

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Bereavement: Festivities during mourning among the Tiv of Benue State, Nigeria**

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Until recently, death used to be a solemn occasion among the Tiv. The Tiv mourning custom of festivities during period of mourning compels the bereaved to provide for sympathisers instead of being provided for. This switch of roles and its supposed implications on bereaves motivated this research. A qualitative case study approach was used for analysis. A total of 125 participants, 84 males and 41 females of varying ages from 16 years and above from 6 Local Government Areas of Benue State responded to in-dept interview guide and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Participants' review was done to confirm the accuracy of perspectives. Findings indicated among others that the Tiv are affected by bereavement on several dimensions of health, but the ability or otherwise to organise festivities today seems to determine bereaves' outcome. This custom seems to be a product of redefinition of values by the elite to display affluence and is ignorantly copied within the society. Its practice has brought untold hardship on the poor but increased the status of the rich. The custom apart from being counter-productive, precludes younger Tiv from appreciating the functional aspects of funerals, thereby leading to distortion in recognition of the needs of bereaves. Education and re-orientation of the people to correct this anomaly is highly necessary.

**Key words:** Tiv, festivities, mourning, bereave, Benue State.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

To understand and assist bereaves, researchers, psychologists and other social scientists have conducted studies on bereavement, grief and mourning. Previous studies (Sanders, 1989; Rubin, 1990; Stroebe, 1991; Brener, 1993; Ukeh, 1997; Casdagli and Gobey, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2003) indicated that bereavement is associated with suffering for many, and with extreme mental and physical health consequences for many. Indeed, death of a significant fellow is traumatic and causes the bereaved to respond with intense physical and psychological distress. Some of the commonly reported effects agreed by most of these researchers are: A shattering of a long-term bond; changes in status and roles; financial hardships and loss of major support.

Other myriad effects resulting from death and observing rites of passage for the deceased include depression, increase in physician consultation and hospitalisation, increases in health compromising behaviours (drug abuse, heavy drinking or smoking) as well as increase in mortality rates.

In order to arrest the devastating effects of death on bereaves, most societies develop conditions that would enable victims of death loss cope favourably. To aid societies in their search to meaningfully determine appropriate mourning practices sensitive to the plight of bereaves, Western theorists (Freud, 1917; Lindemann, 1944; Sullivan, 1956; Bowlby, 1969; Rosenblatt, 1988; Sanders, 1989; Worden, 1991; Rando, 1993; Stroebe

and Schut, 1990, 1997, 2001; Bonanno and Kaltman, 1999) propounded theories over the years and tried to refine them in an attempt to describe more accurately how people grieve and mourn loss, even though each theory holds similar or differing perspectives to one another. For example, Lindemann (1944), Sullivan (1956) and Bowlby (1969) are adherents of "maintaining bonds with the deceased". "Working through grief" is Freud's concept, while "tasks of mourning" is favoured by Worden (1991) and Rando (1993). Rosenblatt (1988) and Sanders (1989) both consider "grief as an emotional role" whereas Stroebe and Schut (1990) and Bonanno and Kaltman (1999) favour "integrative".

The social context in which grief is shaped is of importance to many researchers (Rosenblatt, 1988; Averill and Nunley, 1992). Different cultures specify the "what and how" of grief - the expression of bereaves' thoughts and feelings and behaviours according to Range (2006) in which the society polices grief. She opines that it controls and instructs the bereaved about how to think, feel, and behave. She was of the view that all societies have rules about how the emotions of grief are to be displayed and handled. Doka (2002) study of disenfranchised grief also supports the grief police view. He opined that in order to understand the social aspect of grief, it is important to remember that every society has norms that govern not only behaviour but also affect and cognition. Kauffman (2002) suggests that individuals internalize these grieving rules. In some cultures, for example, those who grieve should not mention the name of the person. Among the Tiv, festivities and a befitting burial are a must do, alongside grief expression. This compulsion may be associated with delayed grief as festivities drain one's ability to work through the grief process. Such coercion, according to Range (2006) is a top-down matter and those who do not conform to the social expectations are labelled aberrant. Since the implied coercion is top-down, it is difficult to change it from down-up.

