Impact of Funeral Rites Disruptions on Family Members' Grief and Bereavement during Covid 19 among the Luo Community in Kenya

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Abstract:- Funeral ceremonies form fundamental component of religious mourning rites among diverse cultures which is considered to offer social and psychological support to the bereaved. Funerals also afford mourners an opportunity to convey love and respect for the deceased. Therefore, being unable to participate in funeral rituals and ceremonies might have a detrimental effect on the bereaved by affecting their ability to cope with and process their grief. Beginning February 2020, the Government of Kenya, in response to safety protocols for controlling the spread of the deadly Covid 19, issued restrictions on funeral rituals. All gatherings of more than 10 people were prohibited, burial of the dead was to be done within 24 hours after occurrence of the death, and everybody was to disperse immediately after the burial. This disrupted funeral rites of different cultural groups to a greater extent. This qualitative study explored the impacts of funeral rites practices disruptions on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among Luo community in Kenya. It specifically focused on impact of restriction on involvement in funeral planning, restrictions on funeral attendance, and restrictions on post death rituals on family members' grief and bereavement. The author interviewed 20 family members of hospitalized patients who died between May 2020 and May 2021 from October 2021 to February 2022. Involvement in planning a funeral had a mixed outcome on grief adjustment, while attendance of funeral had a high and significant outcome on grief and bereavement. Additionally, post funeral rituals were generally viewed positively for easing grief and perceived as reinforcing bonds with the deceased. It is concluded that funeral rites can be significant component in easing grief even during Covid 19, and the restrictions devasted the grieving processes of the bereaved persons to a significant extent. It is recommended that societies should embrace technology such as virtual ceremonies to help in coping with unprecedented disruptions caused by calamities such as Covid 19 pandemic. Further research should be done on how Covid 19 restrictions disrupted funeral-related commercial activities such as outside catering services, hiring professional mourners, hearse services and regalia branding among others.

I. INTRODUCTION

In most cultures across the globe, spirituality forms integral part of the cosmic ontological unity where the spirit of the living dead is embodied. According to Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014), the spirit of the dead is therefore a member of the life cycle constituting cosmic unity where death and life is regarded to coexist within a harmonious and interdependent force. Death is therefore considered as a natural transition from the visible to the invisible or spiritual ontology where the spirit, the essence of the person, is not destroyed but moves to live in the spirit ancestors' realm (King, 2013). The dead transcends to the spirit world to be in company of ancestors who provide protection and guidance to those still living in the material realm (Mokhutso, 2019). The dead are therefore highly respected, venerated and form important beings to the living community. For this reason, funeral rituals for the dead are regarded with the highest esteem in the African Culture even more than the birth of a child. Funeral rituals such as funeral planning, funeral attendance, and post burial funeral rituals form fundamental component of culture which, besides according respectful send-off to the loved one (the dead), also facilitates the offering of social and psychological support to the bereaved (Burrell & Selman, 2020). Circumstances that disrupt funeral rituals such as Covid 19 restrictions could therefore have far reaching psychological consequences on the bereaved which demands for closer scrutiny in specific societies/contexts.

According to Li et al (2020), the year 2020 saw the world finding itself facing a common dangerous enemy: the disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus, short for Coronavirus Disease, referred to in this paper as COVID-19. The disease was first reported in Wuhan Province of China in December 2019, but spread to all the 34 provinces of the country by January 30, 2020 when the total number infected had already exceeded that reached by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003 (Ho, Chi & Ho, 2020). The World Health Organization (WHO), owing to the growing number of COVID 19 infections and deaths in different countries, declared the situation a pandemic (WHO,

2020). Several restrictions aimed at controlling the spread of the disease as well as infections and deaths were recommended by WHO (2020) and adopted by nearly all governments in the world. This includes social distancing (keeping a distance of 1.5 meters from a nearby person), minimising a number of people in a gathering (including funerals), to less than 20, travel bans, and to extreme extent, night curfew (Giamattey, Frutuoso, Bellaguarda & Luna, 2022).

