

**GRIEF EXPERIENCE OF NIGERIAN FAMILIES IN THE
FACE OF THE SUDDEN DEATH OF A LOVED ONE**

BY

OWOYEMI RAJI RUQAYAT

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International Islamic University Malaysia**

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ABSTRACT

Sudden death of a loved one is a distressing life event for family members causing significant challenges which often affects their grieving experiences. This phenomenological qualitative study explored the grief experience and reactions of Nigeria Muslim and Christian families in the face of a sudden death of a loved one. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the religious and cultural specific influences of bereaved family members on their grieving process. This study consists of eight adult participants living in Nigeria aged between 20 and 60. Data were collected using semi structured interview with participants who have experienced the sudden death of a loved one, how they were affected after the death, the impact of their cultural and religious beliefs and practices in coping with the death and their specific grief reactions in reacting to sudden unexpected death. Using a thematic analysis, common themes reflecting the grief experiences resulted into nine major themes; loss of connection, religious practice and beliefs, support systems, financial challenge, circumstance of the death, unforgettable experience, family conflict, meaning making and counseling. Accordingly, from some of the themes found, the Christian and Muslim family found religion as a beneficial coping ways in helping them adapt to their losses through meaning making, and support systems. However, other than the positive impact of religion, the circumstance of the death, financial challenge, family conflicts, unforgettable experiences and loss of connection was a major challenge for the bereaved family members. The study results provide the need for developing and implementing spiritual care and counseling for bereaved.

ملخص البحث

إن الموت المفاجئ لأحد الأحبة يمثل حدثاً مؤلماً في حياة أفراد الأسرة مما يسبب فجوة كبيرة وغالباً ما تؤثر على عواطف المصاب بفقد عزيزه. تكتشف هذه الدراسة النوعية الظواهرية تجربة الحزن وارتكاسات العائلات النيجيرية المسلمة والمسيحية على سواء بعد الموت المفاجئ لأحد أفراد أسرته. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استكشاف التأثيرات الدينية والثقافية المحددة لأفراد أسرة المرحوم خلال مدة أحزانهم. تتألف هذه الدراسة من ثمانية مشاركين بالغين يعيشون في نيجيريا وتتراوح أعمارهم بين ٢٠ و ٦٠ عاماً. وتم جمع البيانات باستخدام مقابلة شبه مشكّلة مع مشاركين عانوا مرارة فقد أحد أحبائهم للموت المفاجئ، وكيف تأثروا به بعد الوفاة، ومدى تأثير ثقافتهم ومعتقداتهم وممارساتهم الدينية في التعامل مع الموت وانتكاساتهم الخاصة على الموت المفاجئ. باستخدام التحليل الموضوعي، وتشكل من الموضوع الرئيسي تسعة مواضيع رئيسية تعكس تجارب الحزن والنغمة الحزينة التي تتمثل في فقدان الاتصال، والممارسات والمعتقدات الدينية، وأنظمة الدعم، والتحديات المالية، وحوادث الموت، والتجربة التي لا تُنسى، والصراع العائلي، وصنع المعنى والاستشارة. وبناءً على هذه المواضيع المقترحة، وجدت الأسرة المسيحية والمسلمة أن الدين وسيلة مفيدة للتكيف مع موت فقيدهم من خلال صنع المعنى وأنظمة الدعم. وعلى الرغم من التأثير الإيجابي للدين، كانت ظروف الموت والتحديات المالية والصراعات العائلية والتجارب التي لا تُنسى وفقدان الاتصال تحدياً كبيراً لأفراد الأسرة المكلمة. وقد توصلت الدراسة إلى أهم النتائج وهي ضرورة تطوير وتنفيذ الرعاية والإرشادات الروحية للمصابين بموت عزيزهم.

APPROVAL PAGE

The thesis of Owoyemi Raji Ruqayat has been approved by the following:

