

Spirituality as a coping mechanism among widows in Nagaland

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Abstract

Widowhood is a journey filled with difficult challenges. It is plagued with financial difficulties, social exclusion, new added responsibilities on top of grieving the loss of their spouses. It is often common to see them turn to spirituality for healing and strength. The current study seeks to understand how spirituality is used as a coping mechanism to mitigate widowhood. The study adopts a qualitative, phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of widows. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews to get in-depth knowledge. The data was coded and thematic analysis was used to identify reoccurring themes. Five themes were generated: Emotional impact of loss, Spirituality and coping, Challenges of Widowhood, Spiritual transformation and personal growth and role of support networks

Keywords: Widowhood; loss; spirituality; coping; support network

1 Introduction

This research looks into the journey of how widows in Nagaland use spirituality as a means to cope with the loss of their spouses. Widowhood is defined as the state or period of being a widow or widower. A widow is a female whose spouse has died. (Horne et.al 2020).

There are many challenges that come with widowhood, including social, financial, emotional, physical. By drawing on three key theoretical frameworks—Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, Park and Folkman's Meaning-Making Model, and Social Support Theory—the study looks at widowhood as a deeply layered experience.

The aim of this research is to understand how widows use spirituality—whether through personal beliefs, religious practices, or involvement in spiritual communities—to help them navigate their grief. Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, about meaning, and about relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community (Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001).

Specifically, this study will explore:

- How spirituality helps with emotional coping, as described by Lazarus and Folkman, by offering psychological comfort and relief during tough times.
- The search for meaning and purpose after loss, based on Park and Folkman's work, and how spiritual beliefs and practices help widows find new purpose or understanding through their grief.
- The role of social and communal support, as explained by Social Support Theory, and how spiritual communities can serve as a substitute family, providing emotional and practical support to reduce feelings of isolation.

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By combining these perspectives, the research seeks to offer a fuller understanding of how spirituality not only helps widows cope emotionally but also strengthens their connections to others, supporting their healing process. The study will provide valuable insights into how spirituality functions as both an individual and communal tool for coping and may inform future support services designed specifically for widows in India.

Worldwide, widowhood comes with a lot of psychological challenges ranging from grief, stress, sexual hunger, denial, withdrawal, anxiety loneliness low self-value and negative change in mood. (Trivedi, Sareen & Dhyani, 2009; Sasson & Umberson, 2014). Their transition is much harder in a country like India, where widows are still expected to shun life and reflect only over their husbands' lives as cultural and social norms dictate. In India, many widows have to bear the brunt of not only being socially ostracized but fare off badly economically and are left to fend for themselves after a certain age; thus, besides bearing the emotional pain one has also opportunities slipping with time. This often leads to transcendental search for solace and meaning outside the realms of material reality, which is one way spirituality may function as an adaptive coping response.

Additionally, in terms of prevalence of widowhood, India ranks highest in the world. At the time of the 2011 Indian Census, there were 43 million widowed women in India, a population comparable to a mid-sized country. (Government of India 2011).

Approximately 7% widows are living alone in India. Population of widows in India is 34 million, out of that 8% population is female, and 50% of the female population is over the age of 50 (<http://www.nativeministeriesindia.org>).

Spirituality, a complex personal and multifaceted construct impacts significantly how people cope with grief and loss. This includes faith, tradition and spirituality with all their related beliefs, practices, and experiences that help people find meaning in life and inspires a mind of appreciation. A sense of meaning/greater spirituality: Many widows find peace and strength in their battles with widowhood through religion. Methods, including prayer, meditations and religious worship can be useful for coping with this problem among widows.

Spirituality in India is deeply woven into our culture and hence, touches the lives of thousands who live here on a regular basis. But the particular ways in which spirituality may support widows coping with their distinctive situation have not been investigated much. Available literature in India on widowhood has been mainly concerned with the social and economic status of widows, diverting attention from their emotional or spiritual dimensions and how spirituality actually serves as a coping mechanism among these widows.

In light of this, the primary aim of this dissertation is to shed some light on spirituality as a coping strategy among widows in India. The study will describe what spiritual beliefs, practices and coping strategies are used by widows to deal with the emotional or psychological aspects of their lives; whether or not community support promotes / obstructs any specific form for cultural approaches (spiritual care) this vivid group invokes. This study will add to the literature looking at lived experiences of being a widow in India, and it is hoped that this may provide important information through which spiritual needs could be specific treatment programs so that necessary interventions can now be developed accordingly.

