

A PARADOX OF LEVIRATE MARRIAGE THEOLOGY IN THE SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST ECCLESIOLOGY: A CASE OF ITUMBE STATION, SOUTH KENYA CONFERENCE

Authors

Ruth Nyanchama Moronya⁽¹⁾ ; Eric Ogwora⁽²⁾ ; Maurice Ogolla⁽³⁾ 

Main author email: ruthmoronya2021@gmail.com

(1.2.3) Kisii University, Kenya.

Cite this article in APA

Moronya, R. N., Ogwora, E., & Ogolla, M. (2023). A paradox of levirate marriage theology in the Seventh Day Adventist ecclesiology: A case of Itumbe Station, South Kenya conference. *Journal of philosophy and religion*, 2(1), 102-121. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jpr.v2i1.359>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 29.05.2023

Accepted: 14.06.2023

Published: 01.07.2023

Scan this QR to read the paper online



Copyright: ©2023 by the author(s). This article is an Open Access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).



Abstract

The study sought to examine the participants' perspectives on various aspects of levirate marriage theology in Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology. The study employed the structural-functional theory of Emile Durkheim. The study's target population was 774 respondents from the 8 districts that form the SDA church in Itumbe Station, and the sample size was 250 participants. Widowhood is a nerve-racking life situation that not only affects the widowed person, but also the Christian community, the orphaned children that are under her care, who in most cases have to manage the loss of one of their parents. The study did not advocate for the abolishment of the SDA church teachings on marriage and Abagusii traditional levirate custom, rather it argued on the embracement of positive aspects of the custom while denouncing those that do not adhere to the well-being of the Christian widows; not all about levirate custom is bad. The study concluded that the SDA church in South Kenya Field, Itumbe Station, has attempted to interpret Biblical teachings on marriage, considering it a permanent, monogamous contract solemnised by the church minister. The study recommends that SDA church should become aware not only of addressing the gospel message to individuals and showing how its teachings are contrary to the Abagusii levirate practice but also of the significant aspects found in the levirate practice itself.

Key terms: Child bearing, childcare, family bonds, physical needs, widow care.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Following both the Old Testament and New Testament traditions, the Christian church teaches that marriage is a permanent union between one man and one woman coming together to form one flesh, bound by mutual consent and solemnised by the church minister (Matthew 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12). Other goals of marriage, like consummation that culminates in childbearing, companionship, and a reciprocal love relationship between husband and wife, are anchored on this first fundamental principle. This forms the essential principle of the biblical theology of marriage advocated by the church for Christians, and any practice devoid of these elements is considered not to be marriage at all. A Christian marriage should reflect and maintain all these essential elements in order to be recognised as a marriage. In the case of the death of one partner, as informed by the New Testament exhortation in 1 Timothy 5:14, while perpetuating a monogamous marriage system, a widowed partner is free to remarry. If it is a lady, she should not remarry her deceased husband's brother but any other man that she chooses to respond to her emotional and sexual needs. This means that unions like levirate, polygamy, and sorority are not considered marriages at all and, therefore, not accepted by the church, even though they may contain fundamental religious values.

However, the paradox in this is that there are a number of Old Testament texts that support the practice of levirate marriage. For instance, the well-known story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38:8 says, "Then Judah said to Onan, go into your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." In Deuteronomy 25:5–10, a brother would take his deceased brother's wife to raise up children for him, particularly a son, to keep his lineage and name alive. This was why a son had to be born to take his late father's name. Informed by these texts, Schwimmer (2003) argues that levirate marriage law is supported by the Holy Scriptures and is practiced by many communities in the world, including the Judeo-Christian traditions. In the New Testament, especially in Timothy 5:14–16, Paul appears to be applying the same Torah obligation of marrying a brother's widow, especially in a situation where there is no male heir. There are many reasons why the levirate union is practiced in the OT and also by the Abagusii Christians in the SDA church. Among these reasons are: continuity of family bonds; guardianship for the widow and children left to her by the deceased husband; moral care of the widow; continuity of community; and many others. Notwithstanding all these essential values cherished by all cultures, including Christian culture, the Church, particularly the Seventh Day Adventist church in Itumbe Station, South Kenya Conference, condemns the levirate union, reducing it to a romantic affair.

Another paradox of levirate marriage in Christian theology is that of virginity. The church teaches and encourages its members to be virgins until marriage. For instance, in the book of Leviticus, the woman the high priest marries must be a virgin. He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people. This is also absorbed within the SDA church's teachings. Teaching and encouraging widows to remarry for the maintenance of monogamous marriages paradoxically undermines the very doctrine of virginity since widows are not virgins. From a socio-ecclesial perspective, upholding virgin marriages is an indicator of the disregard for widows within the SDA church, even if they remarried. It is a factor that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for widows to claim remarriage as propagated by the SDA church, consequently leading to their mistreatment, abandonment, isolation, and disregard (Isaiah 1, 23; 10, 1-2; Jeremiah 7, 4-16).

According to the South Kenya Conference report (2020), Itumbe SDA church Station has 1551 widows, but the socio-ecclesial reality is that the Abagusii people, who are also Christians in the SDA church, Itumbe

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

station, in some clandestine manner, practice levirate unions as a way of caring for the widows and their orphaned children despite the church's disapproval of the practice. Those who openly opt, either openly or secretly, for levirate union regardless of their role in the church are victimised and forced to migrate to other places to avoid stigmatisation, thereby losing their church membership. Widows in the SDA church in Itumbe Station go through various social, economic, and even religious difficulties. Widowed persons, especially women in poor contexts, depend on their husbands for many things: financial support, care of the children if they have them, their own emotional support, companionship, and so on. Unfortunately, the SDA church condemns levirate practice that offers needed support to widows without offering structural systems charged with the responsibility to care for the widows and their orphaned children. The condemnation of levirate custom leaves widowed members of the church, particularly those of the Seventh Day church, without proper care; it contradicts the biblical call of 1 Timothy 5:3–16, where the care of widows is depicted as the primary concern of the Christian community then, the lapses in the care of widows and their orphaned children in the SDA church point to the fact that the demise of the husband creates a significant and general loss in the realisation of family and marriage roles previously fulfilled by the husband.

