional widowhood rites. The study revealed that 98.4% of respondents underwent traditional widowhood rites, meanwhile 58.1% of them were Christians. The possible reasons for this unusual situation could be attributed to the quest for recognition, respect, acceptability and other social factors that might have compelled them to subject themselves to the traditional widowhood rites.

4.4: Reasons for Undertaking Widowhood Rites

The study found out that all 62 widows have undertaken widowhood rites and that 98.4% of respondents did it the traditional for various reasons.

Table 4.5: Reasons for Widowhood Rites

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Respect for tradition	43	69.4
Pressure from family members	5	8.1
Exonerated from being accused of killing my husband	10	16.1
no responses	4	6.4
Total	62	100

(Source: Field survey, 2016)

Table 4.5 above provides a breakdown of reasons for undertaken widowhood rites. Delving into the specific reasons why the respondents undertook the rites revealed that 69.2% did it for respect of tradition, 16.1% did it in order to be exonerated from being accused of killing their husbands, while 8.1% said they went through the rites because of pressure from family members from both spousal and patrilineal families.

The reasons for widows undertaken the widowhood rites among the Talensi are, as a matter of fact, not so different from what pertains in other traditions, for example the Dagaare, the Akan, the Yoruba and the Indians as reviewed earlier. The following are some of the reasons contained in literature as reasons for widows undertaken widowhood rites among various tribes and ethnic groups widows undergo widowhood rites as show of love for the decease, to exonerate themselves from being accused of causing the death of their loved one being forced by family members and also to be accepted by the community and not be disinherited. These findings confirm the fact that customs and traditions on widowhood rites in Africa and most part of Ghana in particular are similar with very few differences.

4.3.2 Processes Involved in the Widowhood Rites

Similar to customs and traditions in Africa and the Asia (Sandys, 2001), the Talensi widow goes through a very elaborate and painstaking widowhood rites. The purpose for which is meant to portray her fallen status and initiation into her new status of a widow. Focus Group Discussion established that, the widow therefore under goes rites involved in confinement, defacement, ritual cleansing, dethronement and reintegration into the community.

Among the Talensi the widowhood rites involved confinement of the widow during which time she is not allowed to do things she would ordinarily have loved to do. The custom demands that she should not be allowed to go outside the house for fear that the spirit of the deceased spouse would harm her and when she does, she must hold a knife, a stalk and walk sideways while brandishing the knife to scare away the spirit of the deceased.

The widow also goes through a period of defacement during which her hair is shaved apparently to make her look unattractive during the period of the funeral. The shaving is done in the midst of ululation on a refuse dump. The process of shaving is described as painful, laborious and time consuming as is deliberately done without haste. The widow therefore



would have to endure sitting for long hours, irrespective of how long it would take to finish as custom demands.

The widow also goes through a period of dethronement which is manifested in the sitting on the floor or on a mat while putting on leaves from a Shea tree. This rite according to my respondents is an illustration of fallen standard as wife and the new role as a widow. The widows endure a lot sitting on the ground. It is custom that if an ant should bite the widow and she reacts, that means that she was unfaithful to her deceased husband, which then is accompanied by a very humiliating cleansing rites which no widow wants to pass through. In a focus group discussion one widow revealed that widows had to endure pains from bites of ants and other creeping creatures in order not to stand accused.

Finally the ritual cleansing which have to do with bathing on the refuse dump or in a nearby river in the company of other widows. This widows confirmed that they went through cleansing process the purpose of which was to finally separate the widow from the spirit of the deceased husband. This process according many widows is very humiliating as a widow is bathed in the full view of the public on a refuse dump. The widow then is reintegrated into the community and the family with a different status as a widow.

From the study 62% of the respondents said that they were stripped naked, made to eat on refuse dumps, sat on the floor, wore Shea leaves, held a calabash, were confined for three days in a room and not allowed to do things they would normally have loved to do. Furthermore when one wanted to urinate, she had to walk sideways brandishing a knife while holding a stalk to scare away the spirit of the deceased spouse. It was revealed also that some widowhood practices have changed and no longer practiced as previously done. Respondents in a focus group revealed that the Talensi living in Tenzughave stopped the practice of widows wearing leaves as part of the traditional widowhood rites practice and this was



confirmed by the traditional leader of the community who is a very strong advocate for the abolishment of the negative aspects of the widowhood rites. The change enjoyed by widows in Tenzug has been corroborated by widows in Winkogo and Shia who also mentioned that times have changed and that there are changes in the manner most widowhood rites are performed as compared with many years back when some of them went through the rites.