These restrictions interrupted the social and economic lives of human kind to a great extent, with much emphasis being focused on losses in the economies of different states and sectors. However, limited literature exists with regard to how Covid 19 restrictions on funeral rituals during planning, funeral (or burial day) and post-funeral rites impacts on grief and bereavement of the family members. Funeral planning has been documented to include night vigils which aim to provide company to the bereaved (Potocnik, 2017; Rugonye & Bukaliya, 2016). Most of these night vigils are also used to raise funds through *disco matanga* and *harambees* in places such as Kenya (Zolnikov, 2013). On the burial day, relatives and friends give eulogies, explaining how they had related with the deceased during his/her life, and the reason why the death has cost them a great loss (Rugonye & Bukaliya, 2016). Some communities in Africa such as the Luo in Kenya perform specific dances called *tero buru* as a ritual (Orawo, 2011). On this particular day, animals are slaughtered where blood is let to flow onto the ground, and the meat is eaten by mourners (Okal, Kodak, Yakub and Okello, 2020; Sultana, Zeeshan & Anzak, 2021). Post burial rituals such as night vigils are also important for providing company to the bereaved and exorcizing bad spirits, where dances such as *disco matanga* and *tero buru* are performed among the Luo of Kenya (Orawo, 2011; Zolnikov, 2013). Whereas some studies (Giamattey et al, 2022; Kgadima & Leburu, 2022; Okal et al, 2020; Sultana et al, 2021) have documented how Covid 19 restrictions has rearranged mourning and funeral practices, perspectives of the bereaved persons on how their grief processes have been disrupted has not been sufficiently highlighted. This paper therefore focused on how disruptions of funeral rituals has impacted family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19, taking the case of the Luo Community in Kenya.

A. Statement of the Problem

Anthropologists have argued that death is a rite of passage where the dead transcends to the spirit world to be in company of ancestors who provide protection and guidance to those who still live on earth. Similarly, the loss of a significant one often has immense psychological impact on the bereaved family members out of the realization that the dead person is gone for eternity. For this reason, the dead are regarded with the highest esteem especially in the African culture, where proper funeral rituals are performed as a sign of respect. Similarly, such rituals also help in easing grief among the bereaved families, besides offering diverse platforms for fundraising which is critical in meeting funeral expenses. However, between 2020 and 2021, the Government of Kenya, reacting out of the WHO's call for the implementation of Covid 19 restrictions, prohibited all

public gatherings. As a regulatory measure, bodies were required to be interred 24 hours after death, and the number of persons to attend burials was restricted to 20. Public transport was also banned, and most counties were locked down. Given elaborate funeral rituals which are often performed to appease the spirit of the dead and to ease grieving among the bereaved families, it was critical to explore the impact of these restrictions on the bereaved persons grieving among the Luo community which is widely known for adhering to funeral rituals in Kenya.

B. Study Purpose

This study investigated the impact of funeral rites disruptions on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among Luo Community in Kenya.

➢ Objectives of the Study
Specific objectives of the study were;

- To establish the impact of restrictions on funeral attendance on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among Luo Community in Kenya
- Explore the impacts of restriction on involvement in funeral planning on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among Luo Community in Kenya
- To assess the impact of restrictions on post death rituals on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among Luo Community in Kenya

II. THEORETICAL AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Theoretical Review

This research was anchored on psychiatric and psychoanalytic thinking of John Bowlby's attachment theory developed in 1980 to investigate cases of depression among children. Attachment as a theory in human psychology refers to any form of behaviour that results in a person achieving or maintaining a desired proximity to an identified individual seen as better able to cope with in the world (Erdman & Kok-Mun 2010). Attachment theory seeks to demonstrate the responses of loss experiences which a bereaved person has had with attachment figures during the whole course of his/her life and especially during his/her infancy, childhood and adolescence (Bowlby, 1980, cited in Mokhutso, 2019). According to Erdman and Kok-Mun (2010), attachment theory was initially concerned mainly with the making and breaking of attachment ties, probably because Bowlby's experiences of working as a child psychiatrist exposed him to the negative consequences of emotional development arising out of severe maternal deprivation towards her child. Noticing that when a mother is going out leaving the child behind, first, the child protests and tries to get back to the mother. Then the child despairs of returning to the mother but remains preoccupied with her. In the end, the child loses interest in the mother and is emotionally detached from her upon her return. This theory extends to adults since their styles of loving represents processes similar to those found in attachment formed by infants or children to their parents. For adults, a significant death triggers a response much like that which a child feels upon separation from his or her mother. Attachment is instinctual behavior that has survival