The paradoxical nature of the SDA church's pastoral theology (Itumbe Station, South Kenya Conference) on levirate custom practiced by the Abagusii raises many fundamental socio-ecclesial and cultural questions: If the widow had children with the deceased and remarried, how are they taken care of? Supposing the one marrying the widow does not want the children of the widowed or does not have the resources to take care of the children, what will become of those children? Should the widow divorce from her late husband's family, leaving behind her children? What relationship does a Christian widow have with her deceased brother's family, including the deceased husband himself? Does the church have proper systems to care for widows and orphans in their times of need that could warrant them not to opt for a levirate union (James 1:27)? Is the church prepared to confront the reality of needy widows and orphans? Widowhood is a nerve-racking life situation that affects not only the widowed person but also the Christian community and the orphaned children that are under her care, who, in most cases, have to manage the loss of one of their parents. If the church condemns the levirate custom that is advocated for in the Holy Scriptures, then it should also provide an alternative for the care of widows and the children left to them by their deceased husbands. The presence of both partners makes marriage a shared responsibility, which becomes more cumbersome for the remaining partner with the death of one spouse. It is improper to condemn the custom and not provide an existential solution to their problems.

The SDA church should see levirate union beyond the theological principle of one man and one woman coming together to form one flesh bound by mutual consent (Mt. 19:1–12; Mk. 10:1–12) solemnised by the church minister and make a formidable theological and pastoral step in finding possible ways of reconciling the two marriage systems (Christian and Customary) as lived and practiced by the Abagusii Christians in South Kenya Conference, Itumbe Station. The Levirate custom practiced by the Abagusii people is not just above sexual intimacy; other essential factors define it.

In traditional Abagusii, marriage is considered the most essential feature of one's life. This includes different forms of arrangements: eloping (forced marriage through dragging), formal traditional, levirate, polygamy, and sororal. When it comes to levirate marriage, this is justified by the values of taking care of the widows and their children upon the death of their husbands or fathers. As it is advocated for in the Old

Testament (Deuteronomy 25:5–10), it is the duty of the dead man's brother to marry the widow for the continuity of the family and the security and protection of the widow and orphaned children.

According to the Bichang'a (2014), Itumbe SDA church Station has 1551 widows, some of whom, in a clandestine manner, live in levirate unions. However, influenced by Christian teachings, the SDA church does not consider the levirate marriage advocated for in the Holy Scriptures and practiced by the Abagusii community as a social unit. The church considers this practice a form of cohabitation, polygamy, and other perceived vices, and members involved in levirate relationships are regarded as immoral and needing repentance. Such members are denied fellowship with the rest. Those who stand firm in the faith face the challenge of being stigmatised by church believers in the Christian community. The negative perceptions and treatment of those who opt for levirate unions force some of them to move away from their villages and from the SDA church membership to other churches in order to seek refuge and places where they can worship God peacefully while continuing with the levirate marriage tradition. This weakens the concept of the church and leads to the decline of all values related to levirate marriage in the Abagusii community. Widowhood is a nerve-wracking life situation that affects not only the widowed person but also the Christian community and the orphaned children that are under her care who, in most cases, have to manage the loss of one of their parents.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a number of Old Testament texts that support the practice of levirate marriage. For instance, the well-known story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38:8 "Then Judah said to Onan, go into your brother's wife, and perform your duty as a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." In Deuteronomy 25:5–10, a brother would take his deceased brother's wife to raise up children for him, particularly a son, to keep his lineage and name alive. This was why a son had to be born to take his late father's name. Both the Old and New Testaments have elaborate theologies on marriage that inform Christian church teachings. In both Testaments, marriage is a permanent union between one man and one woman coming together to form one flesh bound by mutual consent (Mt. 19:1–12; Mk. 10:1–12). A classical theologian, Porter (1965), explained that levirate union is the best example of the principle of corporate personality enshrined in the OT, whereby the family, clan, and tribe are treated as a unit rather than individuals, hence the obligation of a brother in the family to take over the widow of the deceased brother. This was done to ensure that the widow did not belong to a 'stranger', meaning a person outside the family, but to the family of the late husband.

Ogolla (2014) explains that widows choose the people to take care of them and their families and support them materially and in other ways from the family of their late husband. This is done in such a way that widows are given a chance to choose a guardian within the family setup; they cannot live outside the context of the family of their dead husband. No widow is forced to have a man she never proposed to stay within a levirate union. Sometimes, a man could decline and explain the reasons why he could not guard his brother's house. Affirming the teachings of the Scriptures, Thurston (1989) asserts that any wrong done to the unprotected widow and orphan would attract the vengeance of God. Following the position of the Holy Scriptures, the brother of the deceased is not under any compulsion to agree to this kind of marital arrangement; he has the option of refusing the arrangement for reasons best known to him. Under such determination, it is expected that the widow makes it known to the elders, and she is expected to remove the sandal of her deceased husband's brother and spit into his face in public and before the elders of the

land (Dt 25:9). In the OT traditional arrangements among the people of Israel, levirate unions were also to ensure that the lineage of the deceased man who dies without being able to produce an heir would not die out; it was regarded as a great misfortune for a man to die without a male heir, such that the levir was expected to consummate the union (Mbiti, 2002). This situation does not arise in situations where levirate unions are openly accepted since they receive support from their deceased husbands' brothers who take care of them. While Afolayan (2004) argues that the death of the man or husband need not bring an end to the marriage, the widow may remain on her husband's homestead, where she is supported by the surrogate husband (levir), or she may move to his homestead. This is considered appropriate because the widow is still considered married to her late husband's family, and therefore the family has the responsibility to decide on her next destination in that family. For this reason, the family can disown a woman who makes a decision that goes against the family's suggestions in this regard (Fasoranti & Aruna, 2007). In the NT, the issue of levirate marriage was a thorny one. This is expressively manifested in Luke 20:28–31, where Jesus was asked:

Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her; in the same way, all seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be since the seven were married to her?

Jesus did not condemn it but gave a philosophical response, locating marriage as a human, earthly enterprise. This response does not require a quick reaction to condemn the practice of levirate marriage unions without a proper theological basis. Muga (1975) in his work on African Response to Western Christian Religion, pointed out that, with the coming of the missionaries, a new and alien monogamous pattern of marriage was introduced to the African church faithful. This meant that polygamous and levirate marriage practices were equally discouraged, contributing to the disintegration of African traditional marriage patterns. However, the profound implications of this are that it could not recognise and tolerate widow guardianship on the presupposition that this would advance the widow and the heir to indulge in illicit sexual relationships considered to be against the principles of Christian marriage and living (Shorter, 1975). On this, in line with 1 Timothy 5:9–14, the Church teaches that upon the death of a husband, a widow is to either remarry and be supported and kept occupied by the new marriage partner or live alone without a marriage partner.