Haniza Rais
Supervisor

Ismail Sheikh Ahmad
Chairman

Siti Kholijah Kassim
Internal Examiner

Ku Suhaila Ku Johari
External Examiner

Mohd. Said Nurumal
Chairperson

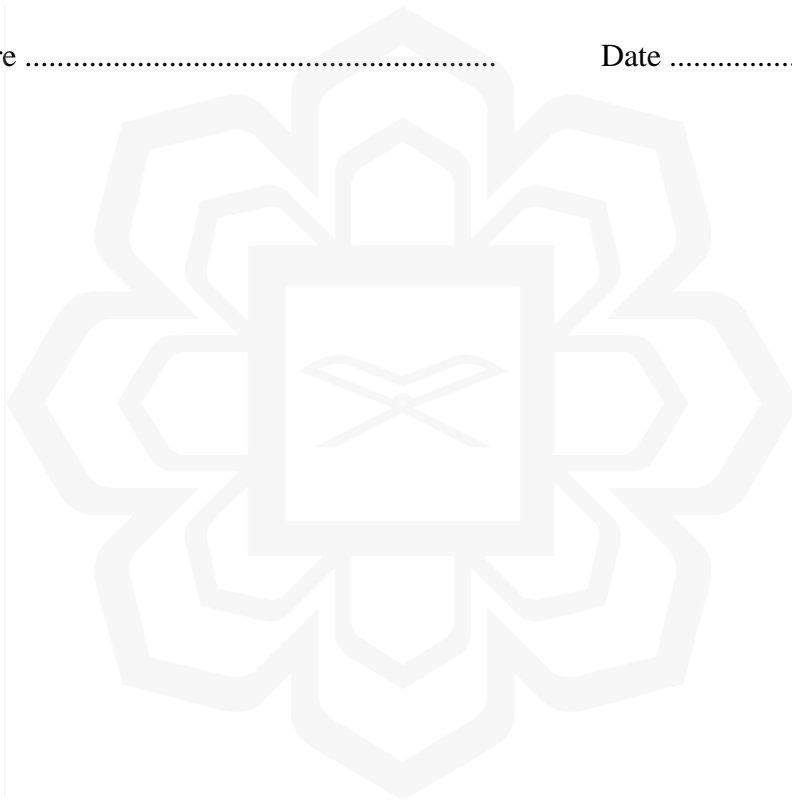
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sudden death can happen at any stage of the life cycle, and is generally perceived as a traumatic experience that evokes different reactions (WHO 2021). Medically, it is defined as death that is not preceded by significant symptoms. The sudden death of a loved one for many individuals constitutes a life-altering experience, as living without the deceased becomes difficult. While some are able to adjust and adapt within a relatively short period, others struggle to cope with the profound disruption caused by such loss (Jorda & Garcia 2018).

Due to the sudden death, families develop grief experiences such as feeling hurt, shock, denial, fear and guilt. Some of these grief reactions can result in negative health outcomes which include sleep disruption, anxiety, poor communication, depression, poor immune function and increase in high blood pressure. The ways individual react to sudden death are significantly influenced by their religious belief, cultural group and ethnicity. Brinkmann (2019) observed that overt expressions of crying, fear and anger are common in most part of the world, except for some Western cultural groups. However, customs vary across cultures and evolve over time, although many core behaviours remain constant. In Nigeria, the concept of death is greatly influenced by traditional religion (Ogunsola, 2019). Wearing black clothing is one practice commonly observed in many countries, though alternative forms of mourning attire also exist (Ajayi & Akpan-Idiok, 2018). Those most affected by the loss of a loved one often observe a period of grieving, marked by withdrawal from social events and quiet, and respectful behaviour. People may also follow certain religious traditions during such periods.

Counselling has generally been recognized as an effective form of support for individuals experiencing emotional difficulties following the sudden death of a loved one, particularly when they are unable to cope or to re-engage in meaningful activities that might help them adjust to the loss (Stroebe, Schut, & Boerner, 2017).

This chapter provides an overview of this study that attempts to explore the grief experiences of the Nigerian Muslim and Christian families in the face of the sudden death of a loved one. The research seeks to examine the grief coping strategies employed by families within the same Nigerian community, considering their different cultural and religious beliefs.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Sudden death is described as a natural unexpected death that may occur across all genders worldwide, and can be a shocking family experiences. Sudden death could be caused by cardiovascular arrest, stroke, accidents or other medical conditions, leaving the bereaved families, friends and relatives to grief after the death of their loved one. A sudden death in the family represents a great psychological threat that can cause significant disruption (Flahault et al.2018). Grief is the experience that comes after the death of a loved one, and is often expressed through a range of spiritual, emotional, psychological, and social responses (Rando 1984).

Sudden death and grief cannot be discussed without considering both past and present studies, as these provide essential insights into their psychological and social dimensions (Rosenblat, 2017). Research have shown that more than 300,000 death cases occur per year within the United States, while in England and Europe, an estimated 25–30% of deaths each year are classified as sudden (Doughty and Hoskins 2011, p25: Muller & Thompson 2003). Another study in the United States reported that sudden death accounts for more than 90% of death cases, with approximately 60% of cases occurring worldwide (Scherer & Kreider, 2019). Grief and loss across different religions and populations have been widely examined by researchers in the United States (B.R. Williams, Baker, Allman, & Roseman 2007).

Nigeria is a country marked by its religious diversity rooted in deep cultural practices. The grief experience of family members following the sudden death of a loved one reflects a complex intersection of emotional, social and spiritual challenges. Grief is not a personal or emotional response to death but also a culturally and theologically framed process for both the Muslim and Christian families, the two dominant religious groups in Nigeria. The way grief is expressed, managed and supported differs significantly across the two religions despite the shared human experience of loss. (Zajaz & Boyatzis 2020). For the Muslims, death is seen as a decree of Allah, with burial occurring within 24 hours (Bahadur 2020). This could cause tension particularly in cases where the sudden death offers little time for psychological preparation. For the Christians, it depends on the denomination. Some may extend burial or mourning rituals, including wakes and memorial services. But, when death is sudden, families may struggle with different questions of divine will, justice and the purpose of suffering.