Prior to 1980s, death was considered shocking, a disaster - especially if the deceased was young and the occasion accorded the rightful solemnity it deserved, while food was not tasted by any grown up person except infants (Moti and Wegh, 2001; Torkula, 2004; Mnda, 2005). Today, festivities during mourning have become the order of the day and the essence of attending funerals seems defeated.

Unlike other social interactions, the general tendency of humans to gather and close ranks to provide support and comfort in their mutual bereavement is not restricted by "invitation only." Generally speaking, anyone who wishes may come. The only compulsion is to do something that shows care and concern for the bereaved. Some persons stay only a short while, express their condolences and leave. Others, usually relatives or friends stay longer, perhaps assisting with the preparation of food (only for children and those on food regime), caring for the

children, helping with funeral arrangements, greeting visitors and doing whatever else needs doing that bereaves cannot do because of their present state. Normally, anything short of such social interaction is inimical to effective psychosocial development of bereaves.

Circumstances are indeed abnormal among the Tiv as bereaves are made to exchange roles with sympathisers. This switch of roles shows blatant disregard for the plight of bereaves and posterity alike. Since bereaves must now cater for large crowds, friends' and colleagues' way of supporting is to provide materials and sometimes loans to enable festivities and a befitting burial to take place. Sons-in-law are taxed huge sums of money and other materials.

Death notification has taken a new breadth as some people must be taxed to afford lavish burials. Torkula (2004) and Mnda (2005) reflected in their study sample letters written to sons-in-law to provide material and financial assistance towards successful expensive burials, accompanied sometimes with threats or intimidation. A typical death notification letter in keeping with the present Tiv festive mourning practice in Torkula (2004) translated version reads thus:

*"Tell Mr. so and so that I am bereaved and that he should come with a coffin in his pocket (monetary equivalent), a goat, and cartoons of beer. Failure to comply with this demand, will not receive our assistance should he get into trouble."*

Some native scholars have unwittingly attributed the change in mourning practices among the Tiv to colonialism and Christianity. However, Feeley-Harnik (1984) and Lawuji (1988) have separately reported in their studies how despite changes brought about by colonization and subsequent political independence, ancestral tradition is being considered to be the ideal guide to action among Sakalavas of Madagascar and Yoruba of Nigeria. Studies on African religions (Anderson, 2000; Magesa, 1997; Mbiti, 1969) have also provided insights into how Christian religion has failed to provide a distinct pattern of mourning and funeral rites from those of African tradition.

In Tiv (being a predominantly poor agrarian society of peasant farmers), bereaves organizing festivities during mourning in purely financial terms is prohibitively expensive for many. Apart from making bereaves to stifle their grief to source for festivities and other necessities or experience disjointed moments of grief and feign happiness, they are also faced with aftermath effects of impoverishment, leading to indebtedness, destitution, prostitution, drug abuse, sale of property and sometimes physical and psychological debilitation or death. These and other unmentioned negative consequences underscore the need for this research.

The purposes of this study are: (1) to highlight the

complex socio-economic and psychological implications of festivities during period of mourning on bereaves' welfare; (2) to provide useful information that will become the vehicle for effecting personal and societal change; and (3) to work together with individuals, groups and institutions to intervene through appropriate legislations, policies and actions.

To enable me achieve those purposes, five research questions and six hypotheses were formulated. These questions include (1) Do many Tiv people prefer the current festivities to the old one? (2) What could be said to be responsible for the change in Tiv mourning practices? (3) How are the Tiv people affected by the change? (4) What efforts are being made to revert to more useful and helpful practices? (5) What should be done in the future?

**H1:** Bereaves are likely to be affected by the death of a significant other on several health dimensions.

**H2:** Exercise of festivities during mourning as "conventional" will likely mar bereaves' bereavement outcome.

**H3:** Rich bereaves are likely to suffer less economically, socially, and emotionally after festivities during mourning than poor bereaves.

**H4:** Bereaves' welfare will be increased significantly where alternative burial exist and reflects personal choice rather than community judgements concerning funeral and body disposition.

**H5:** Many Tiv are likely to be against the materialism of modern funeral and appeal for reforms.

**H6:** Many Tiv are likely to attach self-importance and respect to means and time of death notification.

## METHODOLOGY

### Participants

A purposeful sampling strategy concept based sampling which selects by information rich persons known to experience bereavement is adopted and all Tiv people of Benue state of varying ages could participate if he or she either experienced the death of a significant other or witnessed festivities during the period of mourning as they attend funerals. Other characteristics of participants include sex, occupation, religion, marital status and local government areas. The Tiv people of Benue State share similar characteristics of socio-cultural and religious affinity as well as language. However, family members decide the definition of death and what form of festivity is given emphasis within the funeral differently. At least 6 local government areas were covered.