In a focus group discussion with a group of widows at Winkogo on why widows subjected themselves to widowhood rites, they mentioned the show of love, separation from the spirit of the deceased, to exonerate oneself from accusation of killing of spouse as well as sometimes been forced by family members to undertake the widowhood rites as some of the reasons the majority of them obliged to undertake the rites.

According to the study 61% of widows were confined for a period of less than one month which is a great manifestation of change in the practice of confinement. Hitherto so long as the final funeral (dry) is not performed the widow remained confinement, and this sometimes could take so many years.

4.5 Widowhood Rites and Human Rights Violation among the Talensi

All 62 widows have undergone confinement during the performance of funerals of their late spouses. Analysis of responses on the length of time Talensi widows were confined revealed 98% were in confinement for less than a month. This was validated in a Focus Group Discussion with widows in Winkogo who said the confinement lasted for a period of three days. The confinement was usually characterized by the widow sitting in the room in the company of other women and widows, with her unkempt hair, sitting on a mat, holding a calabash, a stalk and a knife to scare the spirit of the deceased spouse who is most likely to hurt her.



During the confinement the widow was not allowed to do things that she would normally have loved to do until the rites are completed and then she was reintegrated into the society. Similar to what happens among the Dagaaba of the Upper West (Angsotinge 2002) and the Akan and the Ga of southern Ghana (Tei-Ahontu, 2008) the Talensi perceive it as a custom and therefore is nondiscriminatory and not a human right violation.

The study further revealed that widowers were not confined. As tradition demands, the widowers' sits outside with the elders and are allowed to move round though holding a stalk to symbolize his new status and to take drink offered by sympathizers. The widower however also eats from a calabash, but this time around inside the compound.

The study also established that, the right to good health of the widow is compromised in various ways. The widow sits on the floor or on a mat in the room making her susceptible to the bites from ants and other creeping creatures that result in various forms of skin infection which will have negative consequences on the health of the widow. Furthermore, the length of time used in shaving, together with the loud ululation from the other widows could result in health complications leading to the widow becoming deaf or developing a hearing impairment on the one hand or the development of rashes and bruises on her buttocks. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana makes it clear in the chapter on Fundamental Human Rights and Freedoms emphatically that customs and traditions that are dehumanizing and injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing be reformed. Analyzing the practice of shaving of the widow one would realized that the practice is injurious to both the physical and mental wellbeing of the widow and therefore constitutes a violation of her right.

The stripping of the widow naked as well as wearing of shea leaves analyzed along the fundamental human rights and freedoms brings to the realization of the violation of the rights



of the widows, in that she is humiliated by stripping naked in public and differently treated as a lesser human being from other people around which constitutes discrimination against women and human rights violation.

The study revealed that 62% of the respondents said some of the practices were injurious and affected them in different ways. Some of the practices that they said were injurious to them were eating food in an unhygienic surrounding, sitting on the refuse dump, sitting on the bare floor, wearing leaves, holding calabash, confined to a room and shaving of the hair all of which have the tendency of affecting the quality of health of the widow.

4.6 The Effects of Widowhood Rites on the Wellbeing of Widows in Talensi

The study found out that 82.3% of widows felt relieved after under taking the rites, 14.5% said they felt hurt while 1.6% said they were disgraced and degraded respectively.

Table: 4.6. The Ordeal of Widowhood Rites

Ordeal of Widowhood Rites	Frequency	Percent
Hurt	9	14.5
Disgraced	1	1.6
Dehumanized	1	1.6
Relieved	51	82.3
Total	62	100.0

(Source: Field Survey, 2016)

Following from the reasons for undertaking the rites the widows mentioned that they accepted to undertake the rites for show of love, for separation and for exoneration from being accused of killing their spouse. It was obvious for the majority to feel relieved, however it does not take away the fact that majority of widows felt some of the practices affected them negatively physically and psychologically as illustrated in table 6 above.



Testimony: A widow from Winkogo during the Focus Group Discussion confirmed as follows:

“When I think of what I went through during the widowhood rites makes me think or behave abnormally. I have never been myself after undertaken widowhood rites. The stripping naked, shaving of hair with loud ululation have made me not to hear well. This could only happen to me because my children were small. I was so traumatized and could not cope with the embarrassment and pain I went through.”