Furthermore, the grief reactions, either long term or short term for both religions are influenced by the religious teachings about death, societal expectations, and the available support. As religious beliefs enhance comfort and structure during bereavement, it also may constrain the open expression of grief due to the belief of its divine guidance and strength associated to death.

Statistical data on sudden death within families remains limited (Rotimi, Fatusi & Odesanmi 2004; Ogunlade, 2011). Many families are left to navigate their loss with minimal professional support, such as counseling. In many parts of Nigeria, grief counseling services are limited, as it is associated with the stigma surrounding mental health. In the absence of professional grief counseling, families tend to experience prolonged grief, unresolved grief resulting in psychological distress. This gap calls for understanding the religiously shaped grief experience of Nigerian families. Exploring how the Muslim and Christian families respond to sudden death provides insight into the available support systems and the role of cultural and religious interventions in coping with bereavement.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Sudden death can be caused either by accidents, unexpected illness or violence, arising to deep traumatic experience for the families, leaving them with a lasting emotional, psychological and social effects. Many scholarly works have been carried out on sudden death, the experience of death and loss in relation to grief and the grieving process in general. In the Western nations, study revealed that 80% of individuals without coronary artery disease or other illnesses die suddenly and without prior warning (Kwok, Lee & Lau 2003; B. R Williams, Baker, Allman, & Roseman, 2007). This is common among adults and young adults in the same population. The world Health organization defined sudden death to be death occurring from abrupt changes in previous clinical status within 24 hours (WHO report of a study group). Industrialized society records high incidence of sudden death annually, especially in Europe and United States depending on the term and definition used (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). the annual incidence of sudden death is reported at 145 per 100,000 people (Toyoshima, Hayashi, Tinabe, Miyanih 1996).

The grieving process for bereaved is highly influenced by religious belief — particularly Islam and Christianity as the dominant practices in the context of Nigeria—as well as by cultural traditions and community expectations. Bereaved families are often faced with different challenges when death happens suddenly, despite the role religion play as a coping mechanism. Muslims interpret sudden death within the framework of divine decree (Qadar), submission to the will of Allah and accepting the loss with patient, following with a quick burial within 24 hours of the death in accordance with the religious obligations and cultural norms (Tiliouine, 2014). In contrast, the Christian families may delay the burial and engage in elaborate mourning rites, including wake-keeping, memorials and formal church services as a way of maintaining connection with the deceased (O'Rourke, 2019). Despite the numbers of sudden death in Nigeria, associated with different factors such as accidents, poisoning, insurgencies, and medical health conditions, scholarly understanding on how different families from different religion experience and cope with grief remains limited. Most of the existing literature on grief are tailored to the western origin. This creates a gap in understanding and addressing the culturally

specific grief reactions, and the challenges grieving families face in dealing with the sudden death of a loved one.

Therefore, this study aims to explore and document the shared grief experiences of the bereaved Muslims and Christian families in Nigeria, and to understand how they are affected by the sudden deaths emotionally, spiritually and socially. This will help to improve the development of culturally grief interventions, mental healthcare and religious support system.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the grief experiences shared by the bereaved Nigerian families of different religions (Islam and Christianity) following the death of loved ones.
2. To explore the effects of sudden loss on the Nigerian family members after the death of a loved one.
3. To investigate the culturally specific grief responses of family members (from the Muslim and Christian background) in Nigeria to the sudden loss of their loved ones.

1.4 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study is to explore sudden death responses among the Nigerian Muslim and Christian family member following the death of a loved on. The study is expected to present the grief process and how the surviving family members construct meaning after the death of a loved one. The study shall provide answers to the following research questions.

1. What grief experiences are shared by the bereaved Nigerian families of different religion (Islam and Christianity)?

2. How are family members (Christian and Muslim) affected by the sudden loss of a family member?
3. What are the cultural-specific grief responses of Nigerian family members (with Muslims and Christian background) in reaction to the sudden loss of a loved one?

1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

Unlike several studies on sudden death and grief conducted in the Western world, there is the need for studies on sudden death in families and the grief experiences of the Nigeria families specially among Muslims and Christians, the country's two major religious groups. Religion significantly influences how families grieve and cope with loss, in addition to family relationships (Doughty, 2009; Niemeyer, 2004). This study seeks to address the gap in existing knowledge by examining grief and loss among Nigerian Christian and Muslim families who have experienced sudden loss. The findings of this study contribute valuable insights into how individuals create meaning to their lives after the death of a loved one in their family. Furthermore, the study will extend existing literature by providing culturally and religiously grounded descriptions of grief practices, thereby enriching cross-cultural understandings of bereavement. Finally, the findings from this study shall fill the lacuna about sudden death among the Nigeria Muslim and Christian family. It is to be noted that lack of studies on this topic may partly explain the limited progress in providing adequate support to bereaved Nigerian families (Hays & Hendrix, 2008).

