Experiences of widowhood and beliefs about the mourning process of the Batswana people

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Objective
- To explore and describe the Batswana widow’s experience of widowhood and the mourning process;
- To explore and describe the Batswana community’s beliefs about widowhood and the mourning process;
- To formulate guidelines for psychiatric nurses in order to facilitate the development of support mechanisms through which the community can be mobilized to assist the widow during widowhood and the mourning process.

Design
A qualitative design was followed with the aim of exploring and describing the Batswana widow’s experience of widowhood and the mourning process as well as the community’s beliefs about widowhood and the mourning process. The study was conducted in the context of the Batswana community in the Mafikeng, Lichtenburg, and Zeerust rural areas of the North West Province of South Africa.

Population and sample
Two populations were used. Population one comprised of Batswana widows within twelve months of widowhood and who resided within the above mentioned areas. Population two comprised of community members made up of close family members, friends and neighbors of the mentioned Batswana widows. A purposive voluntary sampling method was used for both populations. The sample size was determined by means of data saturation.

Method
Permission was obtained from the various chiefs, headmen and councilors. In order to collect data from the widow’s in-depth phenomenological interviews were conducted. Two questions were asked: How does it feel to be a widow? And Tell me about your mourning process. To explore and describe the community members’ beliefs about widowhood and the mourning process data was gathered by means of a semi-structured interview schedule consisting of several questions. A pilot study was conducted to test the applicability of these questions. After completion of each interview field notes were recorded. The audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in accordance with a combination of the technique of content analysis as described by Tesch and Giorgi.

Findings and conclusions
Various main, sub and further categories were found. The conclusion that can be made is that widows seem to blame the community for isolation, discrimination and stigmatization. These experiences contribute to her feelings of bitterness of not being part of the community. The community on the other hand seems to think that they do not isolate the widow in bad faith but that she should understand that it is the Batswana culture and therefore it should be respected. The widow’s bitterness also seems to follow from the fact that she is believed to have bad luck and that she is potentially dangerous to other human lives, animals and crops. This therefore indicates that the widow experiences extreme frustration during widowhood and the mourning process, because of the treatment she gets from the community. There are however groupings of beliefs. There are those that believe that they must comply with customs and rituals and those that do not see a need to do so.

Implications
Guidelines were formulated to facilitate psychiatric nurses to facilitate the development of support mechanisms through which the community can be mobilized to assist the widow during widowhood and the mourning process.