1.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study integrates Lazarus and Folkman's Coping

Theory (1984), Park and Folkman's Meaning-Making Theory (1997), and Social Support Theory to explore the role of spirituality as a coping mechanism for widows in Nagaland.

1.2 Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory

Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory offers a foundation for understanding how individuals handle stress through problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Within the context of widowhood, spirituality can be considered an emotion-focused coping mechanism. Widows often use spiritual practices, such as prayer, meditation or rituals to mitigate the emotional toll of losing a spouse. This theory emphasizes the cognitive appraisal process, where widows evaluate their situation and use spiritual beliefs to redefine their loss, finding emotional resilience and peace through faith-based interpretations.

1.3 Meaning-making Theory by Park and Folkman

The meaning-making theory compliments Lazarus and Folkman's model by focusing on how individuals derive meaning from life-altering events. Widowhood often triggers a search for existential answers, and spiritual beliefs play a pivotal role in helping widows make sense of their loss. Meaning-making is crucial to emotional recovery, as it allows widows to reframe their grief into a broader spiritual narrative. This theory suggests that spiritual practices offer widows a way to restore coherence to their lives, transforming their grief into a sense of purpose or divine connection.

1.4 Social support theory

Social Support Theory highlights how vital our connections with others can be, especially in times of need. For many widows, spiritual communities provide a crucial source of both emotional and practical support. These communities often feel like a surrogate family, where members share not just beliefs but also deep understanding and compassion. The emotional support from fellow believers can help ease feelings of isolation and loneliness, creating a sense of belonging during a difficult time. Together, they engage in shared spiritual practices that help widows navigate their grief, fostering connections that make the journey a little lighter.

By combining these three theories, the research explores widowhood as a deeply layered experience. It looks at how individuals cope with their emotions (as explained by Lazarus and Folkman), how they seek meaning and purpose in their lives (according to Park and Folkman), and the vital support they receive from their social networks (highlighted in Social Support Theory). This framework sheds light on how spirituality functions not just as a personal coping tool but also as a bridge to social and communal support for emotional healing. It offers a comprehensive view of the intricate ways widows draw on spirituality to navigate the profound loss of their spouse, helping them find hope and connection amid their grief.

1.5 Statement of the problem

In India, widowhood comes with many social and cultural issues along with economic hurdles. Widows are among the most discriminated sections of society where they face social boycott and stigma. Absence of support systems further compounds the problems with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. In the face of these challenges, widows in India often turn to spirituality.

The role of spirituality in mitigating widowhood stress is also not clearly understood, particularly how and why spirituality helps widows adapt to the challenges they face.

Indeed, some studies have recognized the role of spirituality in adaptation and coping but there are hardly any studies dealing with its effect on Indian widows. The current data in this area fails to recognize exactly how spirituality is used as a coping mechanism for loss which is a common practice in India.

The purpose of the study is to bridge this gap by understanding how Indian widows cope using spirituality. Such knowledge can help in understanding this aspect of spirituality to promote the better psychological and emotional well-being among widows, which may inform culturally relevant interventions or holistic policies for improving and promoting wellbeing experience within a marginalized population.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study explores the coping mechanisms employed by widows in India, specifically focusing on the role of spirituality.

- **Mental health implications:** The findings could reveal positive effects of spirituality on mental health and this can in turn be used by mental health professionals to develop culturally sensitive support strategies for widows.
- **Policy Development:** The study may inform policymakers and social organizations about the unique challenges faced by widows, guiding the creation of targeted interventions and resources that recognize and incorporate spiritual coping mechanisms.
- **Contribution to Literature:** This research will fill a gap in the existing literature on widowhood and spirituality, providing a foundation for future studies and discussions in the fields of psychology, sociology, and religious studies.
- **Community Empowerment:** By highlighting effective coping strategies, the study may empower widows and their communities to foster resilience, thereby contributing to social change and improved quality of life for this often- marginalized population.

1.7 Research gap

- Cultural Perspectives on Widowhood: While widowhood is universally challenging, the cultural practices and beliefs surrounding it can vary greatly. Research exploring the specific cultural narratives and practices related to widowhood in Nagaland, including how these affect the emotional and psychological well-being of widows, is limited.
- Support Systems and Networks: While some studies globally emphasize the importance of social support networks, there is a gap in understanding how local support systems operate in Nagaland. Research could investigate existing community-based programs and their effectiveness in supporting widows.
- Mental Health Awareness: There is a growing recognition of mental health issues in many parts of India, but research on the mental health awareness and resources available to widows in Nagaland is lacking. Studies could assess the availability of counseling services and mental health support in the region.