value because it keeps the child in close proximity to the mother for protection from predators. Humans are attached to individuals all through their lives. When they die, individuals experience separation and loss, and so must reorganize their attachments to match the new reality. This, in a nutshell, is the grief process which is normally addressed by funeral rituals. Mokhutso (2019) argues that whereas people can be attached to fellow human beings, money, job, prestige, home, land, and other possessions, the attachment between people is the most important to understand, as it is usually the loss of someone close to us that triggers off the deepest grief. Attachment theory therefore explains why when people lose loved ones, it is hard for them to dare to say goodbye to those loved ones.

B. The Concept of Funeral Rituals

A ritual is a link established between present moment and original reality. In most cultures, it is believed that death completes an elaborate life cycle, a rite of passage that allows the person's spirit to travel on to its next life or world (Sultana et al, 2021). A proper funeral with all the rituals must be performed otherwise the deceased can come back and bring trouble to living family members (O'Rourke, Spitzberg & Hannawa, 2011). In some cultures, particularly among some communities in Zimbabwe, when a person dies, the body is removed through a hole in the wall with the feet pointing the direction to the cemetery, not the door, as the hole can be quickly closed back up again (Rugonye and Bukaliya, 2016). The body is removed feet first and a zigzag path is taken to the cemetery or burial place so the "spirit" can find its way back to its residence. Similarly, when a person dies, an animal is also slaughtered as part of the ritual (and sometimes buried with the deceased), and all of his or her belongings are buried as well (Okal, Kodak, Yakub and Okello, 2020). African funerals are a time of solidarity, and in some communities, this means dancing and celebrations for everyone except the immediate family (Orawo, 2011). This dancing is in most cases referred to as disco matanga in Western Kenya (Njue, Voeten & Remes, 2009; Zolnikov, 2013).

In most African societies especially in Southern Africa, after a person dies in the house, all of the windows are covered in ash, and mirrors and other reflective objects are covered (Rugonye and Bukaliya, 2016). All pictures are turned around and the bed is removed from the deceased room. Grieving women are to sit on the floor or mattresses. In some areas of South Africa, children and unmarried adults are not allowed to attend funeral services, which take place in the early morning hours. If they do attend, they are not allowed to partake in the ceremony. Also, there is a strict mourning period of up to one week. In some societies such as Kenya, the bereaved family members are required to stay at home during mourning, and have no social or sexual contacts. The immediate family members are required to wear black clothing or cover their faces with black cloths, and some even shave their bodies, including all facial hair. Everything belonging to the deceased is considered "unclean" and should be washed and put away for the mourning period which traditionally can last up to one year. According to Burrell and Selman (2020), rituals were

generally viewed positively and provided meaning, easing grief and reinforcing bonds with the deceased.

C. The concept of Grief and Bereavement

While the terms grief, bereavement and mourning are used interchangeably, each conveys different aspects of encounter with loss (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2011). Grief is an individual personal response to loss, which has emotional, physical, behavioural, cognitive, social and spiritual dimensions (Buglass, 2010). Bereavement expresses human emotions following death (Davies, 2017). Other authors describe bereavement as the experience that follows the death of a loved one (Mokhutso, 2019). Grief is experienced by people in different ways. This is so because one's concept of death is based on one's concept of life. For adults, grief usually consists of conflicted emotions of guilt, anger, powerlessness, withdrawal and isolation (Rugonye and Bukaliya, 2016). Many writers make a distinction between grief and mourning, saying that grief is a subjective state, a set of feelings that arise spontaneously after a significant death, whereas mourning is a set of rituals or behaviours prescribed by culture's tradition (Potocnik, 2017; Rugonye and Bukaliya, 2016).