Though the majority of women endorse the rites to exonerate themselves from being accused of killing their spouses, they also acknowledged that some aspects of the rites violated their fundamental human rights as illustrated in the previous paragraphs. Widows have dignity and the same right to health she has same rights to health, shelter and food like everyone else. However they are differently treated and discriminated. A widow ceases to have rights as she loses a spouse; this situation however is not applicable to the widower.

In some extreme situation the widow is made to sleep with the corpse overnight in the same room as show of love for the husband and by so doing fortifying the marriage bond between them until they are separated through a ritual cleansing. The 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana in ensuring the rights of every one is protected and respected prohibits all such customary practices that are dehumanizing and injurious to the physical and mental wellbeing of a person.

As if that was not enough, all widows were made to drink the water that was used to bath the corpse to prove her innocence and also to confirm her fidelity to her late husband. These rites



the widow goes through are tantamount to torture, punishment and an affront to the fundamental human rights of the widow. In the wake of the passage of The Domestic Violence Law, Act 746, some of the rites can best be described also as domestic violence since the violence occurs within the domestic setting.

4.5.1 *Life as a Widow*

When the widow assumes her new role in life after the rites are performed, she begins to be treated differently. She loses her status as a wife to her new status as a widow.

Table 4.7: Effects of Widowhood Rites on Respondents

Effects of Widowhood Rites	Frequency	Percentage
Farm lands have been taken away	31	50.0
No recognition in the Community	8	12.9
Don't participate in decision making	6	9.7
Feel ashamed moving around	1	1.6
Not respected	7	11.3
Not supported by anybody	9	14.5
Total	62	100

(Source: Field Survey, 2016)



The study revealed that 50% of the respondents had their farm lands confiscated, 15% not supported by anybody and have no peace of mind, 13% had no recognition in the community, and 11% said they were not respected in the community like when their husbands were alive. 10% of the respondents said that they were not invited to participate in any form of decision making in the family and in the community at large. Also 2% felt ashamed when they moved around the community due to the humiliation they went through making life miserable for them.

This notwithstanding, with time widows soon get used to it , develop a new strength, make new friends and move on with their lives. Hard working and financially sound widows in the community were tagged, called names such as “Pokɔ Naba” (meaning chief of widows) and are easily often accused of witchcraft in the community said by a widow during the Focus Group Discussion in Winkogo. Furthermore it was confirmed in the Focus Group Discussions that widows are insulted, beating, sexual harassed and sometimes even raped etc. These happenings in the life of widows compel some of them to die prematurely said by a widow during the Focus Group Discussion.

It was also observed during the Focus Group Discussions with the widows groups that denial of property, inheritance, farm lands previous owned by deceased husband, lack of maintenance for the children, physically abuse (beating), insults by children and adults were some of the realities widows were confronted in the community. One of the widows at the Focus Group Discussion testified that after the death of her husband, the few animals left for the up keep of the widow and the children were used for sacrifices without any form of consultation with her or the children. This however is the custom in the community. When a man dies one of his brothers takes over the headship of the family and therefore takes decisions and sacrifices to the ancestors as tradition demands she added.



Recent mobilization of widows and advocacy groups have called for the reforms of some aspects of widowhood rites considered to be violating the rights and dignity of widows. Prominent among the reforms are reforms of widows wearing shea leaves during the performance of the rites. Widows are allowed to wear a cloth during the period of the performance instead of leaves from the shea tree. According to the study 92% of the respondents lauded the reforms and ban by some traditional leaders on stripping widows naked during the performance of widowhood rites. Also 1.6% of respondents were of the view that the stripping was not entirely abolished but that in some circumstance it is done briefly late in the night. These reforms have therefore brought some dignity to widows.

4.7: Conclusion

From the data presentation and analysis I conclude that widowhood rites persist among the Talensi and that 98% of traditional and Christian widows have undertaken traditional widowhood rites. The study revealed some harmful practices such as sitting on refuse dump, shaving, bathing in the open, wearing of leaves, drinking of concoction as well as confinement. Widows suffer economic, health; physical and psychological effects from the widowhood rites .Hence loss of economic resource, dignity and recognition in society were mentioned as some of the effects. Some aspect of the widowhood rites are a violation of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of the widow as contained in the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana, the Domestic Violence Act 732 (Act 2007), the Criminal Offences (Amendment) Act 849 of Ghana (Act 2012) the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW).



CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary and Conclusion

The background of the widows shows that 58% of them were practicing Christians while 48% were traditionalists. It is imperative therefore that most of widowhood rites should be Christian, however it turned out to be 98.4% traditional. The findings from the research revealed that widows whose spouses practiced traditional religion were subject to traditional widowhood rites and therefore most of them had to subject themselves. Some of the widows for fear of rejection and being accused of the death of their spouse and from blame from their families, they also subjected themselves to undertake the rites. This act is in contravention of the Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and can vividly be interpreted as the violation of the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice.

The study also revealed that various rites were performed during funeral performances as widowhood rites among the Talensi people. The widow holds a stalk and calabash and sitting on a mat. For fear that the spirit of the deceased will hurt or harm her she is given a knife to brandish anytime she moves around to scare the spirit. This practice is very similar to the culture of the Dagaaba in Ghana, the Yoruba of Nigeria and the Luo of Kenya where widows also go through defacement, shaving of hair, sits on bare floor, holds a calabash and or with a rope tied around their waist, leg or neck and is supported by elderly women.

The research also revealed that widows wear leaves from a shea tree during the performance and are guided by other widows to take their bath on a refuse dump in the full view of the public. As a sign of fidelity the shea leaves are used to prepare a concoction for the widow to take to redeem herself or exonerate herself from being accused of killing her spouse.



The widow having gone through all the rites is then re-integrated into the family, this time round with her new status as a widow. Drawing from the above summary the study concludes that widowhood rites do persist and practiced among the Talensi in the Upper East Region. The practice is laborious and harmful to the physical, health, economic and psychological wellbeing of widows.

Furthermore the study observed that all the 62 widows had undertaken widowhood rites and that 98.4% of them did it the traditional way even though the majority of them were Christian. Delving into the specific reasons why the respondents undertook the rites, the study revealed that 74.1% did it for respect of tradition, 16% did it in order to be exonerated from being accused of having a hand in the passing on of their husbands, while 8% said they went through the rites because of pressure from family members from both spousal and patrilineal families. This revelation confirms Atinga (2006) in his findings on the Frafra death and mortuary rites in which he attributes reasons for funeral performances to include religious and social factors. In order not to be seen as a miscreant or a deviant breaching tradition even Christian women have to subject themselves to rigorous widowhood rites. Also Angsotinge (2002) and Atinga (2006) attributed the reasons for a widow going through widowhood rites to the mystical or spiritual dirt that the couple shared and which bonded them together, hence the process of separation was through the performance of widowhood rites. Drawing from the above summary the study concludes that 98% of widowhood rites are traditional and performed by traditional and Christian widows among the Talensi.

Also the study also observed that 62% of the respondents mentioned harmful and injurious widowhood rites such as wearing of shea leaves, eating food mixed with some herbal preparation, sitting on the refuse dump, sitting on the bare floor, confined in a room and the shaving of the hair. These narratives were confirmed in the sense that widows indicated that



their rites affected their dignity, self-esteem and brought along both physical and psychological pain which they have to live with for the rest of their lives. The study therefore concludes that some of the widowhood rites mentioned above are harmful to the wellbeing of the widows.

The study observed that 50% of the widows had their farm lands confiscated, 15% not supported by anybody and have no peace of mind, while 13% had no recognition in the community as widows were disregarded as their source of pride and power in the community no longer exist. Also, the study revealed that 11% were not respected, 10% did not participate in any form of decision making in the family and the community at large, and 2% felt ashamed when they moved around the community due to the humiliation they went through. One widow in a Focus Group Discussion said “life as a widow is a miserable”. Drawing from the above summary the study concludes that widowhood rites bring untold hardship to widows. This is evident in their loss of economic resources such as farm lands and loss of status of widows which takes away their social protection as well as dehumanizes.

Furthermore, the study observed that some widowhood rites have been reformed and practiced in a more dignified way to accommodate current development due largely to pressure from Civil Society Organisation (CSO) and Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) in the Talensi District. One of such development is the fact that widows are allowed to undertake widowhood rites according to their faith or religion. This change was necessitated to satisfy her religious congregation. On the other hand even when a widow opts for the traditional widowhood rites the performances are varied to still accommodate her faith. This reform is similar to the Ga widowhood rites as cited by Tei-Ahontu (2008).