1.5.2 Contribution to Practice

This study maybe be beneficial to the teachers, family or school counselors and parents as the findings detail the different reactions of sudden death and grief among the Nigeria Muslim and Christian families. As this study explores sudden death and the grief experience of family members after the death of a loved one, it helps in

providing a better understanding on the grief process among the two religious groups. Unlike the abundant literature on grief and death, this study will help provide insights to the family grieving shaped by religious-specific understandings. Finally, this study will help service providers supporting bereaved families on how they could help ease the process of helping with better understanding of their specific cultural coping mechanism during grief process.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

The limitations of this study lie in the reliance on the responses provided by the Muslim or Christian participants on their experience and understanding of sudden death and grieving in the family. Variations in religious and cultural backgrounds may influence participants' coping processes, and grief experiences are likely to be unique to each individual and family context. Furthermore, this study does not account for the level of religiosity among participants, which may also shape their grieving experiences. (To be refined later once the study is completed)

1.7 DELIMITATION

The scope of this study was delimited to participants from two families: one Muslim and one Christian, with members aged between 20 and 60 who had experienced the sudden death of a family member. The study is therefore relevant to those families who shared grief experiences of sudden losses of a family member in similar situations. While the study provides descriptive accounts of grief experiences, the data are not intended for comparative analysis.

1.8 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Certain key terms carry specific meanings within the context of this study. To ensure clarity and focus, the following definitions are provided to guide the linguistic and conceptual understanding of the terminology used.

1.8.1 Sudden Death

The term sudden death has no universal definition, and the time ranging from 1 to 48 hours have been used in different countries. The World Health Organization (2021) defines sudden death as a natural death occurring within six hours of the onset of symptoms in an apparently healthy individual or in one whose illness is not considered severe enough to predict a fatal outcome. Sudden death medically is referred to those death that are not preceded by significant symptoms, and can happen to healthy individuals from newborn to adults. In this study, sudden death specifically refers to the death of a family member that happened unexpectedly and abruptly that other family members have very limited time to prepare for the loss. The term sudden generally denotes something happening unexpectedly, marked by abruptness, or occurring within a short span of time.

1.8.2 Grief

Grief is defined as a personal experience of a person who has lost a loved one to death (Worden 2009). Grief can also be defined as the intense emotional suffering a person endures caused by other loss (Papa, Lancaster, & Kahler, 2014). In this study, refers to the psychological and emotional responses of family members to the sudden death of a loved one. It encompasses the personal experiences of bereaved individuals as they cope with the impact of sudden loss.

1.8.3 Grief reaction

Grief reactions can be defined as a complex somatic and psychological symptoms associated with extreme sorrow or loss, specifically from the death of a loved one. Such reactions may include sadness, guilt, shock, anxiety, sleep disturbances, and difficulties in social interaction (Worden, 2018). These responses can sometimes develop into maladaptive conditions or inappropriate coping behaviours, but they may also manifest as typical expressions of mourning, such as sobbing or reminiscing about the deceased (Mosby 2016). In this study, grief reaction can refer to as feelings of shock, sadness, denial, anger, yearning and uncertainty experienced by bereaved family members following the sudden loss of a loved one.

1.8.4 Muslim

A Muslim is defined as a follower of Islam or a person who professes Islamic religious belief, accepting the oneness of Allah (Webster, 2019). They are guided by the teachings and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh) and the consensus of the Ulamaahs. The study focuses on selected bereaved Muslim family members in Nigeria who met the inclusion criteria outlined in the research methodology.

1.8.5 Christian

A Christian is a person who professes belief in the teachings of Jesus Christ (Webster 2019). The term derives from Jesus Christ, based on the Bible as sacred scriptures and professed by Eastern, Roman Catholic and Protestant bodies. The study focuses on chosen bereaved Christian family members in Nigeria who met the inclusion criteria outlined in the research methodology.

1.8.6 Bereaved Family Members

In this study, family is defined as a social system comprising a collective body of people who live in one house at the time of the death and related to each other either by birth, by adoption or by marriage, or similar form of long term relationship. In this study, bereaved family members refer to close or immediate member of the family such a mother, father, spouse, children, or siblings who are related directly to the deceased.

1.8.7 Phenomenological enquiry

A phenomenological study is a descriptive study that explores the experience of people on a particular event and how they sense it (Allchin 2006). A phenomenological study identifies and clarifies certain characteristics of peoples' experience. The perceptions and the meaning ascribed to an experience influence how people make sense of the world in a phenomenon. In the researcher's attempt to understand the respondents personal meaning of sudden death in families and their different reactions to grief, this study employed a social phenomenological approach as its theoretical basis (Allchin, 2006).

1.9 ASSUMPTIONS

Many families experience challenges of sudden death and grief across religion, culture and ethnicity. Empirical studies have reported feelings of isolation, depression, loss of connection and intimacy in general following the death of a family member (Rando 1993). This study extends this line of inquiry by exploring such challenges among Nigerian Muslim and Christian families.