Mourning refers to the activities through which a person responds to loss. It is also known as the outer physical demonstration or public displays and rituals intended to facilitate and guide the individuals on their journey through grief (Brennan, 2015). The experience of grief, bereavement and mourning is culturally embedded and understood according to a particular culture's norms, beliefs and traditions (Anderson, 2010). According to Kgadima and Leburu (2022), death is characterised by a series of cultural rituals and rites of passage which at times continue for the duration of the mourning period, as long as the living dead is remembered and continues to influence the actions of the living. The mourning and grieving process cannot therefore be limited to some time span in a discrete sense.

It is for this reason that Africans take time off when their loved ones die to perform rituals that eternally connect them to the deceased. Bereavement is an unavoidable and multidimensional experience for persons who lose their loved ones (Zhai & Du, 2020).

D. Empirical Literature Review

In the U.S., Burrell and Selman (2020) conducted a rapid review to explore quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding the effect of funeral practices on bereaved relatives' mental health and bereavement outcomes. The review revealed that current evidence regarding the effect of funeral practices on bereaved relatives' mental health and bereavement outcomes was inconclusive. Five observational studies found benefits from funeral participation while six did not. However, qualitative research showed that the benefit of after-death rituals including funerals depends on the ability of the bereaved to shape those rituals and say goodbye in a way which is meaningful for them. In another study, Sultana et al (2021) sought to highlight how death serves as a central feature of social ties among the natives of Northern Punjab. Death is a great leveller and one of the

most curious aspects of human cognition. Inductive approach which enabled the ethnographic account of death to be gathered was employed. A total of thirteen cases of death of migrants were gathered. Findings showed that there are social pressures the family of the deceased encountered in the pre and post-death phases both in the country of origin and in the country of destination such as arrangement for the morgue and grave and at the same time making decisions for burial as well as organising for the journey to native home, mourning, condolence and bereavement rituals. In another study, Giamattey et al (2022) explored on how the absence of funeral rituals has affected the grief process of Brazilian families who lost loved ones through COVID-19. This was a qualitative review of three newspapers consisting of sixty-seven reports. Findings showed that the absence of funeral rituals combined with social restrictions had a challenging impact on society and mental health.

In Africa, Mokhutso (2019) analysed the significance of African traditional bereavement rituals amongst Methodist Church members, particularly the Methodist Church based in Mamelodi, Pretoria, South Africa. Qualitative research methodology including face-to-face and group interviews were done alongside observations and case studies. Findings showed that African bereavement rituals were done due to influences by upbringing, pressure of family elders and extended family members, and because it is the norm and common practice in the family and community. In their work, Rugonye and Bakaliya (2016) conducted a qualitative case study on the effectiveness of the African bereavement counselling techniques on the Shona people of Zimbabwe. The study interviewed 20 participants sampled through snowball technique. Findings revealed that grieving people were affected with long term psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, past traumatic stress disorder, behaviour problems, suicidal ideation and reduced psychological functioning. The African Bereavement counselling techniques were very effective in counselling the bereaved. The grieving styles can make one's bereavement burden easy. It was also established that the Shona cultural ways of assisting the bereaved were not enough as they tended to bunch the adolescents to bottle up their emotions thus hastening their recovery.

Okal et al (2020) explored the circumstances that may cause change in the Luo cultural funeral practices in Kenya, such as the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic. The paper reviewed literature on funeral practices world over to provide some insights into what can be adapted to ease this endemic burden. Findings demonstrated that changes in cultural rites can be as a result of some causal factors such as disease, pandemics, wars, infusion of religious customs and ancestral deeds among others. In this regard, changing the Luo cultural funeral ceremonies is inevitable. In another study, Otumba (2015) analysed the traditional views of death and funeral rites in the wake of Christianity among the Luo community in Rarieda of Siaya County, Kenya. Ethnographic methodology, where data was collected through interviews and observation, was used. The findings revealed that death is often viewed as a misfortune mostly caused by activities associated with close relatives. Another