### Instrument

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guide and an in-dept interview guide are developed to tap responses from bereaves. The encounters between researcher and informants are directed toward understanding the respondents' perspectives in their own words. The guide contains themes relating to effects of bereavement across levels of health, bereavement outcome, role of sympathisers, sources of death information and the existence of care

giving organisations or funeral funds within communities. The questions used in the guide are designed to elicit bereaves' perspectives on those themes. To ascertain the validity of the test instrument, a pilot study was conducted. During the interview, themes were rephrased and probed (Appendix 1) to obtain complete and subtle meanings from participants in a strategy called "member checking". Another strategy employed was the participant language and verbatim account which was reviewed with them after FGD and interview.

### Procedure

In order to conform to ethical principles, the researcher gained prior informed consent from participants (Drisko, 1997). The focus group discussion was held in various Tiv communities. A discussion group was made of 8 to 10 people (male and female). Groups comprised of educated and illiterate people. There were also variations in the age category of each focus group. All members of a group were asked their opinion on themes relating to why they attend funeral, Tiv mourning and change, sources of death notification, as well as sources of finance and caregivers. Each member of the (FGD) was allowed to comment on each question in the guide. There was at least one rural and one urban FGD from selected local government areas (LGAs).

The in depth interview guide was directed to bereaved individuals who had lost a significant other within 3 years. The effort was to ascertain among other themes, the effect bereaves felt on dimensions of health when death news was learnt and their present functioning. To control for bias, the researcher empathise with the participants and have shared the experience as well as speak and write in (Tiv) the native language. It was relatively easy to gain entry into bereaves' lives. The researchers successfully established the trust and rapport necessary to get respondents to feel comfortable in discussing potentially painful topics. Finally, participants' review was done to confirm accuracy of respondents to minimise researcher's bias in interpretation.

### Scoring

The participants' perspectives were categorised. The main aim of categorising data in thematic analysis or hypothesis testing is to reflect the diversity of participant's perspectives but not to 'count' occurrences (frequency). In this research, the major category of statements of interest were already identified.

### Research design and analysis

The primary objective of this research is to develop new understanding on the phenomenon of death, which would describe how Tiv bereaves are affected by festivities during mourning. The design adopted for this study is the qualitative case study design. This is informed by the fact that qualitative research uses data analysis that focus on 'one' phenomenon, which the researcher selects to understand in-depth regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents for a study (Herriot and Firestone, 1983). The case study design here is aimed at testing hypothesis, and the thematic analysis approach is adopted. However, the test of hypotheses in this instance is only meant to confirm a hypothesis or otherwise, not in the strict sense of quantifiable critical levels of confidence employed in quantitative researches. The choice of qualitative research method as the most appropriate for this study is for two obvious reasons. First, as this area is relatively unexplored, quantifiable variables could not yet be known. Second, qualitative investigation is considered ideal for generating thorough and holistic descriptions of complex processes or themes (Reid, 1993).

## RESULTS

### Participants' characteristics

A survey on psychological implications of festivities during mourning period among the Tiv people of Benue State was conducted between July and September, 2005. Six LGAs were covered, comprising 125 participants who responded either to individual interview (in-depth) or FGD. The sample was drawn from both urban and rural areas of the LGAs, 84 males and 41 females ranging from 16 years and above participated. About 76% of the participants indicated been Christians and educated with the least level of primary school. The remaining participants were the older ones (50 years and above), mainly farmers were not educated and did not indicate their religious inclination. This category knew more about Tiv mourning change and could point the forms of change it has undergone. Public servants, students and applicants made up the other occupational ratio aside farmers. About 68% (N = 85) of respondents were from urban areas (towns) while 32% (N = 40) were from rural areas. This was done deliberately because urban residents are most hit by festivities during periods of mourning. Besides the living standards in townships where most things are paid for, such bereaves are expected to satisfy the imposed festive demands of villagers. In all the six LGAs, participants invariably agreed that Tiv mourning practices have changed from what it used to be three decades ago. Some even attempted to articulate the direction of change Tiv mourning is facing today.