In line with the Church's position on marriage and widowhood, Nkhwashu (2012) and Baloyi (2001) argue that love should drive marital choices. For them, the parents' or family's decision to allow the widow to remarry within the family is no substitute for love. Baloyi (2012) further advances the religious argument that levirate unions promote polygamy in the sense that if all the brothers of the dead man were already married at the time of his death, the one who was to inherit the widow would not be expected to divorce his legal wife but to marry the widow as another wife. However, Miruka et al. (2015) reveal that even though love is central to widow care, it is not fully implemented in Christian churches. There are structures of care for widows in the church. If the church has to transform or find strategies to take up other socio-cultural and economic roles played by the dead husbands, then she has to collaborate with other entities and social structures to address the plight of widows.

God determines the evangelical activity of caring for widows in the Church in the Holy Scriptures. In 1 Timothy 5:3–16, widows are depicted as the main concern for the Christian community; at Ephesus, the Christian community had a responsibility to care for them since there were no other people to take up the responsibility. However, the care of widows by the church is not without its challenges within the church. For instance, one of the earliest problems that arose in the Apostolic Church was that the widows were being neglected (Acts 6:1–7). This forced the early Church to choose devoted men and women to serve the widows. This problem that confronted the early Church still persists to this day in the Church, sometimes leaving the Church without other possible alternatives except to turn to traditional forms of solving widowhood-related problems. A study by Mwangi (2014) establishes that widows lack the necessary support systems in terms of family, friends, and professionals that could help them cope with the loss of their spouses and the task of solely bringing up children.

The study by Owen (2010) postulated that widows are being excluded in many areas of their lives, including socio-religious aspects. There is also the abandonment of widows by either the family or the Christian community. This is explained in the study by Cassidy and Barnes (2012), who assert that in Botswana, widows face isolation from the community; they are shunned by the community in the name of cultural beliefs associated with widowhood. The widows are suspected to be the cause of the deaths of their deceased husbands, leading to their abandonment and neglect by the community.

A study by Clinton (2008) notes that young widows receive inadequate support systems from the church, family, and friends, leaving them with the task of shouldering all the responsibilities of raising children under their care on their own. A study by McGoldrick and Walsh (2004) explains that young widows' parents become overprotective of them after their partners die, creating more stress for them. Bradley (2007) and Feinberg (2009) explained that widows are left with the feeling of abandonment. This is in disagreement with the study by Mgboo (2014) on the role of the Anglican Church in widowhood practice in Ezeagu, Nigeria, which found out that the Anglican Church is active in addressing detrimental and degrading widowhood practices like levirate union and other behaviours related to sexual intimate life by charting ways to assist widows in ordering their personal worlds through pastoral and caring activities.

Miruka et al. (2015) argue that widows are not thoroughly cared for in Christian churches; they are made to feel neglected and suffer within the church and in the larger society; they suffer from a lack of self-esteem and loneliness since they do not have groups to identify themselves with. These sentiments are echoed by Carr and Utz (2002), who contend that most widows never receive help during grief or even after. They point out that after the funeral, family members, friends, funeral committees, and even the Christian community go their own ways and never turn back to give the widow the support she needs; the widow is left alone in totally new life circumstances for which she has little or no preparation to enable her to cope with the new reality of widowhood. She is left to live a lonely life, isolated and depressed, with virtually no support systems from the church or general society. In addition, their children are exposed to various insecurities that jeopardise their future, leading to grave poverty for themselves and their widowed mothers.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study investigated the paradox of levirate marriage theology in Seventh - day Adventist ecclesiology: a case of Itumbe Station, South Kenya Conference. Specifically, it examined the participants' perspectives on

various aspects of levirate marriage theology in Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology. The study employed the structural-functional theory of Emile Durkheim. The study's target population was 774 respondents from the 8 districts that form the SDA church in Itumbe Station, and the sample size was 250 participants. The determination of the sample size was informed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), who suggests that a sample size of 30 per cent is preferable for a target population of less than 1,000, as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: The Sample Size

Target group	Target Population	Sampling procedure	Sample size	Percentage
Widows	406	Simple Random	122	49%
Family Members	200	Simple Random	60	24%
Pastors	8	Censors	8	3%
Abagusii Leaders	80	Purposive	30	12%
Family Life Leaders	80	Purposive	30	12%
Total	774		250	100%

Source: Field Data, 2023

As illustrated in Table 1 above, the engagement of various clusters of informants was to obtain a significant and multifaceted representation of the respondents. These were justified by the data collected from church widows, family members, Abagusii traditional leaders, and church family life leaders selected to participate in the study from all the districts that constitute Itumbe station of the SDA church, South Kenya Conference. Consequently, the sample size for the entire study was 250 informants. In the collection of data, a questionnaire (for 62 widows, 60 family members, and 30 church family life leaders, for a total of 152 participants), interviews (for 38 participants, 8 pastors, and 30 Abagusii leaders), and focused group discussions (for 60 respondents) were used.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After establishing the reactions of the informants on levirate marriage theology in the Seventh - day Adventist ecclesiology: a case of Itumbe station, South Kenya Conference, The discussion was classified into two categories: biblical exaltations and pastoral reality realised on a Likert scale of 5–1, where SD = Strongly agree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, and SA = Strongly agree.

Theological Views on Marriage and Widowhood

The respondents were asked to express their perceptions, feelings, and regard for the SDA church's teachings on marriage and levirate union custom. Figure 1 below presents the results.