2 Review of literature

Holm et al. (2019) explored the deep emotional and psychological toll that losing a spouse takes on older adults. Beyond the immense grief, many find themselves grappling with a loss of identity and independence, especially as they face the added challenge of declining health. The need for help often creates an inner struggle, as it clashes with the sense of independence they once cherished. Asking for assistance can make them feel even more helpless, and when their emotions aren't fully understood by those around them, it can lead to greater isolation.

The study highlights a recurring theme: older adults often long for support and connection, but after losing a spouse, they frequently feel cut off from the social circles they were once part of. The fear of being a burden keeps them from reaching out, which only deepens their loneliness. Holm et al. emphasize how spousal loss affects not just emotional well-being, but also a person's sense of self and connection to others, stressing the urgent need for support systems that can help older adults through these difficult times.

Jain et al. (2022) explored how widowhood affects cognitive function in older women in India, finding a notable gap between widowed and married women. Widows consistently score lower on cognitive tests, and the longer they have been widowed—especially up to 20 years—the more this gap widens. After two decades, the difference in cognitive abilities remains, but it stops growing.

The study points out that widowed women's poorer cognitive performance is partly due to the challenges they face with both their physical and mental health. Widows often experience higher levels of stress, social isolation, and physical decline, which all take a toll on their cognitive abilities. This research sheds light on how widowhood not only affects emotional well-being but also leads to long-term health and cognitive issues. It emphasizes the importance of creating support systems that address both the emotional and health challenges widows face to help improve their overall quality of life.

Srivastava et al. (2021) looked at how being married or widowed and where older adults live affects their mental health in India, and the findings are quite telling. The study found that widowed older adults are 34% more likely to experience depression than those who are still married. Losing a spouse clearly takes an emotional toll, increasing feelings of loneliness and grief, which can make widowed individuals more vulnerable to depression.

The study also highlighted how living arrangements make a big difference. Older adults who live alone are 16% more likely to feel depressed than those who live with others.

This shows just how important companionship and social support are in keeping up one's emotional well-being. The situation worsens when older adults are both widowed and living alone—they're 56% more likely to suffer from depression compared to those who are married and living with family or others. The combination of losing a spouse and living in isolation presents a particularly high risk for depression, underscoring the urgent need for support systems that address both the emotional and social needs of older adults, especially those who live by themselves.

Boekel et al. (2019) explored how losing a spouse affects the psychological well-being, quality of life, and health-care costs of older adults living in the community in the Netherlands. The study found that spousal loss had a clear negative impact on emotional well-being and how older adults perceived their overall quality of life. Grieving the loss of a spouse often left individuals feeling emotionally strained and diminished their sense of life satisfaction.

Interestingly, while the researchers expected that spousal loss would lead to increased health-care costs, the study found no significant effect in this area. Despite the emotional and psychological toll, spousal loss did not seem to translate into higher health-care expenses, which was an unexpected outcome. The findings underline the emotional challenges of widowhood but suggest that, at least in this study, these challenges didn't result in increased medical spending.

Menzfeld et al. (2024) delve into the lived experiences of social isolation and loneliness among military widows and widowers in the UK, highlighting the emotional and social challenges they face. The study found that nearly all participants expressed feelings of loneliness, social isolation, or both. These emotions were closely tied to the unique grief of losing a spouse in the military, as well as the lack of sufficient social participation and support in their everyday lives.

Many widows and widowers reported that they struggled to reintegrate into social circles after their loss, feeling disconnected from both civilian life and the military communities they had once been part of. However, those who joined military support groups or associations found great value in the peer support they received. These groups offered a shared sense of connection, understanding, and solidarity, as fellow members had also experienced the unique challenges of military widowhood. This peer support helped alleviate some of the loneliness and isolation, offering a space where their grief was acknowledged and understood in a way that was often lacking in other social settings.

The study highlights a pressing need for more targeted social programs that address the isolation and loneliness faced by military widows and widowers. Such initiatives could provide critical emotional support, fostering social participation and helping to rebuild a sense of community and belonging.