study by Ngesa, Tuikong and Ongaro (2020) explored whether exposure to the intense Luo cultural burial practices could predispose a bereaved child to develop complicated grief in Siaya County, Kenya. The 241 participants used in the study were orphans enrolled in 12 public primary schools in Siaya County. The results showed that there was no significant difference observed in means of complicated grief against the individual cultural factors. They concluded that the Luo burial rites did not predispose the bereaved children to maladaptive grief, but instead, the participants had psychologically adapted to these practices and therefore were not bothered or traumatized by the practices. In a study that was done in the same location as the present one, Stull (2016) utilized grounded theory ethnography to obtain data from sixteen home-based interviews for analysing the experiences of sickness and death among the Luo tribe living in Nyakach Plateau of western Kenya. The study revealed that members of this community tend to face sickness and death not as individuals, but as a community, based on the Luo practice of gathering to tell stories.

The existing studies have elaborately discussed the significance of funeral rituals in situations of grief especially to the bereaved family members as well as friends and the community at large. Literature documents that funeral rites are practiced all over the world. Whereas the existing studies have documented how Covid 19 restrictions have disrupted processes of grieving, the literature is silent on how these disruptions have affected participation in funeral planning, attendance of actual funeral (burial), and participation in post-funeral rituals. This study therefore investigated how Covid 19 restrictions have disrupted processes of grieving, in terms of participation in funeral planning, attendance of actual funeral (burial), and participation in post-funeral rituals.

III. METHODS AND MATERIALS

A. Study Design

This study adopted ethnographic research design. Levitt et al (2017) explains that ethnographic research, being inductive in nature, the duty of the researcher is to generally explore meanings and insights in a given situation. It refers to a range of data collection and analysis techniques that use purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews (Gopaldas, 2016). It is a social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help us to understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Punch, 2013). This design was adopted because it enabled the researcher to develop a level of detail from high involvement in the actual experiences of the bereaved persons (Haradhan, 2018).

B. Target Population, Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The study targeted 20 families from three locations in Nyakach sub-county who lost their loved ones after being hospitalized for a while and who later died between May 2020 and May 2021. These bereaved relatives were targeted because, having waited for their loved ones to heal and come home after hospitalization for a while, were also being

denied the chances to view their bodies after their unfortunate demise because of Covid 19 restrictions. The researcher was eager to capture their experiences during funeral planning, during burial, and during post funeral period. Census method was used to include all the targeted bereaved persons for the purposes of data collection. According to Israel (2013), for a small target population in a research, the entire accessible population can be included for data collection.

C. Data Collection Instrument

For data collection, the researcher developed an interview guide. The interview guide was developed in English, translated into Swahili and Luo. Pre-testing was then done in one of the locations which was thereafter excluded from the main exercise. The interviews were conducted in Luo, Swahili or English, and tape-recorded; they lasted about 45-60 minutes. Prior to the interviews, the researcher obtained verbal informed consent/assent from all adolescents, in addition to parental consent for minors.

D. Data Analysis and Presentation

Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data obtained from the interviews. This entailed categorization of generated answers into outstanding themes and reported in narrative forms as articulated by Haradhan (2018).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Results

➢ *Participation in Funeral Planning*

Following an announcement of death, bereaved families and friends often have a duty to arrange for a decent send-off to the departed loved one. Activities preceding immediate announcement of death is often referred to as funeral planning and involves selecting a committee comprising of a chairperson, a secretary, and a treasurer to oversee the process of mourning until burial and after-burial programs. With the emergence of Covid 19 restrictions, the planning activities of funeral committees were banned and burial after death was required to be conducted after 24 or 48 hours. This means that the bereaved families and friends could not participate effectively in funeral planning. When the researcher enquired from the sampled respondents how participation in funeral planning during Covid 19 restrictions has related with their grieving, majority of the respondents indicated that failure to participate in planning their respective funerals negatively affected them, while most of them felt they were socially isolated from their grieving partners:

We were only required to do virtual meetings and coordinate through phones. Contributions were done through mobile phone services. We were completely isolated from one another; hence we could not console the immediate family members of the bereaved. I personally felt so bad and dejected when face-to-face engagement with my work-mates was rendered impossible.