1.10 AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMPLETE DOCUMENT

This thesis is organized into five chapters, which are outlined as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter presents the background and context of the research problem, outlines the purpose of the study, and states the research questions. It also discusses the significance of the study, its underlying assumptions, and its limitations. In addition, an overview of the literature review and the research methodology is provided.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter reviews the existing literature on sudden death and grief are presented, with particular attention to grief reactions and their implications for family counseling. It traces the historical development of scholarly work on grief and loss in families, highlighting both foundational and contemporary studies. This review examines research on sudden death and family grief to show their impact on theory development and their relevance to family counseling. The chapter concludes by synthesizing the concepts and theoretical perspectives that inform the foundation of this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter outlines the study's methodology and the family counseling theories that inform it. A phenomenological approach within the qualitative paradigm is used to explore sudden death and grief reactions through participants' experiences. Guided by family counseling principles, interviews were conducted in line with ethical standards of family therapy. The chapter also presents the criteria for participant selection, describes the data collection process, and explains the methods of data analysis.

Chapter Four: Analysis of the Grief Reaction of the Muslims and Christians Participants

This chapter presents the analysis of participants' grief reactions using a family systems approach. The findings highlight how Muslim and Christian families respond to the death of a loved one. The analysis is based primarily on interview data, supported by observations of interactions, activities, and participants' reflective journals.

Chapter Five: Summary, Discussion and Conclusion

The summary, discussion, conclusion, and recommendation for further studies are presented in this chapter.

1.11 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 1

Chapter One provided an introduction to the topic of sudden death in families and the grief experience of the Nigeria Muslims and Christians families following the death of a loved one. It also outlined the organization of the study by summarizing the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Losing a loved one in the family to sudden death is a traumatic experience, leaving individuals and family members to adapt with the different emotional challenges after the death. Sudden death may result from self-harm, accidents, natural or unnatural cause. Relatives are often left with unanswered questions and may interact with professionals such as social care workers, religious scholars, counsellors, health workers, police, and other professionals who can help with answers, support or investigating the death (Jacobsen & Petersen, 2020). When confronted with sudden death, family members may be unaware of the roles of professionals or the procedures required following the death (Gazelle, 2007). The way people grieve depends on the circumstances of the death, and sudden deaths often lead to more intense or prolonged grief (Shah 2013). Individuals who experience the unexpected loss of a loved one often grieve in their own ways, frequently keeping their emotions private and suppressing their feelings, for example, when they are not allowed to view the deceased (Jalland, 2020). This chapter presents a literature review on sudden death and grief, tracing available studies from foundational research to recent developments.

2.2 BOWEN FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

Bowen's Family Systems Theory examines the thoughts and feelings of each family member and the broader family context that shapes family life (Nichols, 2010). It focuses on how family members think, interact, and respond to events, including the circumstances and timing of those events. Bowen (1976) emphasized that individuals respond more effectively when they maintain connections with the family while developing autonomy. The theory helps individuals distinguish between emotional and intellectual processes (Papero, 1990, p. 35) and highlights the functional aspects

of relationships, applying systematic thinking to everyday family experiences (Friedman, 2014, pp. 134–170).

The family, as a social system, can be understood from the perspective of System Theory. Cook & Oltjenbruns (1998) identified the key concepts of System Theory which include: (a) a system consisting of interacting parts that is characterised by wholeness or unity, (b) the family system is governed by rules and (c) the family exhibits some degree of openness. According to Broderick (1993), no system can be closed by definition. Several concepts of Systems Theory have proven useful in studying families, including roles, which Afolabi (2014) defined as the expectations associated with specific positions within the family system (e.g., the role of mother). The family, like any other social system, however, also has the tendency to resist change, a phenomenon which gives rise to homeostasis and morphostasis, terms referring to the tendencies to maintain family process and family structure respectively, as they are (Nadeau 1998).

Systems Theory provides a clear illustration of how families function as a whole and remain stable to change when the need be to adapt to new circumstances. (Nichols, 2010). In this study, it is assumed that family members are able to share their different experiences with other participants and explain how they are able to carry on with their lives. The family structure shows how people's lives are shaped by their interchanges with people around them. The System Theory is useful for understanding and appreciating the impact of death on family communication and the structural changes that may result from such a crisis.

2.3 ATTACHMENT THEORY

Attachment theory examines the fundamental roots of human bonds, ranging from close nuclear family relationships to extended family and other social connections, including friends, neighbors, and community members. Attachment involves seeking closeness in the face of stress. A close attachment in the family has a significant value for the individual in a way that if such bond is disrupted by death, individuals grieve

(Nichols, 2010, p97). The study assumes that, through conversations with other family members, participants construct meaning and interpret the reality of their experiences.

2.4 FAMILY COUNSELLING

In the family context, participants are able to express their feelings through family counselling, which represents an important assumption of this study. Through family counselling process, it is assumed that participants will feel secured and view the family session as a platform to support them in dealing with their loss.