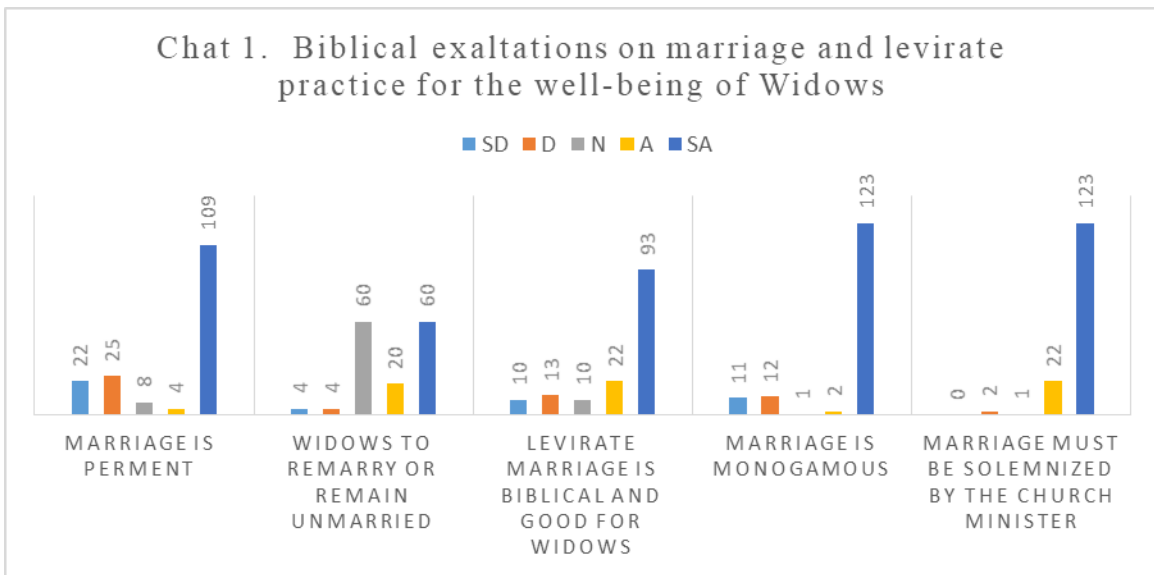


Figure 1: Biblical Exaltations on Marriage and Levirate Practice for the Well-Being of Widows
Source: Field Data, 2023

Results in Figure 1 indicated that 27 (18.2%) were of the opinion that marriage is not a permanent union, 8 (5.4%) were undecided, and 113 (76.3%) were of the opinion that marriage is a permanent union. These views were complemented by those in the interview schedules where participants were asked whether death marks the end of a marriage, and a participant informed:

No, death does not mark the end of a marriage because, according to the Abagusii culture, marriage proceeds even after the death of the husband. With the husband's death, the widow is never allowed to leave the deceased husband's home. Instead, she has to continue as a wife in that home (Interviewee 2).

The findings are supported by both the Old and New Testaments (Isaiah 1, 23; 10, 1-2; Jeremiah 7, 4-16; Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12; 1 Timothy 5:3-8, and so on), where marriage is a permanent union between one man and one woman coming together to form one flesh bound by mutual consent.

On the theme of remarriage, the findings specified the church's theological teachings as follows: 8 (5.4%) argued that the widow is allowed to remarry or remain unmarried after the death of the husband. The sentiment of this data was reproduced by a participant in the interviews, who informed:

The practice of levirate custom is outdated and primitive. The Bible makes it clear in 1 Timothy 5:14: Let the young widows be free and remarry so that they may not overburden the church. The culture will not allow the widow to remarry; the elderly will remain faithful to their first pledge and continue caring for their children. However, the issue is: Who is ready to marry a widow? If she has young children, should she go with them? Will the second husband accept the responsibility of caring for the children that are not his? What if the deceased husband's parents are too old to care for the children? This sometimes leaves the church at a crossroads (Interviewee 13).

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

God's grace is enough for widows, and they need not remarry or opt for any form of marriage. It is of great importance for widows to commit themselves to God in prayer, to study and follow the Bible teachings, to attend church functions, and to serve in the church. These all help them grow in the grace of God, which will sustain them through all challenges they face (Interviewee 33).

The voiced field data sentiments are in line with 1 Corinthians 7:8–9, 39–40, and 1 Timothy 3:9–16, where not remarrying was considered an honourable, indeed exemplary thing, and widows were encouraged to dedicate themselves to a life of fasting and prayer to God. God's grace is explained as an integral part of a widow's ability to move on with life. This group of widows and Christians approves voluntary celibacy as the highest good for every widow, while others oblige them to remarry for other reasons. Reasons given for such positions include religious commitment, God's grace, and celibacy as a higher good. However, the findings also show that 60 (40.5%) were neutral, and a relatively large majority of 80 (54.0%) did not favour the idea of a new marriage or remained unmarried as advocated by the church in the Holy Scriptures. In this position, a participant in the study postulated:

The Gusii people believe that the widow cannot remarry outside the family because if she does, the deceased husband's family lineage is disrupted, and the spirit of the deceased husband will haunt the widow. Marriage is not a contract that ends with the death of the husband (Interviewee 5).

Informed by functional theory, the distinguishing feature brought out by the Abagusii culture and realised through a levirate custom is that marriage is not a social contract that ends with the death of the husband. This view of participants does not agree with the SDA church's theological teaching on marriage as a temporal social contract. However, the same SDA church position to deny levirate union finds a serious biblical challenge as expressed in Luke 20:28–31, where Jesus was temptations asked:

Moses wrote to us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and have children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. The second and then the third married her; in the same way, all seven died, leaving no children. Finally, the woman died too. Now, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be since the seven were married to her? (Interviewee 7)

The most indicting issue is that Jesus did not condemn the levirate custom of the Jews but instead gave a philosophical reaction, locating marriage as a human earthly enterprise. Jesus' response did not condemn the practice of levirate marriage since it did not have a proper theological basis to warrant its condemnation. However, the point to note was that the SDA church selectively uses biblical texts and reasons to discourage levirate custom practices.

The study further sought to examine the Christian notion of marriage as a monogamous endeavour. The findings in Table 4.2 demonstrated that 23 (15.4%) disagreed with the view of marriage as monogamy, 1 (0.7%) was undecided, while the majority of 125 (84.5%) affirmed that marriage in Christian faith and practice is a strictly monogamous institution solemnised through a wedding. The aspect of solemnisation was exhibited by the overwhelming majority of the 145 (98%) respondents who affirmed it. A participant in the study's interviews informed:

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

Levirate union is not a proper form of marriage; it is unlawful because the widow is not the brother-in-law's wife, it lacks a wedding ceremony, and therefore is a form of fornication and adultery, which the church cannot allow (Interviewee 15).

Levirate custom often leads to a form of polygamous marriage, which the SDA church or Christianity does not allow. God created one man and one woman and commissioned them to go and multiply; any form of marriage (polygamy, polygyny, including marriages of the same sex) that does derive from this divine command is, therefore, a deviation from that norm and commission (Interviewee 10).

This overwhelming response could mean that structurally, the SDA church holds on to the teaching in Genesis 2:24, which states that "a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh." Based on this, the church does not allow any marriage arrangement that would be sympathetic to widows wishing to maintain their previous matrimonial homes. The position of the study findings is supported by Baloyi (2012), who advanced a religious argument that levirate marriage unions support polygamy in the sense that if the brother of the deceased man was already married at the time of his death, the levir (one to marry the widow) would not be expected to divorce his legal wife but rather take up the widow as his second wife. However, the argument then is that if monogamy is taken to be the only and rightfully religiously ordained form of marriage as taught by the SDA church, how does the same church explain other forms of marriage in the Holy Scriptures? For instance, a participant in the FGDs in disagreement with the church teaching asked the question:

How does the church reconcile her position with the text from Isaiah 4:1, which says: Seven women will take hold of one man in that day, and say we will eat our own bread and wear our own clothing; only let us be called by your name, and take away our nakedness. (Interviewee 27).