Mudis et al (2023) examines the relationship between widowhood and the psychological health of widows in Kisumu East Sub County, Kisumu County, Kenya. The study findings show that widowhood is correlated to psychological health as it leads to poor psychological health of widows.

Ukeachusim et al (2023) examines the impact of spiritual and religious activities on the emotional well-being of widowed older adults in Enugu State, southeast Nigeria.

Widowed older adults experience emotional challenges such as loneliness, life dissatisfaction, anxiety/uneasiness, sadness/grief, and insomnia due to the loss of their spouse. Widowed older adults participate in spiritual and religious activities such as attending church services, prayer meetings, Bible study, and meditation to cope with their emotional challenges. Participating in spiritual and religious activities helps widowed older adults to buffer their emotional challenges.

Kellyjoy et al. (2022) explore the challenges that widows face in ACK Embu, Kenya, uncovering several significant obstacles in their lives. Many widows struggle with limited resources, making it hard to meet basic needs like food, shelter, and healthcare.

This financial insecurity leaves them feeling vulnerable and helpless.

Isolation is another major issue. Many widows find themselves socially excluded due to their marital status, which can be incredibly lonely. Compounding this is a cultural stigma that often paints widows in a negative light, leading to feelings of blame and further alienation. As a result, accessing the support they need to navigate their grief becomes even more challenging.

The study also highlights the difficulties faced by grief caregivers—those who try to support widows emotionally. Many caregivers lack adequate knowledge about how to effectively help someone cope with loss, which limits their ability to provide meaningful support. This gap in understanding can leave widows feeling even more alone during a time when they need connection the most.

Kellyjoy et al. (2022) emphasize the urgent need for better resources, community support, and training for grief caregivers. Addressing these issues is crucial to help widows in this region find the support and understanding they need to heal and rebuild their lives.

Akinyu (2023) aimed to assess the relationship between widowhood and psychological health of widows in Kisumu East Sub County, Kenya. The study findings show that widowhood is correlated to psychological health as it leads to poor psychological health of widows. The study recommends that widows should be sensitized on the need to strive for

good psychological health either by seeking counseling or joining widows support programs in the community to help them cope with psychological health challenges that comes with the death of a spouse.

2.1 Synthesis of literature

Several studies focus on the psychological effects of widowhood. Holm et al. (2019) discusses the emotional struggles of bereaved older adults, emphasizing the challenges of maintaining dignity and seeking help, often resulting in feelings of isolation and misunderstanding. This is also shown in Srivastava et al. (2021), which identifies a strong association between widowhood, living alone, and increased rates of depression among older adults in India.

The cognitive decline associated with widowhood is another significant theme. Jain et al. (2022) finds that widowed women in India experience lower cognitive scores compared to married women, with the disparity linked to poor physical and mental health. This suggests that the psychological strain of widowhood may contribute to cognitive decline, particularly over extended periods.

The role of social isolation and loneliness is further explored by Menzfeld et al. (2024), who study military widows/widowers in the UK, highlighting the prevalence of loneliness and the importance of peer support for social participation. Similarly, Mudis et al. (2023) examines the correlation between widowhood and poor psychological health in Kenya, reinforcing the global nature of these challenges.

In terms of coping mechanisms, Ukeachusim et al. (2023) emphasizes the role of spiritual and religious activities in helping widows manage emotional challenges such as loneliness and grief in Nigeria. This aligns with findings from Kellyjoy et al. (2022) and Akinyu (2023), which discuss the broader challenges faced by widows, including resource constraints, cultural stigma, and the need for support programs to address psychological health.

Overall, these studies collectively underscore the significant emotional, psychological, and social challenges faced by widows globally, while also highlighting the importance of social support and spiritual practices as vital coping mechanisms.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research design

- Qualitative Approach: This study will use a qualitative research design. This approach is suitable because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and meanings that widows in India associate with spirituality as a coping mechanism.
- Phenomenological Approach: A phenomenological approach will be used to focus on understanding the lived experiences of widows. This methodology is appropriate for exploring how widows perceive and experience spirituality in the context of coping with their loss.

3.2 Research objectives

- To identify spiritual beliefs and practices adopted by the widows in India.
- To understand how these practices influence the emotional and psychological wellbeing of the widows.
- To explore the role of community support.

3.3 Research question

- What are the specific spiritual beliefs and practices that widows in India adopt after the loss of their spouse?
- In what ways do spiritual practices impact the emotional and psychological well-being of widows in India?
- What is the role of community support in reinforcing the spiritual practices of widows in India?

