

**BEREAVEMENT AND ITS CHALLENGES AS PERCEIVED BY THE MUPUN OF THE  
JOS PLATEAU STATE NIGERIA**

**By**

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**ABSTRACT**

The research examined the concept of bereavement and its associated issues as understood by the Mupun people of the Jos Plateau. The publication also addressed the Mupun as the populace. An examination of bereavement focused on practices and traditions related to it. The challenges were addressed as follows. (i) Challenges encountered by widows (ii) Challenges encountered by widowers (iii) Challenges of remarriage for both widows and widowers (iv) The necessity of a will. The report finishes with recommendations and suggestions for further research.

**Keywords:** Bereavement, challenges, Mupun, Jos, Nigeria

**Introduction**

Death is inevitable and certain; what remains uncertain is the timing, location, and manner of its occurrence. Although death is universally unwelcome, it is inevitable; so, the most effective strategy is to be adequately prepared for it, akin to preparations for retirement and ageing. Death estranges individuals from their loved ones and induces suffering. Additional terms related to bereavement include grief, grieving, sorrow, sadness, demise, death, conclusion, and loss. Grief is the response to loss, particularly when an individual with whom a link or affection was established has died. Occasionally, the death of a spouse, child, or family member creates a void in the lives of the surviving individuals. This study examines the perspective of the Mupun people of the Jos Plateau towards sorrow and death.

**Who Are The Mupun?**

The Mupun are found on the eastern edge of the Jos Plateau, which is approximately located in the center of Nigeria. The Mupun, like many other ethnic groups. The eastern part of the Jos Plateau speaks Chadic language of which many are closely related that they are mutually intelligible. Chadic is a sub-family of the Afro, Asiatic family group of languages. The Chadic speaking neighbours of the Mupun include the Ngas, Mwagavul, Mship, Chakfem, Fier, Tambes and Gung. The Mupun are known by specific and genral terms given them as nicknames by their neibours. The people are known as Mupun, which their land is known as Lankan or Mupun. A closer look at how they got these two names is interesting. The Name Mupun was a war term, initially by the Mwaghavul, to connote the Jiblik people, their closest neighbors to the south east. It was later used loosely to refer to all the people and communities comprising the traditional villages of what became Lankan district in the colonial period. Mupun as term is composed of two phrases: Mu, meaning 'We' and Pun, meaning 'Chase out of hiding' or 'uncover their hiding place' is a term used by hunters when a game is chased out of its hiding place or abode. A tradition of the Jiblik people has it that, during one of their wars with the Mwaghavul and Shouted 'Mupun Mo'. This indicated that they had discovered their hiding place and intended to flushed them out. The term Mupun could also denote 'the thing of the father' or 'that which belongs to the father' today it is the most popular name the people use for themselves for purpose of self and national identification. It is more readily accepted than 'Lankan'.

Lankan on the other hand is the Ngas term for groundnut (peanuts), given to the Mupun as a nickname in circumstances quite different from the one above. Some Ngas used to travel to Mupun in search of food during difficult years and they would return home with aenough maize, cocoa-yam, sorghum and groundnuts because of the peoples generosity. This gave birth to the met-we-ba-ter myth. The Ngas decided to nickname their Mupun neighbors by using a term which in his/her language means groundnut, they will invite passer-by to come and help in the harvest with helpers keeping their pickings separately in the large heaps. At the end of the day each helper was rewarded with at least a third of their pickings. In the case of a King, up to have or even more could be given back a reward.

Secondly there is a Mupun saying which state that Kom a rep, rep a kom, meaning groundnut is a girl, girl is a groundnut, since everyone can eat groundnut, but nobody knows what is inside the pod until the shell is broken, one can access the quality of the seed inside the pod. The same is applicable to the character of a girl, any man can approach her and try his luck, but how she looks tells us nothing about her character. Yet everybody is free to approach any maiden he wants, so how can the Mupun stop anybody from eating their groundnut?. A woman is groundnut, the only way to find out whether she is beautiful inside as she is outside is to 'split her open like the groundnut', that it is, access her character or marry her. This proverb explains their generosity especially with groundnuts. However the term Mupun as a language and as an ethnic identification for the people will remain alive for as long as the language is spoken.