Another change among the Talensi is the reduction in the period of confinement in addition to the fact that the widow is allowed to move around. This reform has also become necessary because of the fact that the widow could be a career woman or even for the fact that the social support system in families is not as it used to be therefore the need for the widow to move round and organise things well for the funeral celebration. Furthermore, widows do not sit on the bare floor, stripped naked as they are now allowed to wear a cloth. During the ritual cleansing, women are not bathed in the full view of the public but colleague women form a ring round while the widow is allowed to put on an under wear or shorts during the practices. The study there concludes that though there might be harmful aspects of the widowhood rites as discussed in earlier paragraphs, the people of Talensi acknowledging the trend of change and respect for human rights have instituted some changes in the rites to protect the dignity of womanhood, respect for diversity and show of religious tolerance.

5.2 Conclusions

The study concludes that a widowhood rite is real. It exists and is practiced among the Talensi people. The practices of widowhood rites even though done traditionally, most of the widows are Christians. The victims of the widowhood rites practices subject themselves to the practices because of respect for tradition and proof of innocence with the majority of them doing so to have a relief.

It is also conclusive to mention that some of the widowhood rites are harmful to the widows. Some widowhood practices are harmful and injurious to the physical and mental well-being of the widows. These include rites such as the wearing of shea leaves, eating food mixed with some herbal preparation, sitting on the refuse dump, sitting on the bare floor, confined to a room and the shaving of the hair were confirmed by the widows. These rites affected dignity,



self-esteem and brought along both long lasting physical and psychological pain to the widows.

Finally, it is conclusive that some of the widowhood rites constitute a human rights violation of the widow. Widows whose spouses practiced traditional religion were subject to traditional widowhood rites and therefore most of them had to subject themselves to the act. Some of the widows for fear of rejection and being accused of the death of their spouse and from blame from their families, they also subjected themselves to undertake the rites. These acts are in contravention of the 1992 Constitution of the Republic of Ghana and can vividly be implied as the violation of the freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice. The practice is also discriminatory as widowers are not subjected to the same laborious rites as widow. Hence widows are confined, made to prove their innocence, wear shea leaves, sit on a refuse dumb, and eat food made of concoctions and many more practices that the widower is free from. The performances of these rites obviously are a gross violation of the fundamental human rights of the widow.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study proposes the following recommendation. Widowhood rites are practiced among the Talensi. Some aspects of the practice are harmful hence the National and Regional House of Chief and the various Traditional Councils should be resourced and empowered by government to evaluate and reform harmful and negative practices or abolish them entirely in their chiefdoms as mandated by 1992 Constitution.

The research unit that has been established to understudy and make recommendations for review of outmoded customs and practices or injurious traditions in the National and



Regional Houses of Chiefs should be adequately resourced by government and their recommendations enforced with legal backing.

Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and NGO, should partner with Legal Aid scheme and social welfare institution to educate communities and build the capacity of women to engage traditional leaders and Queen Mothers on harmful/negative widowhood rites. The Criminal offences Act 2012, Act 849 prohibit forcing any widow to undertake widowhood rites in Ghana. However this piece of legislation is not well known by the affected people thus requiring more public education to get the public informed and educated. Interaction with widows during the study reveals the complete lack of knowledge of such a law. They are rather familiar with the domestic violence law presumably because Civil Society Organisations helped in hyping it in the media and through community legal awareness education.

Ghana is noted for the promulgation and enactment of laws, yet same cannot be said when it comes to enforcement. Governments should therefore put in adequate system and mechanisms to ensure that citizen particularly vulnerable people such as widows are given maximum protection to ensure their rights are respected and fulfilled. This therefore means strengthening the capacity of all relevant state agencies with the mandate to ensure social protection through the provision of adequate staffing and logistics for their operations.

Government should ensure the enforcement of all laws and the prohibition of practices that have been criminalized by law such as forced widowhood rites and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Criminal Offences Amendment Act 2003. The Domestic Violence Secretariat, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service, the Commission on Human Rights and the legal aid agencies should be adequately resourced



and empowered to provide quality and accessible services to widows in remote communities. This should include physical access, removal of administrative bottlenecks, revision of fees as well as providing an enabling environment to guarantee the security and protection of victims.