This field data informs us that the Bible has varieties or forms of marriage: monogamy, polygamy, concubinage, and levirate unions. In the Holy Scriptures, marriage arises in a variety of settings: arranged directly by God, for example, those of Adam and Eve (Gen. 2) and Hosea and Gomer (Hos. 1); organised by the father, as in the case of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24). In the same Old Testament, there are numerous samples of polygamous men of God (Gen. 24:57): Abram is a notable example, where his wife Sarah gave him her servant, Hagar, to produce offspring for him. God raised the people of Israel through Jacob's two wives and two concubines (Gen. 31) and many other marriage examples. These biblical texts challenge the SDA church's theological position on monogamous marriages as the only authentic marriages.

The doctrine of remarriage preached by the SDA church does not resonate with the reality on the ground. For instance, some widows who participated in the study were informed:

I remarried as taught and advised by the church, but it was a traumatising experience. My new husband never wanted my children, especially the boys. All the time, they were mistreating my children, forcing me to return them to my parents or to the home of my deceased husband. However, I had already had two other children with him; I could not abandon my children with the deceased husband. I chose to suffer with them until my new husband also died. Upon the death of my second husband, his family was on me, accusing me of causing the death of their son. Life became unbearable. Now that my sons with the first husband were grown enough, they asked me to go back to the home of my first deceased husband. On

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

my return, we found that all the land that belonged to my first deceased husband was already sold by his brothers, whom I refused to contract a levirate marriage union with even after being besieged by the clan elders. I regret that I did not commit myself to levirate marriage. At the moment, my children have nothing of their own, no home, and no family (FGD 16).

I remarried when I had one girl child. At a very tender age, my so-called second husband turned my daughter into his wife. He continuously assaulted her sexually until I decided to move back to the home of my previous deceased husband. Going back there, the family did not accept me and my daughter. Since I lost my parents when I was young, I had nowhere to go. I decided to be the life in town—a life that is painful to narrate to you now (FGD 37).

From the field findings and reactions of the respondents, it can be deduced that the SDA church in Itumbe Station has not taken the time to contextualise the Abagusii levirate marriage custom. Instead, in a structured manner, the church selectively uses the Holy Scriptures to encourage young widows to remarry or remain unmarried to create a negative perception of levirate practices at large (Mombo & Joziase, 2011).

SDA Church Pastoral Regard to Levirate Unions

Respondents were asked to express their perceptions, feelings, and regard for the SDA church teachings on marriage and levirate union custom on pastoral grounds related to marriage and levirate marriage custom. This was done thematically, as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2: SDA Church Pastoral Teaching on Marriage and Levirate Marriage Custom

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
Levirate unions are not accepted, considered sinful, and therefore prohibited.	R-7 %-4.7	11 7.4	6 4.1	20 13.5	104 70.3%	148 100%
Stigmatisation	R-00 %-0.0	00 0.0	00 0.0	28 18.9	120 81.1	148 100%
Widows in levirate unions are condemned by the church.	R-00 %-0.0	00 0.0	8 5.4	130 87.8	10 6.8	148 100%
Widows in levirate unions are excommunicated from the church.	R-00 %-0.0	0.0 0.0	11 7.4	130 87.8	9 6.1	148 100%
Widows in levirate unions are isolated in the church.	R-00 %-0.0	00 0.0	8 5.4	135 91.2	5 3.4	148 100%

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

There are active widow pastoral care ministries and programs.	R-0 %-0.0	110 74.3	20 13.5	10 6.8	8 5.4	148 100%
---------------------------------------------------------------	--------------	-------------	------------	-----------	----------	---------------------------

Key: R = Respondents, % = percentage

Source: Field Data, 2023

On the theme of levirate unions being considered sinful and therefore prohibited by the church, the findings in Table 2 indicate that 18 (12.2%) disagreed, 6 (4.1%) were undecided, and a majority of 124 (83.8%) affirmed that the SDA church regards levirate unions as sinful and therefore an unacceptable practice for the church's faithful widows. The same was reiterated by a respondent from the interview schedules, who argued:

Levirate marriage is a form of slavery to the widow since it denies her the freedom to remarry outside her deceased husband's home, as preached by the church; she cannot set up an independent home, and so is her future. She has inherited but has not been given an inheritance from her husband since the inheritance is for the deceased husband's children. Therefore, she cannot own any property of her own with the freedom to dispose of it as she wishes (Interviewee 19).

The widow should go and remarry elsewhere, and it is silent on the welfare of the children. When a man dies, the marriage vows cease to have an effect because it is only death that parts them, but the levirate union is wrong because it encourages polygamy, which is unacceptable in the Christian faith (Interviewee 20).

The study noted that such denouncing church positions contradict the very biblical principles of levirate custom (Genesis 38:8–10) and also consider widows in levirate unions in isolation from the SDA church membership and from the community of the deceased husbands to which they belong. The church position expressed through the above field findings is inconsistent with Carol Meyers et al. (2000), who argued in favor of levirate custom, expressing that the levirate law is, in fact, the only law in the Bible that includes an act of humiliation as a penalty against the offender, the levir who rejects to take up his deceased brother's widow. This suggests that it is an exacting law that obliges close adherence and that it is incredibly evil not to follow it. The study affirmed that belonging to the community of the deceased husband does not contradict freedom but is somewhat necessary for freedom.

Inclusively, with respect to the freedom of the widow, her consent was sought to ascertain the person she likes to live with; the widow is never forced into a levirate union, but instead, she is to consent to it. However, just as it is advocated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7:39, the study argued that the concept of freedom is not an absolute one; the freedom of widows to remarry advocated in this text was not absolute, for there were constraints attached to the obligations to be fulfilled: the proposed marriage had to be 'in the Lord,' and presumably the husband, too, had to be willing to marry. So, in levirate unions, the two are not forced to, since the widow has to consent, and the levir too must be willing to take up the responsibility to care for his deceased brother's family. This is fundamental because a widow's union with the levir is considered to be a continuation of the same family and relationship with her deceased husband. There is nothing secretive, shameful, or illicit about it within the Abagusii community. The union

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

is witnessed by the community elders' meeting, who choose the younger brother of the deceased, and the relationship begins with the proposed brother's (levir) acceptance of the widow as his real wife, taking up all the responsibilities of the husband. However, the study was cognisant of the fact that there are cases where this noble practice is abused, as was echoed by one discussant in the FGDs, who narrated:

When my late husband's family and community elders suggested that one of my brothers' in-laws, whom I also like, have me as his wife, he consented. We started living together very well, and our relationship as a couple was pretty good. As time went by, things changed. He consumed all the property left to me by his late brother and educated his children from his first wife. I used all the property I had from my deceased husband. He even started selling the land left to me and my children. This went on until the clan elders had to intervene. He later left me and returned to his real wife (FGD 58).