3.4 Concepts

- Widowhood: Widowhood refers to a state of a person who has lost their spouse and has not remarried.
- Spirituality: A sense of connection to a divine power that leads to feelings of peace, purpose and meaning.
- Coping mechanism: A coping mechanism is a strategy or method that people use to manage stress, adversity, or challenging emotions.

3.5 Population Of the Study

- Widows that are engaged in spiritual practices
- Women above the age of 18.
- Geographical Area:
- This study is situated in Nagaland, India.

3.6 Sample

- Sampling technique: Purposive sampling will be used to select participants who is likely to provide rich and insightful information.
- Snowball method: Initial participants will be asked to refer other widows that fit into the inclusion criteria.

3.6.1 Inclusion criteria

- Widows that are engaged in spiritual practices.
- Women above the age of 18.

3.6.2 Exclusion criteria

- Widows that have cognitive impairments or mental health issues.
- Recently bereaved widows (less than one year) to avoid acute grief periods.

3.7 Procedure

- The study was conducted on widows from the state of Nagaland. The widows were screened using the Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale. 8 participants were selected, with data collection continuing until data saturation is achieved.
- The participants were given a consent form that contains the aims and objectives, the different essential requirements, and confidentiality of the information of the study along with their consent.
- Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to gather data.
- Lastly, they were thanked for their participation.

3.8 Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Data was analyzed using thematic analysis to identify themes patterns as well as to explore subjective experiences of the participants.

3.9 Tools For the Study

- Informed consent
- The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale
- Interview questions

3.10 Description of Tools

- Informed consent: Google forms were used to gather informed consent from the participants along with socio-demographic data.
- The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale: The Spiritual Involvement and Beliefs Scale is a 26-item questionnaire in a modified Likert-format that measures an individual's level of spiritual involvement and their spiritual beliefs.
- Semi-structured interview: Semi-structured interview will be conducted to gather data from the participants.

3.11 Research Ethics Followed

The study had the following ethical considerations:

- Informed Consent: Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights.
- Confidentiality: Confidentiality of participants were ensured by using pseudonyms and securing data storage.
- Sensitivity: The topic was approached with sensitivity and respect for participants' spiritual beliefs and practices.

- Peer review: The questions for interview were reviewed by three experts to ensure that questions are relevant, valid and likely to obtain useful and reliable data for the study. Another purpose for the review is to ensure that the questions are respectful and sensitive to the topic at hand.

4 Results

4.1 Socio-demographic details

Eight participants agreed to participate in the study out of which all 8 participants passed through the screening and was taken through the interview process.

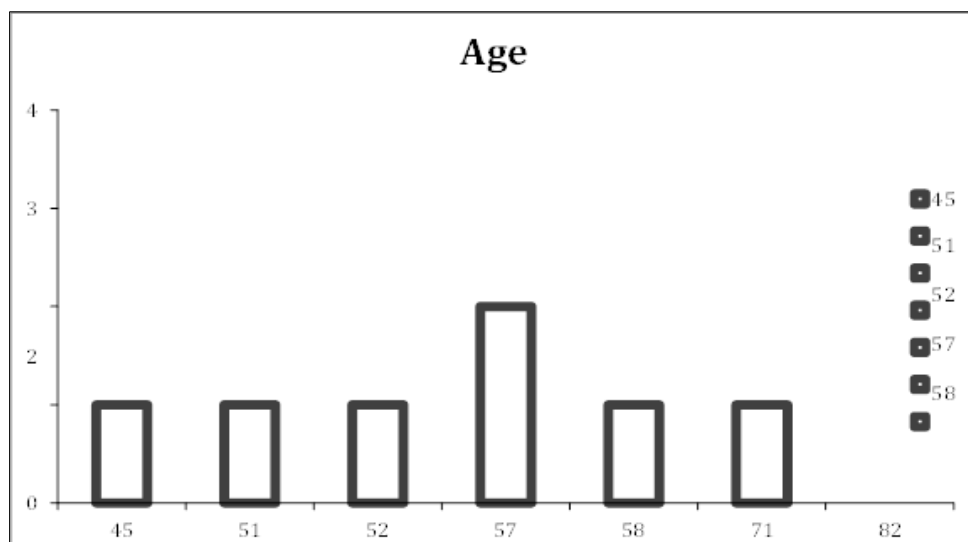


Figure 1 Age of the participants

Graph 1 shows the age of the participants. There are 8 participants, the youngest is of the age 45, 1 participant is 51 years of age, 1 participant is 52 years of age, 2 participants are 57 years of age, 1 participant is 58 years of age, 1 participant is 71 years of age and the oldest is 82 years of age.