### Analysis/interpretation

The analysis started with predetermined themes in the structured interview guide. However, in course of memo writing, three major categories emerged. These are (1) participants' definition of the situation, (2) participants' perspectives and (3) implications. These categories and subcategories were used to answer the research questions but are interdependent and are represented in Table 1. Participants in this study defined death as a situation that is traumatic, demanding and frustrating. With such understanding, one would expect today's Tiv people to have clear roles for bereaves to enact in response to death. In handling the reactions, 94 respondents (75.2%) said they relied on God and time, mostly for relief or comfort in the absence of social support. 84 respondents (68.8%) reported that no assistance in any form was offered by other relations except sons-in-law. On present functioning and new experiences learnt, 101 respondents representing 80.8% of bereaves seemed to be in a confused state, apprehensive of the future without a major support. The state of uncertainty of future support affected bereaves

outcome too.

Participants were asked to report their present functioning with a view to ascertain if they resolved their grief properly. The responses were classified under three possible outcomes.

1. Psychosocial growth;
2. No substantial change and;
3. Adverse change in health or functioning

Those responses that fitted the first outcome indicated functioning as well as before, while the second reflected indifference, and the third, complications (physical and psychological). The last subcategory was used to probe and estimate from participants' words their outcome. It was learnt that while 29.6% (37) of bereaves were determined to go on with life a new way, their expressions were marked with words such as, "I had learnt to grow up"; "I realized I can live" or "life must continue" etc. These statements support psychosocial growth. 75 respondents representing 60% decided not to make changes and live "as if" the deceased was simply away for a moment. This was due to the fact that those bereaves were preoccupied with issues of how they failed or succeeded to defray financial costs incurred for festivities. The elderly were mostly affected by this outcome. The festivities made them fail to accept the fact that the person actually died. The last group 10.4% (13) included those who initiated or increased drinking and or indulged in other risk behaviours likely to cause illness or death. Younger people who lost a source of support unconsciously took to this decision because they could not get it elsewhere and could not continue on their own.

Participants' perspectives were as varied as the respondents on the subcategories. To some, the inability to organise festivities and expensive funeral inevitably led to poor outcome and vice versa. It remains unclear whether this source of outcome was derived from positive grief experience or from a sense of accomplishment for performing festivities. This outcome negates the position of grief theorists (Rando, 1993; Stroebe and Schut, 1990, 1997, 2001; Bonanno and Kaltman, 1999) that bereavement is associated with suffering for many, and with extreme mental and physical health consequences for many.

On attending funeral, several kinds of sympathizers were identified, with only one perceived as genuine. That is, those who come to share in the grief and do everything morally, materially and through activities to care and support the bereaved throughout the mourning period. The respondents confirmed they were rare indeed. The impact of this subcategory is to highlight how Tiv funerals are becoming increasingly loose unlike the closely knitted ones in the past and also to point out how the absence of alternatives to festivities during mourning have placed enormous economic and psychological burden on bereaves. Torkula's (2004) view that the Tiv

**Table 1.** Summary of major categories and subcategories.

Definition of situation	Participants' perspectives	Implications
Reactions to death	Outcome	Individual
Actions to handle effects	Attending funerals	Family or society
Present functioning	Change	For the future
New experiences learnt	Death notice/sources of finance	-

society has become extravagant without corresponding resources to keep the supply line afloat further buttresses the implications of festive burials at both individual and society levels. To validate participants' perspectives, the researcher attended some funerals and observed that regardless of age, status of deceased or type of death, festivities was a necessity and the number of people present was disproportionate.

Seventy-two (72) participants representing 57.6% concurred with the opinion of others that changes in mourning practices brought untold hardship on many families and individuals. They opined that moneys meant for other basic necessities are channelled into funeral ceremonies. Where the money is not available, bereaves must borrow at whatever cost. Despite the consensus on economic hardship brought about by this practice, no effort was made to reverse the trend. Maybe, the most affected are suffering in silence or did not know who to complain to. By and large, this sociological change was viewed with suspicion and 60% of the respondents expressed their dislike for the undue pressure it places on bereaves. The letter, personal messages and radio constitute the common means through which death notice was spread, with the radio reaching the people most. 95 respondents (76%) reported that letters and personal messages were most influential in spreading death news among the Tiv. Preference was expressed for timely personal messages or letters as a sign of respect and importance especially among Matrilineage elderly and in-laws whose financial assistance was needed. When changes of dates were done, they demanded formal notices specifying the new date.