This is reiterated by Abuya (2002), who argued that the noble custom of taking care of widows and orphans sometimes turns its back on the very ideals for which it was created. However, it would be wrong for the SDA church to denounce the Abagusii levirate custom on the grounds of some corrupted people who take advantage of it to exploit the widows and consume their wealth without providing the proper guardianship that is initially envisioned in the custom.

On the construct of stigmatisation in the church, the findings in Table 1.2 reveal that all 148 participants (100%) who answered the questionnaire were of the position that widows who engage in levirate marriage are stigmatised by church membership. This quantitative finding from the questionnaire was confirmed by the qualitative verbatim responses from the interviews and FGDs, as indicated below:

The church is undecided about whether to appoint or elect us widows to leadership or assign us some duties. Whenever there is a chance for any responsibility to be done, the church does it with much caution because it thinks that in the event that we (widows) are overtaken by desires and remarry or engage in any sexual activity, the church is put in disgrace (FGDs 11).

The findings were in agreement with Onyeocha (2014), who argued that it is not only that widows lost their husbands but that the widowhood state of robbing them of their status and condemns them to the brims of society where they suffer life-threatening forms of discrimination, stigma, and deprivation. While the church appears to be in defense of widows by putting protection measures in place to prevent certain practices perceived as unacceptable, the same church isolates them instead of being accommodative.

According to the results in Table 2 above on the postulate of women who embrace levirate custom experiencing condemnation from the church, only 8 (5.4%) participants were neutral, while almost all, or the majority of 140 (94.6%) of the respondents, were in agreement that the SDA church condemns those widows who are in levirate union relationships. These questionnaire findings were supported by those from the interviews and FGDs, where some of the participants asserted:

We practice levirate custom privately for fear of church condemnation because the church views the practice as an act of polygamy that cannot be accepted in the Christian church that emphasises monogamous marriages through the church procedure where the two must openly wed (FGDs 51).

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

Many of the widows we support have been sent out of their church membership and families because of their decision to embrace Abagusii levirate custom instead of following the church teachings. These widows have no one to help them (Interviewee 23).

The field findings are consistent with Usha (2011), who postulated that in Holland, nearly every Christian community has structures supported through the members' offerings; however, within those structures, church widows are sometimes subjected to various kinds of suffering and mistreatment. However, then, the situation of the widows puts into question the very principles of the Christian message preached by the SDA church. For instance, the parable of the Samaritan is the best scriptural text to consider in this discussion on the condemnation of widows in the SDA church. The Samaritan's attitude and actions to meet the needy person followed the neglect shown by the Levite and a priest, who is religious and church officials (Luke 10:25–37, Matt 22:34–40, Mark 12:28–34). Jesus narrated this parable in reaction to a question posed to him about whom to regard as a neighbour (Luke 10:25). However, in the context of the findings of this study, the question could be: Is it the church that condemns, isolates, and stigmatises the widows, or the levir that accepts and cares for them? Jesus taught zero discrimination, and at the end of the parable, Jesus commanded, "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). This is what the SDA church is challenged to do and entrench in her attitude and regard for widows who opt for levirate relationships.

On the theme of ex-communication from the church, the results in Table 1.2 indicated that none of those who answered the questionnaire disagreed with the thesis that widows who embrace levirate custom experience ex-communication from the church. Only 11 (7.4%) participants were neutral, while the majority of 139 (93.9%) respondents were in agreement that the SDA church excommunicates from the church those widows who are in levirate union relationships. The sentiments in the quantitative findings are fully echoed by those from the FGDs and interviews. For instance, some participants informed me of the following:

Whenever a widow is found to have been remarried through a levirate union, she is excommunicated. In this case, many who cannot withstand ex-communication from the church membership opt to practice it secretly. Those who practice it openly are excommunicated from the church, and a good number of them opt to join other denominations that are less rigid, while others decide to be re-baptised and come back to the SDA church membership (Interviewee 7).

The church is unfair because, in the creation story, man and woman are believed to stay together as a marriage union. As a family life leader, there are many issues brought to me to solve concerning levirate unions. Sometimes I sympathise with the young widows because they are very tender and cannot cope with life alone. It becomes difficult for me to judge them because no law in the Bible or church manual guarantees any judgment. As a church elder, I find myself at a crossroads on recommending them for ex-communication or censuring them (Interviewee 29).

Through the threats and actions of ex-communication of members engaged in levirate unions, the church is losing more members because it does permit their practice within its membership. At the same time, widows who are good church members and wish to remain within the confines of church teachings on levirate custom are tied by the Abagusii culture, which cannot allow them to move from their marital home and be re-married elsewhere, except to accept the custom. This situation puts widows at a crossroads even

though others privately choose to remain in church membership for fear of being excommunicated (Interviewee 17).

The presented data showed widows' hardships in the SDA church in Itumbe Station, South Kenya Conference. The church's rigid stance was seen to frustrate any efforts toward authentic pastoral care for widows. Former friends avoided widows, and others disappeared. Widows in levirate unions are discriminated against and divorced from church membership.

The study further discussed the isolation and marginalisation by the SDA church of widows who engage in levirate marriage. The results in Table 1.2 above indicated that none of those who answered the questionnaire disagreed with the thesis that widows who embrace levirate custom experience excommunication from the church. Only 8 (5.4%) participants were neutral, while the majority, 140 (94.6%) respondents agreed that the SDA church isolates and marginalises those who practice the Abagusii levirate custom.

No, because this practice is considered polygamy, which is not accepted in any Christian church. Those who practice it openly are condemned, isolated, and marginalised from the Christian faith and face censorship, while others are excommunicated from the church and denied rendering services in the church (Interviewee 34).

Anybody found engaging in the levirate union is censured, excommunicated from church services, abandoned, isolated, and even marginalised. Once the person is censured, she or he is not supposed to comment, ask questions, or take the sacraments. A good number of those who have been excommunicated have joined other denominations that are less rigid, leading to the loss of church members instead of gaining members for the Lord's kingdom (FGDs 15).