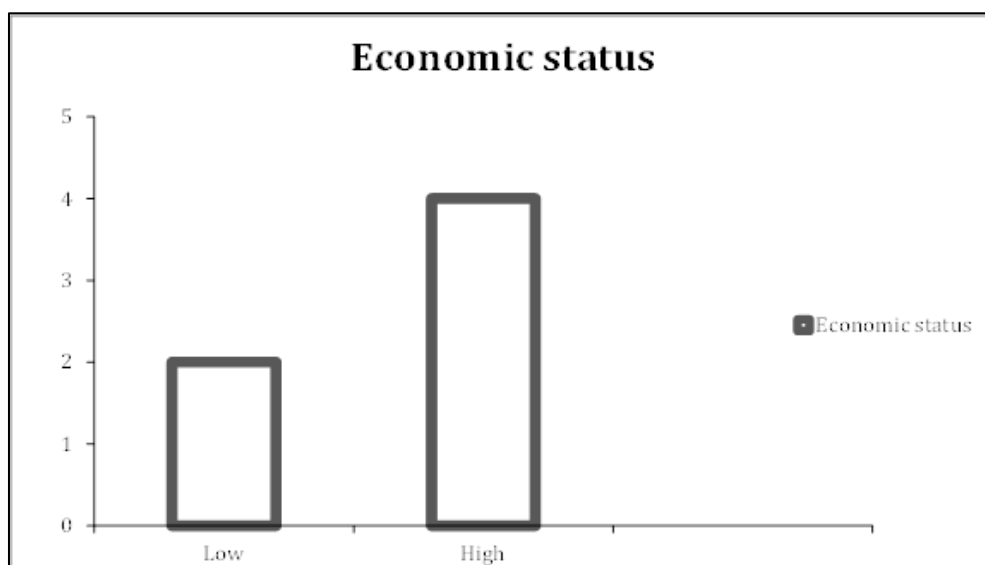


Figure 2 Economic status of the participants

Graph 2 shows the economic status of the participants. 75% of the participants are part of the middle class while 25% of the participants are low class.

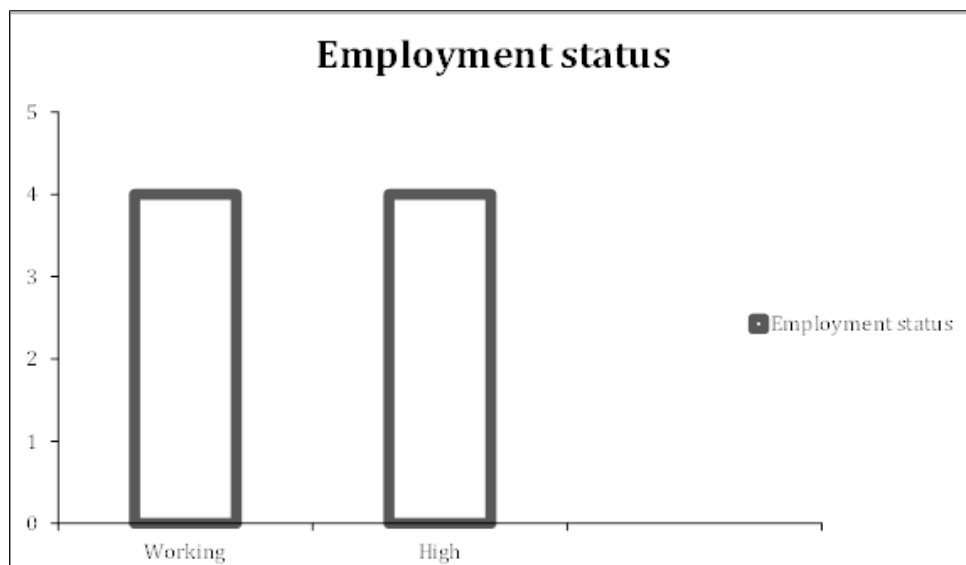


Figure 3 Employment status of the participants

Graph 3 shows the employment status of the participants, 50% of the participants are currently working while the other 50% is not.