One hundred and two (102) respondents (81.6%) reported rare visits and condolence letters for the poor bereaves, but affirmed that the rich get visitors who come to sign condolence register. Friends, associates and subordinates send piles of condolence letters, monetary and material assistance. This according to them was not only done out of pity or concern but to placate the rich to be favourably disposed to them. It is common for hear as a mark of appreciation, bereaves acknowledging on radio and television dignitaries who attended funerals of their loved ones. Particular reference was made of bereaves they knew who started Livestock farms with leftovers of cattle, goats and sheep donated to them over the loss of a relation. The rich usually have more "friends" than the poor, so it is not a surprise.

On what should be the role of Tiv Traditional Council (TTC) and State government in funerals, 80 respondents (64%) suggested that the TTC should convene a meeting (Ijir Tamen) of 2nd class and 3rd class chiefs as well as elders from all over Tiv land to discuss the issue and find lasting solution. Others suggested the government should assist bereaves through scholarships and micro-credit loans to start life. Yet, others expressed doubt that something positive could be done about it as nobody is forced to observe funerals that way. One would have accepted their contra opinion but many have affirmed the monolithic form festivities have assumed in funerals.

The implications at the family or societal level include destitution occasioned by festivities and absence of social security. When the product of such a system fails to embrace socially accepted ways in the pursuit of goals, the society will be most affected. Another social problem created by existing system is the extinction of social status acquiring opportunities which served as sources of socialisation as external motivators. This may be a likely possible cause for the lack of motivation among Tiv children. There are few or no status holders as role models. What all these implications portend for the future is that the Tiv mourning is undergoing change that is neither planned nor constructive and has high likelihood of leading to social disorganisation. The mere fact that death is a threat to the survival of a people, including the Tiv, their choice to celebrate it with festivities and giving little regard to the bereaved is indicative of misplaced priority.

## Findings

Analysis according to research questions and hypotheses was done and from the analysis some fascinating findings emerged and these are related to the research purposes, questions and hypotheses. Participants' perspectives did not reflect proper resolution of grief and what others could do to ensure it. Rather, outcome was determined along how successful or otherwise festivities were carried out. Those who met societal expectations got status "via hembra ku" (some one has done best funeral). While those who could not do it got publicly shamed "via faityo u iin ku ga" (some one has failed to bury deceased well). It was established that the latter were subjected to gratuitous insults or derision at public

gatherings. This finding relates to research purpose 1, and is corroborated by question 3, as well as confirms hypotheses 2 and 3.

To increase bereaves' understanding of functional aspects of mourning (research purpose 2) participants revealed different categories of sympathisers who use funeral occasions to satisfy personal interest at the expense of the bereaved. The implication is that the welfare of the bereaved is compromised. This research purpose is further corroborated by answers to research question 4 and hypothesis 4. The finding in support of the second purpose of this research is that all funerals today involve festivities, whether the deceased was poor or wealthy, a criminal or noble, young or old, or whether the deceased died sudden or natural. This attitude reflects low socio-economic differentiation.

The third purpose of this research devolves from the second. When bereaves understand the functional purpose of funerals and essential elements, they need alternatives to choose from to guarantee welfare. The argument here is that bereaves' would have a choice, either to struggle hard to raise money to satisfy conventional funeral demands or to become aware of the complex responses bereaves are subjected to during bereavement. By understanding the issues involved in bereavement, we offer ourselves greater opportunity to cope successfully with loss and to use the experience of loss as a means of becoming more fully human (DeSpelder and Strickland, 1999).

Results of analysis also reflected a relationship between research question 1 and hypothesis 5. The findings were that the current mode of mourning was by and large counter-productive to the bereaved. The fact is that instead of addressing the grief problems, it depicts status symbol for those who celebrate death fabulously. In spite of this finding, some respondents were of the view that people should have the freedom to determine what is good for them. However, the argument is that society ought to determine within its cultural structures, behaviours that are or not appropriate in social contexts. More so, there is no freedom where options to the monolithic festive mourning practice are not found. The essential elements of mourning rituals need to be identified by the society to help regulate bereaves' behaviour and shape society's responses to them.