### **Mupun Perspective of Bereavement (Tok-ma'ap)**

The Mupun people of the Jos Plateau State, regards the period a love one dies '**Mu'ut**' to the period of burial as bereavement (**Ma'ap**). Being an agrarian society within the period of bereavement which usually last for several days particularly if is an adult or an old person. During the seven days period, nobody within the community is expected to engage in farming activity of any kind, people within the community usually will be seen bringing food and drinks to the deceased family compound. Throughout the period of the seven days no any member of the family is expected to cook, in fact no smoke should be seen in that family compound, the believe is that the deceased family are weak and sober and should not be allow to do anything by themselves. <sup>7</sup> During the seven days of the mourning it is the duty of the community to bring food and drinks from their various homes: morning, afternoon and evening for the people voluntarily as the tradition of the Mupun people. But today this culture and tradition is gradually dying, giving way to modernization thereby becoming a burden to the deceased family. The pre-colonial Mupun people do not keep the deaths for a day before burial, they buried the dead bodies of their love ones immediately, the culture of keeping the corps in mortuary for some days before the burial for adequate preparations is not a Mupun culture but as a result of modernization.

The Mupun people in the colonial period, perceived bereavement Ma'ap based on the age of the deceased. If a child dies 'Mu'ut' the Mupun liken that death as 'God who gives and has

decided to take it back' or that just "like water that poured after fetching. That tomorrow another one can be fetched replace that" therefore the encouragement during such bereavement 'Ma'ap' to the deceased family is usually God knows all he will bring another one at the right time, be strong, must people do not eat during such bereavement and no celebration. Whereas, if is an adult or young person the news of such death usually come as a shock and surprise. Women and children are not usually informed of such death on time, the first person to receive such news is usually the closest person to the deceased or an elderly person in the family. They will in turned know how to break such news to women and children. The Mupun people have this believe that if a man dies you do not tell people on time and you don't cry immediately because some people when they die prematurely they can decide to come back particularly if people have not cry. But if people have cried that his death then, even if he wants to come back he will not see because of the tears people have cried. The period of such bereavement of a young man or woman is still seven days with no celebration and jubilation, believing that they die in their prime. During bereavement Ma'apof a young people are usually seen weeping and crying if they most eat and drink they do that soberly.

In the same vain, the Mupun people before colonialism were said to have longidivity age ranges between 100-120 years before they die 'Mu'ut', some died in their sleep. Those within this range once they die be it a man or a woman such bereavement 'Ma'ap' is usually characterize with celebration and jubilation believing that is a celebration of life. Different traditional dancing groups dance one after the other throughout the bereavement which is usually seven days. On the day of the burial, some people who specialized in imitation are usually seen imitating the deceased as a way of entertainment signifying that his/her spirit is still around, with the people. If the family of the deceased are rich they will slaughter a big "muturu" for the celebration but if the family do not have the resources they could make do with goat a very special one for the bereavement, for the people to eat the meat. In preparing such meat they do not cook it with salt the aim is for people to taste it small small and the meat is not meant to be sweet if not those that are said to be witch will used that avenue to be killing people in order to be eating meat always. The pre-colonial Mupun people normally bury women in their parents' house, if they are about to die or very sick her parents will request to bring her home so that if

she eventually die the parents will be the one to bury her. But such culture no longer exists with the coming of Christianity.

The Mupun people, the perceived bereavement ‘Ma’ap’ as a moment that comes with mix-reaction and shock for both the deceased family and the people around the community be it a child, adult or even an old person because of the vacuum created as a result of the death and the fear of not seeing again thereby making bereavement a moment of sober reflection.

### **The Challenges of Bereavement Ma’ap**

There are so many challenges that comes’ with every bereavement Ma’ap as the Mupun will call it, in trying to respond to the death of a love one. Although, both widows and widowers face various challenges, from the family and society is more favorably disposed towards widowers than widows so they face so many challenges. The following are some of the challenges Mupun **widows** are faced with:

- i. Maltreatment on the part of her in-laws
- ii. Loneliness. No mature understanding person among the children in situations that they are not grownups. <sup>13</sup>
- iii. Most times familiar people disappeared and they do not show up again.
- iv. Widows also face physical, social and emotional insecurity. The man that was not value when alive will suddenly be appreciated for the little support he was making.
- v. Economic challenges which usually lead to poverty in most home and the society as a whole.

In an interview with an old widow, she also attributed some of the challenges they faced as widows to the enemy Satan who uses a combination of these challenges to pressurize must of them to re-marry even when they are emotionally not ready, while some join bad friends just to make ends meet. For more details on the challenges that widows go through in today society is the clear example of a poor widow in holy bible found in the book of 2 Kings.