The findings demonstrated widows' subordination in the SDA church, which makes them feel the loss of personal contact and human association, leaving them with the only alternative to withdraw and become unresponsive to the church and its activities. Nevertheless, this makes them lose a very important aspect of the church's psychosocial widow support system discussed in objective two of this study. However, the profound effect of this is to have a negative appreciation of themselves and the church as a social institution; it deprives them of a faith-based living environment and of a psychosocially encouraging and consoling community ministry and coping mechanism.

Attached to ex-communication is the theme of isolation. The field findings showed that none of the respondents disagreed with the postulate that the church isolates widows in levirate unions; 8 (5.4%) were neutral, and 140 (94.6%) were in agreement with the postulate. This resonated with the qualitative findings, where participants informed:

We are marginalised and isolated in matters of church pastoral ministry and service; every church department is supposed to be allocated three Sabbaths to carry out their programs from morning to evening, but with us widows, we are allocated minimum services, which is not enough for us to put our energies into service for the church. While those who are in levirate union are not even supposed to

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

perform any function in the church even when they are prepared and willing to offer their services (FGDs 14),

Why should we feel neglected and isolated by the church we have always been esteemed and grown up in? We are not needed simply because we have engaged ourselves in levirate customs that give us support that the church could not holistically give. Because of this, nobody in the church cares about our dignity as humans and people born in faith within the SDA church (FGD 55).

The findings revealed that the isolation of widows who are in levirate union comes in different forms, where they are left disengaged in social and church interactions and events. This culminates in excommunication because accepting the Abagusii levirate custom results in stress and a sense of rejection from the church, leaving them with no alternative to growing in the faith. This has profound ramifications, such that the SDA church is considered not for those considered to be "sinners", but rather for the "upright". Such women lose self-esteem, worth, and dignity and find it difficult to mingle with other members of the church. They lose friends in the faith who are also suspicious about the "perceived regard" for their marriage option of levirate union. The field findings are supported by The SDA church in Itumbe Station should welcome widows who have embraced levirate custom and let them participate in all church activities. By so doing, she learns to empower them and help them live independent lives beyond their financial needs. Consequently, widows would be able to concentrate on their ministerial duties in order for them to improve their emotional, physical, and spiritual lives and those of their church membership.

On the theme of the silence of the SDA church on the plight of those who accepted levirate custom, the results in table 1.2 above indicated that none of those who answered the questionnaire disagreed with the thesis that widows who embrace levirate custom experience silence from the church, and none of the participants were neutral. Instead, all 148 respondents (100%) agreed that widows in levirate unions experience or silence indifference from the church; their issues are never part of the church's concern.

Once a church member has customarily opted for a levirate union and is excommunicated from the church membership, the SDA church does not speak of their plight anymore. They are taken as if they never meant anything in the life of the church when they were active members (Interviewee 28).

The church has no plan to involve those who have opted for levirate union. But this practice is in the Holy Scriptures, which the SDA church has committed itself to propagating. By keeping silent, the church does not have any modalities to exploit the potential of these widows, who are now remarried within the home of their deceased husbands (Interviewee 42).

The situation of silence on the plight of widows who opt for whichever way of life is stressed in the study by Chauke (2003), who observed that churches in Zimbabwe take a detached stance on the reality of widows who are supposed to take care of the children left to them by their deceased spouses. Bellamy (2005) also asserted that the silence and inaction from the Christian community that surround widowhood for proper care of themselves and their children is morally wrong and unacceptable. While Bouwers in (Kretzschmar et al. 2009) sustained that if the church remains silent, then it means she is complicit in acts of injustice, abdicating her responsibility to speak for the helpless and uphold their dignity, but when they are neglected, they are not able to suffer within the church or in the larger church membership (Miruka et

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

al., 2015). Kariuki (2018) further adds that the most basic way in which the church involves itself in assisting the orphan and widows is by taking up concrete duties for these groups at a local church—organising church-based initiatives like offering shelters, having support groups, home-based care, and encouraging volunteers to get involved in a natural and practical way that will alleviate pain and suffering. Such church initiatives cover the basic needs of widows and lessen other forms of widow care that are not consistent with church values. In their absence, the church loses any moral and religious authority to denounce any form of widow care (levirate and polygamy).

After analysing the church's position and attitude towards widows, the study sought to establish and discuss whether the SDA church has elaborate widow pastoral care ministries or programs. The responses from the field illustrated in table 1.2 above were worrying, with 110 (74.3%) respondents generally in disagreement that there is an elaborate widow pastoral care ministry or program; 20 (13.5%) were undecided; and a minority consisting of 18 (12.2%) of the respondents were in agreement of the existence of such a program in the SDA church at Itumbe Station, South Kenya Conference. These findings were quite indicting on the side of the church that places emphasis on widows either remarrying or remaining unmarried but does not accept the Abagusii levirate marriage custom. In the absence of such a program, the church does not provide a place where widows can be heard as they express themselves. The findings from the questionnaire are replicated in the interviews and FGDs, where participants had to say the following:

The church does not have any meaningful, elaborate program for widows; even in the SDA church manual, you can find children and youth ministry and women's ministry, but not a widow ministry that is directly charged with widows' affairs. It is, therefore, unfair to condemn any platform that gives widows meaning in their lives. The existing things are just initiatives from individual church groups, initiatives that are not structured and not under the structural organisation of the church's pastoral plan (Interviewee 3).

The absence of a structured pastoral program for widow care is a sign that the SDA church community seems not to consider the issue of needy widows as a problem in the church. If the purpose of widow care is to express compassionate love to the bereaved widows and their deceased family, as is the case in the Holy Scriptures, then it is difficult to understand the position of the church on levirate unions. It is unfair to condemn labour unions. The inability of the church to care for the widows means that the same church should also not overlook the positive aspects of levirate cultural custom as practiced by the Abagusii traditional community, which also confesses the SDA church faith and teachings (FGD 15).

There is a need to have an official nominated committee comprised of widows with unique programs that keep them busy. The widows should chair these programs with a church elder as their adviser and, if possible, be funded by the church and well-wishers (Interviewee 33).

However, another participant had a different opinion. He argued that the Ministry for widow care exists but does not perform well.

In the church tradition, the mandate of the church is to take care of widows and orphans, which is why we have so many orphanages to take care of this. Within these church teachings, the church responds in an individualised manner to them. However, it is also true that this has not performed well (Interviewee 36).