On the causes of change, the focus of research question 2, it was found that Christianity and Tiv elite were culprits. The elite, it was noted, in their bid to try to make an impression, organised festivities at funerals to boost their ego, while illiterates copied this unusual behaviour as monolithic standard for funeral ceremonies. Also, another source of influence worthy of note is the absence of the role fulfilled by former status acquiring activities which funerals have assume today. The insight here is that when certain aspects of a people's culture that facilitate need satisfaction is removed, they must be replaced with suitable ones. Failure to do so might lead

to its satisfaction through inappropriate circumstances. In fact, in the case of this replacement, there is hitherto no empirical evidence to show that the festive practice promote positive bereavement outcome.

Findings related to hypothesis 6 reflect undue importance attached to mode of death notification by family of married girls (matrilineage). Usually, in former status acquiring occasions, they were treated with preferential dignity. Now that funerals have assumed that role, it has also become necessary for them to be treated in official capacity. The basis of this custom remains unknown till date.

## DISCUSSION

This research is interested in determining how the framework of Tiv culture (social role of the bereaved providing festivities during mourning period) facilitate or mar bereaves coping with bereavement at the death of a significant other. The purpose is to make Tiv people reflect on their values, shared realities, collective meanings, needs and goals. It is hoped that by this research, knowledge will be generated and power regained through deliberate actions (advocacy) that nurture, empower and liberate them.

Efforts in this research has linked the extent damaging socio-economic and psychological effect, and the compulsion to combine festivities to the complex and overwhelming experience in response to death of a significant other can be to the bereaved. If this cannot be stopped, then appropriate measures should be taken to cushion the effect imposed by huge expenditure on the part of bereaves. The literature is replete with mourning behaviour of cultures that are very supportive to the bereaved (Wikan, 1988; Rosenblatt, 1988). Reference is also made to the old useful Tiv mourning practices aimed at helping us reassess the costs/benefits of the modern festivities (Torkula, 2004; Asase-Igyo, 2004).

Changes in social systems require better quality of life for people. Change that predisposes people to unavoidable suffering and impoverishment such as festivities and expensive funerals need not exist. Most people who live in modern societies have somewhat more freedom to determine for themselves what behaviour is appropriate in different social contexts. Such freedom and appropriateness of behaviour is not guaranteed in the festivities encouraged during the period of mourning among the Tiv. Some researchers (Brener, 1993; Irion, 1991; Morgan, 1988) opined that rather than being locked in a "conventional funeral" that fails to meet bereaves' needs, people can choose from a wide range of resources that allow them to create or adapt funeral customs from both religious and secular traditions. It is proper to expose Tiv to varying ways of celebrating funeral and allow them to choose from amongst beneficial merit.

The younger Tiv people of between thirty-five years

and below have grown to know the present festive mourning practices. It is possible that they have embraced these festivities as a normal and appropriate behaviour. The psychological paradigm which postulates that humans cannot learn what they have not experienced holds true. Our school system does not offer bereavement education for students even when they lost some of their members. It is reasonable to conclude that comprehensive literature on bereavement and burial customs is lacking and that the younger generations have no access to appropriate socio-emotional grief roles to enact in place of the festivities they have grown up to learn from.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To provide an assessment yardstick, grief was analysed as an emotional role along the dimensions of privileges, restrictions, obligations and entry requirements like any other social role (Averill and Nunley, 1992). This was done to reflect how the Tiv festivities fit into the analysis. For instance, if it is an obligation for the bereaved to do so, the entry requirement ought to specify who is and is not qualified to satisfy the obligation. This is because people are not equal economically. Also, the relevance of festivities in helping the bereaved move beyond grief to deal with the life changes demanded by death of a loved one should be the basis for the obligation. Such relationship has not been established.

The second conclusion drawn from the research is that elites in particular and TTC as well as religious groups have done little in redirecting the course of Tiv mourning practices. As noted by Despelder and Strickland (1999), the ceremonies that a community enacts to mark the passing of one of its members express, through symbol and metaphor, how death is perceived within that particular social group. The manner in which Tiv celebrate death today makes them a death loving people who may create every opportunity to make death occur so that their clandestine needs could be satisfied.