In another interview with a younger brother of a man who died during the pandemic in Nairobi while the family was residing in the rural area of Nyakach, it emerged that the restrictions made it hard even for fund raising through the popular disco matanga at night:

All gatherings were prohibited. Harambees to help in raising funds for funeral arrangements could not take place, even though my brother was loved by many people, gatherings were disallowed. We could not even organize for night vigils to keep our sister in-law company. Many friends wanted us to arrange for night discos to help in collecting funds and keeping us company, but the area chief could not hear of this. Never in my life had I seen such devastation before.

Another interview revealed how non-participation in funeral planning had negative effects on some of the bereaved friends and family members when he said thus:

Having been stopped from planning my father's funeral and further prohibiting eating and huge gatherings, I felt dejected and depersonalised. I was extremely ashamed because I could not accord my dear father the kind of send-off that he deserved.

➢ *Attendance of Funeral (Burial)*

Attending a funeral of a close friend or a relative is given a lot of significance in most cultures because this is the day the deceased person is laid to rest. There is a funeral service for the deceased, eulogies from friends, relatives, and acquaintances, whoever is owed by the deceased anything is requested to come out, and whoever owes the deceased anything is also requested to come out and declare it. In essence, the deceased is being set free to transit to the next world. This is a very significant day for the bereaved persons. In light of the Covid 19 restrictions, those who could not attend funeral services and ceremonies of their loved ones reported various forms of unresolved grief. In one of the interviews with a son who could not attend the burial of his father due to complete lockdown of Nairobi County, he indicated that he felt guilty for failing to say good bye to his father:

I have a feeling that I was the only person absent from my father's funeral. Everyone was there, everybody was consoling each other and wishing him farewell, and asking him to go in peace. 'Me I was just seated some ten thousand kilometers away, unable to join those who were wishing him farewell. Will he really forgive me? I wonder'.

Low funeral attendance or failure to attend a funeral is perceived by relatives and bereaved persons as a lack of social support, while high funeral attendance is considered as being supportive, and remains helpful for years afterwards. In an interview with a widow of a man who died during the pandemic, the researcher gathered that the bereaved persons felt that the community including friends who failed to attend the burial due to Covid 19 restrictions were not supportive:

"Even now, I think back to that day and it pains me because despite the fact that Baba Junior was a well-known and respected person at work and in the village as well as the church, there were very few people who supported us".

The bereaved person expects all the friends and acquaintances of the deceased person to be around when he/she is being sent off. Therefore, failure to attend a funeral is perceived as lack of support. Indeed, the bereaved persons also believe that failure to attend a funeral of a person is a show of disrespect to the deceased person which will be punished by the ancestors whose company the deceased person is joining. In another interview with an elderly person whose son passed on during the pandemic, the interviewee, the researcher gathered that failure to attend a burial ritual is a curse on the side of the living persons and the dead might revisit this with vengeance:

"My son used to have so many friends. He was supposed to be accorded dignified send-   off by all his friends; lining up and bowing by his coffin in last respect. Those who did   not give him farewell on his journey to the next world will provide him with an appropriate reason when they meet again"

A feeling of desperation seemed to have crept in from low turnout or failure to attend a funeral on the bereaved persons. The restrictions on funeral attendance including travel bans and lockdowns therefore resulted in unresolved grief on the side of the bereaved.

➢ *Participation in Post – Funeral Rituals*
Participation in post-funeral rituals is significant in keeping the deceased as well as the bereaved company, lest they felt as being left alone. In most cultures, people used to stay in the company of the bereaved for over seven days after burial so as to help ease grief among the persons who have lost their loved ones. In many African cultures, several rituals were performed during post-funeral period including shaving the hair of the persons whose father/mother/husband/wife had passed on. Some communities would play music both during day time and at night. However, Covid 19 restrictions disrupted these rituals hence interfering with easing of grief among bereaved families as noted by the researcher from one interviewee:

"When the wife to my son died, we could not sufficiently bond with her children who   have   been living in Nairobi since they were born. This is because everybody was asked   to leave the home immediately after burial. The aunts to the children could not prepare   a special meal for them to eat together. The children could not be cleansed; their   hair   could not be shaved, they could not be fitted with special clothes, and special prayers could not be accorded them".