However, the sentiments raised in the field findings were critical. It is paradoxical for the SDA church in Itumbe Station to denounce levirate unions while her pastoral ministry does not have structural widow care systems. Any consistent position should demonstrate what the church is doing to enrich widows that are in its congregation and also have a ministry by the widows themselves for themselves and others in the church. Having a widows-led ministry is able to realistically address the salient issues of the widows, thereby giving a justification for denouncing any practice like levirate unions that, in a practical manner, attends to the situation of widows. In the absence of widow ministry or programs, the church should instead not even rush to condemn levirate unions that provide what the church cannot give to widows.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions: The study concluded that the SDA church in South Kenya Field, Itumbe Station, has made attempts to interpret Biblical teachings on marriage, considering it a permanent, monogamous contract solemnised by the church minister. In the view of the church, any marriage union that does not adhere to these elements is considered no marriage at all. Levirate unions are revered and encouraged in Old Testament theology, but the SDA church, in her teachings, condemns the Abagusii levirate custom, considering it immoral, sinful, and not acceptable by the church. Furthermore, it appears not to have convincing Biblical and pastoral reasons to warrant the condemnation of levirate custom; instead, it has weak arguments against the embracement of Abagusii levirate custom. The church makes biblical claims that are far from the context of the local church community that is entangled between two realities that both look for solutions affecting widows. The SDA church selectively and conveniently applies the Holy Scriptures on marriage to suit her position while leaving out other aspects, biblical texts, and contexts on levirate unions in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This points to the theological inadequacy of those who are charged with the teachings of the church on marriage. The study did not advocate for the abolishment of the SDA church teachings on marriage and Abagusii traditional levirate custom; rather, it argued for the embracement of positive aspects of the custom while denouncing those that do not adhere to the well-being of the Christian widows. Not all about levirate custom is bad.

Recommendations: The church ought to adopt an alternative, suitable approach in her regard to Abagusii levirate custom—an approach that can produce a favourable effect in her encounter with the native Abagusii people concerning levirate union—to avoid any doctrinal and pastoral conflict. In her evangelism activity, the SDA church should become aware not only of addressing the gospel message to individuals and showing how its teachings are contrary to the Abagusii levirate practice but also of the significant aspects found in the levirate practice itself. This will help her understand the importance of levirate marriage as practiced by her own membership.

6.0 REFERENCES

1. Abuya, P. (2002). Women's voices on the practice of *ter* among the Luo of Kenya: A philosophical perspective. *Fabula: Journal of Folktale Studies*, 4(3).
2. Afolayan, F. (2004). *Culture and customs of South Africa*. Greenwood Press.
3. Baloyi, M. E. (2001). *Counselling Christian Shangaans on choosing a marriage partner* (Unpublished master's dissertation). Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education.
4. Baloyi, M. E. (2012). Critical reflection on polygamy in the African Christian context. Paper presented at the Law Conference, University of Limpopo, August 29–September 2, 2011.

5. Bellamy, C. (2005). *The state of the world's children*. UNICEF.
6. Bichang'a, J. M. (2014). *A strategy to increase giving in the South Kenya Conference*.
7. Bradley, R. H. (2007). Parenting in the breach: How parents help children cope with developmentally challenging circumstances. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 7(2), 99–148.
8. Carr, D., & Utz, R. L. (2002). Late-life widowhood in the United States: New directions in theory and research. *Ageing International*, 27(1), 65–88.
9. Cassidy, L., & Barnes, G. D. (2012). Understanding household connectivity and resilience in marginal rural communities through social network analysis in the village of Habu, Botswana. *Ecology and Society*, 17(4).
10. Chauke, C. (2003). *Community participation in the management of cultural heritage: Co-management and participatory management in Zimbabwe* (Unpublished MA dissertation). University of Zimbabwe.
11. Clinton, J. (2008). Resilience and recovery. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 13(3), 213–222.
12. Fasoranti, O. O., & Aruna, J. O. (2007). A cross-cultural comparison of practices relating to widowhood and widow-inheritance among the Igbo and Yoruba in Nigeria. *Journal of World Anthropology: Occasional Papers*, 3(1), 53–72.
13. Feinberg, L. (2009). *I am grieving as fast as I can: How young widows and widowers can cope and heal* (10th reprint). New Horizon Press.
14. Kariuki, D. (2018). *The church's role in community development*.
15. Mbiti, J. S. (2002). *African religions and philosophy*. E.A.E.P.
16. Meyers, C., Craven, T., & Kraemer, R. S. (2000). *Women in scripture: A dictionary of named and unnamed women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books, and the New Testament*. Houghton Mifflin.
17. Mgboo, A. (2014). *Widowhood practice in Ezeagu, Nigeria: The role of the Anglican Church* (Master's thesis). South African Theological Seminary. <https://www.sats.edu.za/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Agabuzu-FinalMiniThesis-Apr-20151.pdf>
18. Miruka, P., Aloo, M., Nathan, J., & Onginjo, M. (2015). The role of the church and the Christian family in widow care. *Sociology and Anthropology*, 3(1), 52–57.
19. Mombo, E., & Joziase, H. (2011). *If you have no voice, just sing! Narratives of women's lives and theological education at St. Paul's University*. Zapf Chancery.
20. McGoldrick, M., & Walsh, F. (2004). A time to mourn: Death and the family life cycle. In F. Walsh & M. McGoldrick (Eds.), *Living beyond loss: Death in the family* (2nd ed., pp. 27–46). W. W. Norton & Company.
21. Muga, E. (1975). *African response to Western Christian religion*. E.A.L.B.
22. Mugenda, O. M., & Mugenda, A. G. (2003). *Research methods: Quantitative and qualitative approaches* (Revised ed.). Acts Press.
23. Mwangi, R. N. (2014). *Psychosocial challenges and adjustment of widows of HIV and AIDS partners: A case study of Mugunda location, Nyeri County, Kenya* (Master's thesis). Catholic University of Eastern Africa.
24. Nkhwashu, G. (2012, July 25). Culture shock for a rich widow. *Daily Sun*, 1–2.

Journal of Philosophy and Religion

25. Ogolla, M. (2014). Levirate unions in both the Bible and African cultures: Convergence and divergence. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(1), 287–292.
26. Onyeocha, A. E. (2014). *The cry of the African widow*. Opanto Productions.
27. Owen, M. (2010). *Widowhood: Invisible women secluded or excluded*. UN Women. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2001/12/women2000-widowhood-invisible-women-secluded-orexcluded>
28. Porter, J. R. (1965). The legal aspects of the concept of “corporate personality” in the Old Testament. *Vetus Testamentum*, 15(3), 361–380.
29. Schwimmer, B. (2003). *Levirate marriage*. <http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/marriage/levirate.html>
30. Shorter, A. (1975). *Church and marriage in Eastern Africa*. Amecea Research Department.
31. Thurston, B. B. (1989). *The widows: A women’s ministry in the early church*. Fortress Press.