Also, considering the manner every death or funeral is celebrated, it is also plausible to draw the conclusion that the Tiv people are not stratified socially. In stratified societies, the wealthy and those who leave so many legacies in death are buried in dignity as opposed to those who have contributed nothing or little to the growth of society. This is done to motivate others to also serve society so as to merit a befitting burial. A society that encourages every member to feel important without reflection in social mobility and status encourages laziness and/or self-deceit. There is also cause to conclude that the huge expenditure incurred on festivities during mourning is a manifest expression of improvidence. For example, if such moneys can be channelled into a foundation or scholarship fund, it can memorialise the deceased's name and the living could benefit enormously from it.

Finally, the Tiv seem not to be futuristically inclined. For them to be celebrating the dead at the expense of the living points their thinking to total disregard for the future. It is disastrous for a society to be living for the day as if tomorrow does not exist. The backwardness of the Tiv nation may not be far removed from this outlook to life.

It is recommended that the younger generations of the Tiv deserve to be taught informally by parents and formally by teachers and professionals to understand the impact of death and the complex responses of the bereaved. This can be done through death, bereavement and grief education in classroom and experiential programmes designed to help them confront their own mortality. This can enable them to empathise with bereaved and offer them care and support in time of need. Their non-committal attitude to care for bereaves indicates that "You can not offer what you don't have". Also, evidence based information should be offered through seminars and lectures from experts designed to counter the prevailing attitudes surrounding death and mourning as well as those engendered by festivities during mourning capable of affecting them negatively.

If festivities must continue during period of mourning, a short-term remedy is recommended that those who attend funerals should be made to provide for themselves whatever they need and not bother or burden the bereaved. The so-called sympathisers should each, on signing the condolence register donate at least One hundred naira (N100.00) to the bereaved family to supplement financial distress.

Former social status acquiring activities should be reviewed in order to provide appropriate avenues for Tiv people to display their social worth. Here, the task of the TTC is enormous. These revivals will undoubtedly bring about high sense of national pride and become sources of motivation. Alternatively, anyone who affords a car, acquires a title or achieve any feat should call for festivities rather than celebrate death.

The elites on their part should assume social responsibility towards their illiterate brothers and sisters. I charge all of us to shun obscurity and enlighten our society to become a model one for others to emulate. This attitude, I believe would attract more respect and status to the elites than seeking it through exhibition of wealth at funerals. People must be made to learn to live according to their abilities and means. If these recommendations are given the desired attention, the Tiv may solve a multitude of problems with a singular approach. This however, requires the efforts of all and sundry.

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## APPENDIX I

### Focus Group Discussion guide and In-depth Interview guide-bereaves

#### 1. Conceptual framework

- a. Have you experienced death of someone significant in your life? (Who and how)
- b. What reactions/effects can you recount when you heard the death news? (Probe for several dimensions of health)
  - i. Physical
  - ii. Social
  - iii. Psychological
  - iv. Emotional
  - v. Spiritual
- c. How did you, the family/ community and friends tried to help you handle the effects?

#### 2. Bereaves' present functioning

- a. How is your health now? (probe for some dimensions as in 1b above)
- b. What new experience have you learnt from the death and funeral?

#### 3. People who attend funeral

- a. What reasons can you give for attending a funeral?
- b. If a close friend of yours lost a significant other, how will you try to help?
- c. If one of your parents died suddenly, how could your friends be most helpful?
- d. What are your expectations when you attend a funeral?

#### 4. Mourning and change

- a. What forms of change has the Tiv mourning practices undergone that you've noticed? (Probe for causes/effects

on some dimensions, esp. socio-economic) (What is or should be appropriate)

- b. What in your view should be done about festive funerals?
- c. What is your Religion's doctrine concerning mourning rituals?

#### 5. Sources of death information

- a. How did you get notice about the news of Death? (Probe relationship)
- b. Which means of information reaches and influences the people most?
- c. How would you like the message delivered?
- d. Do people usually send condolence messages/ letters in respect to death news?

#### 6. Sources of Finance and caregivers

- a. How did you, others know raise money to organize festival funerals?
- b. Do deceased provide for themselves in death what is spent? (if no, justify spending)
- c. Are there funeral funds in families/communities or care organizations?
- d. How are issues of inheritance, remarriage and custody of children settled?
- e. What should be the role of government and Tiv Traditional council (TTC) in funerals?