It seems every ritual which culture requires to be done for orphaned children after the burial of their parents were disrupted by these Covid 19 restrictions. These occurrences seemed to have devastated the bereaved families to a great

extent. Similarly, the restrictions also had further interruptions in terms of ceremonies aimed at soliciting funds through playing of music known as *Disco Matanga*, as well as *Tero Buru:* A statement generated from six families bereaved during Covid19 restrictions was summerised by the researcher as:

"Our culture normally requires friends and bereaved families to stay close to the burial   site both during day and night to keep company the departed colleague lest he/she felt   isolated. Similarly, keeping company with the bereaved family ensured that they are not isolated hence   helped in easing the grief. The culture required that special dirges and songs known as *Tero Buru* were played to them to console them after burial, while night music or *Disco Matanga* was played for at least three days to keep vigil and ward off the evil spirits.

The families and friends who were bereaved during Covid 19 restrictions could not perform post-funeral rituals. This move left them a devastated lot feeling isolated. In turn, their grief could not be eased and it took them a long time to process and come to normalcy.

B. Discussions
This paper analysed the impact of funeral rites practices disruptions on family members' grief and bereavement during Covid 19 among the Luo Community in Kenya. Like most African communities' cultural orientations, the Luo practise various rituals immediately a person's death is announced up to the period after the body is buried, pre-funeral planning, during burial or funeral attendance and post-funeral rituals. The bereaved families were therefore left with unprocessed grief, thereby exposing them to trauma and psychological problems. Earlier studies had also discussed problems associated with deprived grief. A study done in USA by O'Rourke, Spitzberg & Hannawa (2011) concluded that being unable to participate in funerals, rituals, and ceremonies will have a detrimental effect on the bereaved, affecting their mental health and ability to cope with or process their grief. Another study done in Africa (Zimbabwe) by Rugonye and Bakaliya (2016) revealed that grieving styles can make one's bereavement burden easy. They also indicated that restricted grieving can contribute to long term psychological consequences such as depression, anxiety, past traumatic stress disorder, behaviour problems, suicidal ideation and reduced psychological functioning. Within the Luo culture, funeral rituals are accepted practice that help in easing grief among bereaved persons hence restrictions such as those imposed due to Covid 19 pandemic were detrimental to grief processing to the whole community. A study by Ngesa et al (2020) among the Luo community in Siaya County showed that the Luo burial rites helped the bereaved children to ease grief, and that, the rituals were psychologically adapted to address trauma among bereaved persons and the community. This finding seems to concur with an earlier study done specifically in the same area as the current study (Nyakach Sub-County) by Stull (2016). The author concluded that members of this community tend to face sickness and death not as

individuals, but as a community, based on the Luo practice of gathering to tell stories and share grief.

C. Conclusions

The prevalence of unprocessed grief and hence mental health conditions is likely to increase during and immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic, with those who have lost a family member at particular risk of psychiatric distress. The social support available to those who are bereaved is limited, and social isolation is found to exacerbate psychological morbidity in bereavement. Based on this study, it is clear how funeral restrictions have contributed to unprocessed grief among the population. This study highlights the importance of meaningful and supportive funerals for the bereaved; enabling relatives to achieve a sense of control and social support despite current restrictions is crucial, especially among the Luo community. As well as access to bereavement support and sign-posting to specialist services, palliative care and bereavement teams should provide locally-relevant information regarding the creation of meaningful, culturally appropriate funerals. As people continue to find new ways to grieve and commemorate their loved ones, the impact of these alternative modalities should be explored. Becoming bereaved during COVID-19 presents challenges at every stage of the funeral process, from planning to post-funeral rituals and memorialisation.

D. Recommendations

The study recommends that the government should strictly monitor sources of meat sold by butcheries in urban places within the vicinities of cattle rustling hotspots. Similarly, standard measures should be put in place to protect social places like schools and open-air markets from invaders during conflicts occasioned by cattle rustling. In addition, the government should put in place indemnities to provide cover from financial losses arising from conflicts occasioned by cattle rustling in all areas experiencing similar farm related atrocities.

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