Grief is the reaction that follows any death. Families, friends and relatives' grief after the loss of their loved ones. Grief is a natural and painful experience that individuals undergo as they adjust to the loss of a loved one. The emotions of bereaved family members' grief experience in response to their sudden loss and death is often surprising to them and they at times, think that they are responding to their grief in ways that are unusual, or inappropriate to them. This may result in further distress (brown 2012). Therefore, the response to grief differs according to religion and ethnicity, this makes generalization difficult.

2.5 STUDIES ON SUDDEN DEATH AND GRIEF

Studies on sudden death and grief have evolved significantly and have indicated that grief is a multidimensional range of experience following loss (Bonanno, 2001, pp. 494-495). According to Rais (2020), the painful loss as a result of the death of a loved one can be unbearable. There is no prescription to how one should react or must react to make the experience less painful. There is no clear cut or the right or wrong way to respond to such loss, what to say, what to do, and how to feel. (p.284) These experiences are shaped by historical, social, cultural and political factors. Sekowski and Pregerson (2022) also found that, following the sudden death of a loved one, not being able to say goodbye intensifies the grief reactions. However, the nature of the grief is determined by the cause of the death and the bond that exist with the deceased (Smith 2017). As a result of this, grief has been studied extensively in a variety of

disciplines. From a psychological perspective, grief is the individual's reaction to the loss of a loved one and is considered one of the most stressful life events (Rais 2020, pp 238). Freud (1917) in his article *Mourning and Melancholia*, described grief as involving the breaking of ties with the deceased, readjusting to life after the loss, and forming new relationships, conceptualized as the process of detaching from the lost object. Freud's concept of grief work has been widely referenced in research literature. Grief has often been evaluated as normal or abnormal based on societal norms. For example, (Walters, 1994) explained that doctors, psychologists and statisticians, rather than religion or tradition, have traditionally dictated how individuals should grieve. In the late 1980, reviews of the grief literature began to point out the importance of empirical data to support the concept of grief (Bonanno, 2001, p.719). As such, a substantial new body of research has emerged guided by theoretical perspectives from other fields such as attachment theory and stress research. Bonanno and Kaltman (1999) highlighted these developments, noting that grief may be potentially pathogenic and, in some cases, require professional psychological intervention.

In recent years, the conceptualization of grief has undergone significant changes. Grief was recategorized as a disease in the twentieth century by Colin Murray-Parkes (1965) in his study of bereavement. Murray Parkes described grief as a form of illness, characterized by the painful emotions that follows after the death of a loved one to be a type of illness. In this sense, people often react to news of loss with shock and disbelief, numbness and a desire to reunite with the loved one. The usual life of the bereaved will change from exactly the way it was before the loss to an unbearable different life experience.

Bereaved individuals are mostly affected in their functionality by their experience of losing a loved one. They are faced with the inability to perform efficiently in socially expected roles as a worker and consumer. According to (Worden,2009), most people find it difficult to return to their daily routines after the loss of close relative, may decline to go to work, and neglect simple needs like eating and sleeping. Such disruptions necessitate a redefinition and reorganization of life. The resolution of grief is therefore essential, as unresolved grief may persist for extended periods if not adequately addressed. Hunt and Robson (2000) emphasized

the importance of exploring how individuals construct meaning and continue life in the aftermath of loss (p. 72). In this regard, factors such as the bereaved person's relationship with the deceased, the level of familial support, the circumstances surrounding the death, individual personality, and broader life philosophy must be considered. For instance, the sudden death of a loved one may have a markedly different impact compared to the anticipated death of someone who had been ill, or in particularly devastating cases, the sudden death of a child.

Studies on grief have largely focused on understanding the emotional aspects of bereaved individuals. Charles Darwin (2016) has a similar opinion to Murray Parkes in the explanation he made for the expression of emotions in man and animals. He noted that certain painful ideas affect the brain in the same way a wound affects the body—both result in tears. However, Asa Jasson (2021) argued that emotion is the mental equivalent of reflexive action. Disordered emotions grew out of the belief that mind could be understood as a function of physiology not mediated by the conscious mind. Consistent with the emphasis on grief being based on the emotional aspect of the bereaved, Neimeyer (2018) highlighted that integrating the experience arising from the loss can help explore and clarify the need of a person.

2.6 STUDIES OF GRIEF ACROSS CULTURE

Numbers of studies have been conducted to explore whether the grief experienced by culture and family members is universal (Stroebe, Hanson and Stroebe, 2005). Grief in different cultures have been shown to vary since they are shaped by cultural factors. In dealing with loss, each culture has its own approaches which usually involves deep understanding, beliefs, rituals, etiquette, and expectations (Klass and Steffen, 2018). Every culture evolves its unique beliefs, customs and practices that address the issues associated with death (Rosenblatt 2017). Researchers have shown that the response to death is always intersubjective in nature. Klass and Steffen (2018) explained that grief involves rituals dealing with the disposal of the body, the incorporation of death into religious ceremonies, the prescribed actions of mourning and official remembrance.