4.2 Thematic Analysis Table

Table 1 Emotional impact of loss

Theme	Description	
Emotional impact of loss	Exploring the effect of loss on the individual's emotional state.	
<i>Subcategories</i>	<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Significant Statement</i>
		<i>Examples</i>
<i>Sense of loss</i>	The emotional, psychological, social impact following the loss of the spouse.	"Losing my husband was the most painful experience of my life. I was only four months pregnant with my daughter, and suddenly, I felt alone in raising her." (P3) "I became sad and fearful and confused thinking of how to carry on my life." (P2)
<i>Emotional resilience</i>	The ability to adapt or recover from significant life challenges.	"Truly, I was able to bear the loss of my husband

5 Discussion

5.1 Theme 1: Emotional impact of loss

This theme describes the emotional, psychological and physical impact of loss. All participants in the study have reported profound emotional impact post loss. Not only did they feel the absence and loss, they were required to take on new roles and responsibilities for the family which added to the already existing toll of loss.

- **Sense of loss:** All the participants have described a deep sense of loss, fear, isolation and helplessness following the death of their spouse. They have expressed how they have felt alone and were longing for support and companionship. The uncertainty of the future that were fueled with financial burdens and new found responsibilities evoked more fear among the widows.

- Emotional resilience: Despite all the challenges faced by the widows, they have demonstrated resilience over time. According to them, this resilience and strength comes from the divine power and from their faith. This faith has helped them to accept the situation and has helped them self-resilient and increased confidence in themselves. One participant states that their faith in God has become her anchor and has helped her cope with all the challenges that has come her way.

Table 2 Spirituality and Coping

Theme	Description	
Spirituality and coping	Understanding how the individuals have used spirituality to cope with their challenges	
Subcategories	Descriptions	Significant Statement Examples
Faith as a source of comfort	The individual's faith in spirituality that serves as a source of comfort during these times	"Losing my husband was painful, but my faith gives me hope that we will meet again in heaven." (P3)
Spiritual practices and rituals	The practices that are followed by the widows.	"Yes, I start each day by reading the Bible and praying for 10-15 minutes.

5.2 Theme 2: Spirituality and coping

This theme explains how spirituality has been the biggest factor in helping the participants cope with their situation and challenges. Not only has it helped them overcome the initial stages of widowhood but is also helping them cope with current challenges and as believed by the participants, will help them cope with future challenges as well.

- Faith as a source of comfort: For all the participants, spirituality and their faith in the divine power has played a pivotal role in their lives. It has given the comfort and emotional solace that they had longed for post loss. They are able to be optimistic and are able to withstand their difficulties because they have trust in the divine power and believe that is all a part of the divine plan.
- Spiritual practices and rituals: The participants are all involved in spiritual practices and rituals. As mentioned in their interviews, each participant attends church services, engages in bible reading and study as well as fasting. This not only makes them feel closer to God but also helps mitigate their feelings of loneliness.

Table 3 Challenges of widowhood

Theme	Description	
Spirituality and coping	Understanding how the individuals have used spirituality to cope with their challenges	
Subcategories	Descriptions	Significant Statement Examples
Social and financial challenges	The challenges that the participants have faced socially and financially after becoming a widow	"In a patriarchal society, widows like me face a lot of challenges. Providing both emotional and financial support for my children alone can be overwhelming sometimes. Also, society disregards my efforts of playing both the role of a father and a mother. Often times us widows and our family face social exclusion since a father figure is not present at home. Society tends to look at us as vulnerable and dependent and perceived as overly emotional rather than recognizing our individual experiences and strengths. It's a feeling of isolation." (P1) "Finding way to earn my livelihood was my greatest challenge and I was only a housewife. To raise and educate my daughter and to find peace of mind." (P3)
Dual roles and responsibilities	The double roles and responsibilities that the widows now had as their spouse is no more present.	"Being a widow has meant carrying all the responsibilities on my own, from raising my daughter to managing the household. I've faced moments of loneliness, especially when I needed someone to lean on. It's been difficult to balance work, parenting, and the emotional weight of grief." (P3)

5.3 Theme 3: Challenges of Widowhood

This theme explores the challenges that come with widowhood. It is a given that widowhood is extremely hard, it is emotionally, mentally and physically taxing. Some of the common challenges are shared.