The media should provide adequate platform for the discussion of matters of human rights violations including harmful or negative widowhood rites. The government programme on Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) should be expanded to cover all non-working widows. This will enhance their livelihood and upkeep and therefore protect them against exploitation, violence, sexual assault, denial of property and also given them a voice.

Legal Aid Schemes should be made available and accessible to widows in rural areas to seek redress to their rights violation including property inheritance. Hence the services of Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the Legal Aid schemes should be made accessible to remote communities.

Government should not only revise the Spousal Bill but put in the necessary administrative structures for widows to be able to access services under it from appropriate agencies and ensure that.

Ensure all red tapeism and administrative bottlenecks that make access to justice by vulnerable people are removed.

Widows in Ghana should form associations or network and work together to advance their interest as well as influence international and national government policies for improved wellbeing. Widows should engage traditional leaders as well as lead in the reporting of violations of their rights to the appropriate state institutions responsible follow up to ensure justice is delivered.



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APENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

The administration of this questionnaire is purely on academic grounds for the partial fulfillment of requirements towards to the award of a master's degree, from the University for Development Studies. I therefore entreat you to in as much as possible be sincere with your responses

1. name of respondent :-----
2. age of respondent : 1) 18-25 2) 26-30, 3)1-35 4)36-40 5)41-45 6) 46-50 7) 51+
3. sex of respondent : 1.ale 2. female
4. name of community 1) tenzug 2)winkogo 3)baare
5. number of children 1).1 2). 2 3). 3 4). 4 5). 5+
6. how long have you been widow 1)< 5yr 2)5-10 yrs 3) 11-15 yrs , 4)16-20 yrs
4) 20+
7. what religion do you worship 1) traditional 2)Christian 3) Islam 4) none
8. have you undertaking widowhood rites 1) yes 2) no
9. under which religion did you undertake it 1) traditional 2) Christian 3) Islam 4)
why did you undertake the widowhood rites, because of: 1) tradition 2) I was forced
3)the community will reject me 4) myin-laws will be angry with me 5) I will be
ejected and denied property 6) my children will be taken away 7) I will be called
names 8) pressure from family members 9) to exonerate myself from being accused
of killing my husband/wife
10. which of the following were you taken through ,a) stripping naked b) eating on the
refuse dump, c)sitting on the bare floor ,d) wearing of leaves, e) holding calabash
confined to a room) f)not allowed to do normal things
11. were you confined to a room 1 yes 2no



12. If yes how long 1 less than a month 2)2-5 months 3) 6months +
13. how did you feel during and after undertaken the rite 1) hurt 2) disgraced 3) dehumanized 4) good 5) relieved
14. do you think some of the rites are injurious 1) yes 2) no
15. if yes which rites ,a) stripping naked, b) eating wholesome food c sitting on the refuse dump, c)sitting on the bare floor ,d) wearing of leaves, e) holding calabash confined to a room, f) not allowed to do normal things
16. how could they cause injury to you 1 physical injury 2) fall sick 3) could be bitten by crawling insects and animals
17. how different are you as a widow today from your marriage life a) farm lands have been taken away from me, b) no recognition in the community c), don't participate in decision making, d) feel ashamed moving round due to the rites I have gone through e) receive threat, f) am not respected g) am not supported by anybody h) I am disturbed and have no peace of mind.
18. are you aware there are laws that protects widows from being forced to undergo widowhood rites 1) yes 2) no
19. is the practice of widowhood rites today different from many years ago 1) yes 2) no
20. if yes what makes it different 1)no more confinement 2) shortened period of confinement 3) no more stripping naked 4) stripping naked done late in the night 5) widows no longer wear leaves 6) others-----



Appendix 2: Key informant interview guide

1. Name :-----
2. Gender :-----
3. Community /organisation :-----
4. Role/designation -----
5. What is your understanding of widowhood rites and does it exist -----

6. Why do widows undergo widowhood rites -----
7. How are the rites performed -----
8. What are the benefits of widowhood rites -----
9. What are the effects of widowhood rites-----
10. Are there laws that protect the rights of widow's .Kindly mention and explain how?---

11. Are widows rights abused as results of the widowhood rites practices? Kindly explain
how and why you think so?-----



12. What do you recommend to address the practice of harmful widowhood rites among the Talensi-----