Beside the cultural diversity, some ways of grief appear to be more adaptive than others. The literature suggests that societies which encourage the open expression of grief are less likely to experience prolonged difficulties following a loss. This view is supported by a comparative study of U.S. Latinos and European Americans on their perceptions and practices surrounding death. Mexican Americans show increased overt expression and somatization of grief. Some Hispanic cultural imperatives, such as the concept of 'respeto' (respect), religion, and spirituality, influence grief reactions and rituals (Whitaker, Kavanaugh, and Kilma, 2018). Iranian families describe their grief after a sudden loss as overwhelming and they form a new identity in their sorrow. The intensity of sorrow depends on the bonding or age of the deceased (Maryam et al., 2016). In the Iranian context, cultural practices and interactions with health care providers play an important role in supporting families as they cope with their loss.

According to Richards, Graham, Embleton, Campbell, and Rankin (2015), three major themes emerged from wife's accounts of the sudden death of husband: the status of 'special, the importance of trust, and issues of control and empowerment. The women in this study described the emotional support of the health professionals was crucial to their wellbeing. Some of the wives sought formal bereavement support, while others put their grief on 'hold' in order to support their family. The study highlighted that addressing patient-identified culturally appropriate requests significantly improved the wellbeing of the wives after a sudden death of their husband. Grief due to sudden death can be a traumatic event and the disrupt core beliefs, resulting in unresolved grief, posttraumatic stress symptoms, or growth following the loss (Krosch & Shakespeare-Finch, 2017).

The psychological aspects of sudden death and the importance of cultural-based rites in helping families deal with their loss have been widely explored. Holding the dead person may be helpful in addressing the strong emotions after a sudden death (Badenhorst and Hughes 2017). However, for some individuals, this practice alone is insufficient, and professional referrals are necessary to address complicated or prolonged grief. Van and Meleis (2010) in their study, found that sudden death was a major life event for African Americans, despite the influence of acculturation and the partial loss of African heritage. Culture and life experiences still significantly

influenced their daily lives, religious and cultural values, and beliefs. Additional factors that intensified grief included economic hardship, their roles and responsibilities in their families, and unsupportive relationships with others. These African-American families are known to have used religion as a coping mechanism in their grief or a religious or spiritual leader for seeking answers in their grief. This highlights the importance of connectedness in coping with grief successfully.

In a phenomenological study of nine participants, Muller and Thompson (2013) examined coping, effects, changes, and relationships in the context of grief. Participants identified several helpful coping strategies, including faith in God, positive self-talk, support groups, optimism, individual therapy, and psychotropic medication. Other coping mechanisms mentioned were praying, reading holy books, receiving supports from families and friends, physical exercise, attending funerals and readiness to accepting support from others (Muller and Thompson, 2013). The emotional effects reported included sadness, shock, anger, longing for the deceased, pain, guilt, and depression. Participants also described personal transformation following loss, such as changes in their worldview, a heightened appreciation for time and family, and personal growth reflected in greater positivity and maturity. However, they also reported diminished motivation for life and fear of forming new close relationships due to the possibility of future loss. Their relationship with the deceased affected their grief and also gave details of both pre-loss and post-grieving experiences.

While many grief studies have focused primarily on Caucasians, comparative research has also examined grief across different cultures, offering insights into both shared experiences and cultural variations between Western populations and those from other societies. For example, (Laurie and Neimeyer 2008) did a comparative study on African Americans and Caucasians focusing especially on identity change, interpersonal dimensions of loss, and continuing attachment to the deceased. Out of the 1,581 bereaved college students they recruited, 940 were Caucasians while 641 were African Americans. The participants were asked to complete the questions regarding the circumstances of their loss. Results indicated that African Americans reported higher levels of complicated grief symptoms than Caucasians, especially when they spoke less to others about their grief. The results also indicated that African

Americans have greater experiences of bereavement by homicide than Caucasians. More also, African Americans had continuity of bonds with the deceased and a greater sense of support in their grief than Caucasians.

A qualitative study on funeral rights and the spirituality of African Americans in a Kentucky family identified the following themes of grieving among African Americans: death as a transitional stage, attending funerals, mourning period, celebration of home going and respecting the burial. Death is conceptualized by the African Americans as a transitional stage from this life to the next and death being part of the process of life. To them, there is life after death which is assumed as a better one. Attending a funeral of family members or friends is of great importance and is viewed as a way of paying respect to the deceased. It is also a way of showing support to the bereaved family members. The mourning period is a time for reconnecting with family and friends and showing support, as friends, family members, and church members cook food or bring uncooked items to the bereaved family and retell the story of the dead person's life. This is viewed as the moment when the community and friends begin to support the bereaved in their healing journey (Collins and Doolittle 2006). They also observed that African Americans add ceremonial and cultural elements to their grieving by ensuring that their loved one is buried with respect and in a style that befits a person held in high esteem. The aim is to highlight the most cherished qualities of the deceased rather than the less desirable ones.