- Social and financial challenges: In a place like Nagaland, there are many traditional societal rules most of which are very patriarchal in nature. Without a male figure present, some families are sometimes excluded from social events or are not treated with enough respect.
- Widows also have to face a lot of financial worries now that they have to handle their finances on their own. Especially for the participants involved in this study who are part of the older generations wherein women played the role of a housewife, this is an extremely difficult challenge. Without the breadwinner of the house present, the widows have to come forward and somehow find ways to bring
- in the income that supports their family. This can be extremely taxing as they now have to play both the role of the father and the mother. All the participants have reported the struggle and fear with having to find means to provide for their family. This is the most recurrent challenge that have come up in every participant's reply.
- Dual roles and responsibilities: The widows now have to take on two roles in the family, one of which is completely new to them. This can be extremely overwhelming especially because they do not have a partner to turn onto for support. The participants have expressed how hard it is to juggle playing both roles and handling the responsibilities single handedly

Table 4 Spiritual Transformation and Personal Growth

Theme	Description	
Spiritual transformation and personal growth	The growth that has occurred help of spirituality in the participants with the	
Subcategories	Descriptions	Significant Statement
		Examples
Faith-strengthened dependence on God	The inner resilience or fortitude that the widows draw from their faith despite the difficult situation they are in.	"Spirituality has helped me accept that everything happens for good. It gives me hope and inner peace and makes me feel confident to face life's challenges." (P5)

5.4 Theme 4: Spiritual transformation and personal growth

This theme talks how spirituality has helped in the transformation and growth of the widows.

- Faith-strengthened dependence on God: Throughout the interview it is evident that spirituality has played the biggest role in the participant's coping. Faith- strengthened dependence talks about the deepened reliance on the divine power during challenges. This dependence is rooted in one's faith. The widows believed that God will guide them through every challenging phase just as he had once done, it is their primary source of comfort.
- Personal growth: Through spirituality, the widows have become more resilient, self-reliant and fearless. Because of their trust in the divine power, they believe that they can withstand all the challenges that are on their way.

Table 5 Role of support networks

Theme	Description	
Role of support networks	The support systems that the widows may or may not have around them	
Subcategories	Descriptions	Significant Statement Examples
Spiritual and religious communities	The spiritual or religious support systems that the widows have	"Yes, I have found support through local church groups and faith-based Support organizations. I have found great support through church-organized prayer cell groups specifically for women.

		These groups create a safe and nurturing environment where I can connect with other women who share similar experiences of loss. Together, we gather to pray, share our stories, and support one another through our journeys of grief. Being a part of this supportive network has been invaluable in my journey as a widow, guiding me toward a path of healing and resilience."
Family and peer support	The support that the widows get from their family and their peers	"My children too have been such a great support in obedience and helping me make important decisions, concerning me and the family." (P6)

5.5 Theme 5: Role of support networks

This theme explores whether or not the widows have found any support systems and how have they impacted them. Most of these support systems are unofficial groups that are not specifically for the purpose of helping widows overcome their challenges, it however becomes as a default support group as most widows turn to them while going through widowhood.

Spiritual and religious communities: For all of the participants, they have found the church to be a significant source of comfort. Here they feel understood and therefore less isolated. They have expressed being able to communicate with other widows that are going through similar experiences and finding mutual understanding and support.

Family and peer support: The participants have also expressed how immediate family has become a source of comfort to them. This along with peer support from fellow widows or those in similar situations help them feel less isolated and helps them feel supported.

6 Conclusion

The journey of widowhood is undoubtedly very tough. There are a number of challenges faced from all sides of life.

The emotional impact of the loss is profound with most widows reporting fear, anxiety, loneliness, but with time and with the help of spirituality, they have shown remarkable emotional resilience and a strong, firm faith in the divine power.

Through spirituality, most widows have found solace and peace. The support systems have also played a major role in helping them feel understood and less isolated.

The analysis shows that spiritual widows undergo significant phases or stages throughout their journey. What starts with grief and loss ends with resilience and strength for those that seek spirituality as a coping mechanism. Their faith serves as a driving force in their healing. Support networks such as family and friends as well as religious communities also play a major role in the process.

Implications

The findings show that spirituality has a positive impact on widowhood. This can therefore be incorporated amongst mental health fields in order to recognize spirituality as a viable coping mechanism. Faith-based counseling can be an available option for grieving people. This can be done by establishing proper organizations that focus on spirituality for coping.

Limitations

Spirituality and faith are deeply personal and therefore the results cannot be generalized to the greater population. Additionally, the study is conducted in Nagaland, a state where spirituality is deep rooted into the culture

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