On the other hand, there are challenges facing **widowers** also. Even though not much is said about widowers in the Holy Scripture because in most cases after a year or two must men re-marry. Some men have married after six month after the death of their wife but that does not

mean that widowers do not face challenges. Some challenges facing the Mupun widowers are as follows

- i. Widowers also feel lonely after the death of their wife especially if they were living well.
- ii. Widowers also face challenges of managing the home front especially if the children are much younger.
- iii. Challenges face by relations, trying to arrange another marriage for their widowed brother/son to take care of the children.
- iv. Challenges face from friends, church and even the community are also found of recommending some widows to the widower for him to consider for re-marriage which is usually a challenge to man.
- v. Some senior girls an even some widows see him as an opportunity to cash in by presenting themselves for marriage. All these challenges and others are issues that the Mupun widowers face whenever their wife dies.

The Bible also gave us an example of Judah when he lost his wife Tamar in the book of Genesis chapter 38:12-23.

There are also challenges that both widows and widowers face after the death of their **Spouse**, The greater challenge is the challenge of **remarriage** for widows and widowers. Biblically, death terminates marriage between the death and the living Spouse. But remarriage poses big challenges. Levirate marriage was preached amongst the Jews and some African tribes practice. Although the widow or widower has the Biblical right to remarry who they marry is the challenges.

Among the Mupun it is culturally alright to remarry if one's spouse dies but as to which time to remarry after the death is not specify which is also a problem on its own, as it regards the reaction from the society and also from one's in-laws. The following are some of the problems or challenges the Mupun associated with the question of remarriage from the part of the widows or widowers:

- i. To the widowers, remarriage it has financial burden for the wedding expenses. The cost is mostly on the widower's shoulder to bear, to him is an additional cost which is a challenge especially in today's economy.
- ii. The Mupun people has this fear of what kills the spouse might also lead to his/her death eventually if he/she remarry thereby poses a challenge to the question of remarriage amongst the Mupun people.
- iii. The fear of whether the spouse will take care of his/her children is usually a challenge.
- iv. The challenge on how to settle disagreement between the children and widows by the widowers if they remarry and he initially has grown up children who are still under his control is a great challenge for him to find a common ground for his new wife and his children.
- v. Sometimes the widow is now the new wife she will not want the widower who is now her husband to assist his children.

Another challenge is the need to have a will.

Sometimes what normally prolongs bereavement after death particularly for a wife after the death of her husband is insecurity, because she is left unprotected from greedy relatives of her deceased husband. Such in-laws dispossess the wife of all that belongs to her late husband especially if he had indicated they are his next of kin. At times they forcefully takeaway the children from the mother under the pretext they will care for them but in reality they are using them to gain access to the asserts their brother has left behind. Often after using up what they have collected, some abandon the children, and the mother has to fend them from the scratch. A will is a legal document in which an individual known as 'testator' declares he/she would want his/her asserts to share when he/she dies. The individual designated to receive any of the property of the testator is called a 'beneficiary'.

The pre-colonial Mupun people do not have will since will writing is a recent development, is a product of western culture, which is also the same with modernity. What the Mupun man use as will in the pre-colonial era, since his society was an agrarian setting. Their resources and level wealth was based on the number of livestock and farmland an individual has. Therefore that is what he will share inform of will that we know today. Since the pre-colonial

Mupun ma could become as old as 120 years old, and all his male children could get married before he dies, whenever his male child get to the age of marriage a piece of land is given to him as his share of inheritance and the livestock used for the marriage tradition become his own share but not will per say.

Land was shared amongst male children that married, it is not shared equally, the elder son usually takes the bigger portion of the farm land. Women were also given part of the farmland to cultivate as part of their own inheritance, but strictly to only women that married within the community, and whenever she dies her family will collect back that land. Because Mupun people do not share inheritance with women. Mupun people do not really have a written will traditionally, but with the coming of modernization or westernization they have embrace it because the advantages of a will cannot be over emphasize.

In conclusion, it has been observed from the research that bereavement comes with its challenges as perceive amongst the Mupun of the Jos Plateau State Nigeria. An attempt was made to identify the Mupunpeople, their perspective of bereavement, challenges associated with this phenomenon was extensively discussed.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of this research informed the following recommendations:

- i. The mass media, non-governmental organizations and ministry of women affairs should embark on enlightenment campaigns for widows in particular and women in general.
- ii. Government should pursue with vigor the issue of education for the girl child and Adult Literacy classes for women.
- iii. Government should abolish all repugnant customary laws.
- iv. Religious leader should emphasize and abide by the provisions of the holy books regarding the rights of widows and orphans.
- v. Spouses should be encouraged to register their marriage with judicial institutions.



- vi. Spouses, in writing will, they should seek legal counsel and a good will should eliminate possible confusion or conflict as to who get what, provide for immediate family and relatives where possible especially aged parents.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

This study recommends a further research to focus on a comparative analysis of challenges faced by windows and widowers.

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