2.7 GRIEF AMONG NIGERIANS

A literature search was carried out to identify research related to sudden death in families and the grief experiences of the Nigeria Muslims and Christian families. Data bases searched included Scopus, ProQuets, Google Scholar, PQDT, and EBSCO. A total Result of 250 articles were identified across the different search engines. Narrowing the search to studies on death and grief specifically within Nigerian families resulted in 15 relevant articles; however, none addressed sudden death and the grief experiences of both Muslim and Christian families. Due to this lack of literature on sudden death and the grief experiences of Nigeria Muslims and Christians

families, this study search was however extended to include articles on sudden death in families and the grief experiences of Muslim and Christian from other developing countries.

From the literature reviewed, it is discovered that fewer studies have examined grief and sudden death in families compared to broader grief and bereavement research. The Western researchers are mostly concerned with an individual reaction to loss and grief while the Africans are concerned with the spirituality, systemic interactions, and community support provided for the deceased (Nwoye 2005). Cultural differences and variances influence the degree of grief. For example, Alali (1993) explained that death is a visible aspect of Nigerian culture, given its high mortality rate of 15.6 per 1,000 people per year. In order to understand the cultural significance of death in the Nigeria culture, the study examined 86 obituary and memorial advertisements published in 11 Nigeria newspapers. The celebration and the mourning of the life lost symbolize deaths. Different dimensions are used to manage death and grief as demonstrated in traditional oral communication and in the pages of newspapers. Alali highlighted ten different dimensions to manage death and grief as demonstrated in a traditional oral communication and in pages of newspapers. The amplification of loss depends on culture, the bereaved, and the degree of importance given to the individual (Ogbuagu 2012). The study draws interest to the cultural view and practices surrounding death in Nigeria. According to the study, the grieving and bereavement process of Nigerians in diaspora is very long due to their distance from their cultural home, coupled with cultural expectations and the financial burden of completing rituals and rites of passage. These practices explains how inconvenient and stressful the lived one of the deceased to fulfil the expectations of the burial rites to be in line with the Christian way or the traditional way. It is known among the Muslims that burial after death should not be prolonged. The study concluded that the experience of grief is highly varied. While bereavement is a universal event, most Nigerians living outside Nigeria experience grief differently because of the extra cultural, social and economic expectations surrounding the funeral and burial rites. This asserts that not all losses and bereavements are equal, as cultural differences shape the ways grief is expressed and experienced.

Among the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, the grieving style and funeral rites for widower is unique and particularly specific to the Igbos (Osai 2020) From the rituals of widowhood, the cultural significance of marriage is demonstrated, and the same significance is shown in connection between marriage and motherhood. Being married and a mother is of great importance and respect in the Igbo culture. Also, the dead adult among the Igbo tribe of Nigeria maintained in death the status they held in life as explained by Similarly, Owete, (2017).

The ancestral home is considered to be both the home of the living and for the dead. This is the more reason why Igbos bury their dead around their homes. The Igbos, with this practice, takes their dead home to the land of their ancestors to be buried. In this same vein, bad people who died are not buried but thrown away into the evil forest without respect. Among the Igbo people, the mourning period lasts between one week to one year and a widow is expected to wail for her husband three to four times a day or once in a day for three or seven days. They are expected to mourn outwardly and express their grief of their late husband. It is noteworthy to mention that there is a certain difference in the grieving pattern of a person holding a particular title before his death. For example, a widow to an Ozo title holder grieves differently from the widow of an ordinary citizen Owete, (2017).

2.7.1 The Nigeria Culture on Grief

Ekore and Lanre (2016) conducted a study on religious and cultural perspectives on grief and death in Africa. The traditional belief system of Africans is based on ancestral worship, as it is believed that those who are dead are alive in a different world and can reincarnate in new births. The cause of a death is sought for to know if the death is a natural death or if there is any foul play such as witchcraft which will offend the ancestors or the gods. And for the survivor of the deceased, death is considered as enemy of life. They concluded that these cultural beliefs influence the African concept of death.

In Nigerian society, the psychological dimension of loss is often overlooked, with greater emphasis placed on religious, cultural, and social aspects (Muhammed 2020). Most studies found a distinctive proof of psychological dysfunction among widows in Nigeria while exploring their grief experiences and coping ability (Elegbeleye & Oyedeji 2003). Some of this psychological dysfunction is denial and disbelief in the first place, then next is apathy and despondency after the bereaved realizes that the dead has gone forever. Following this is the feeling of personal loss and accepting the loss. In the Yoruba culture of Nigeria, there is a great respect for the deceased person based on fear of the fact that the dead person is a spirit. When a man dies, according to the Yoruba culture, the wife is expected to mourn by crying and fallen into the hands of the people around her, preventing her from falling and hurting herself. As part of the grieving style among the Yoruba, the widow is expected to go into confinement without weaving and cutting of her hair for seven days. The mourning period lasts between 40 days and four months, and as part of the culture, the widow is expected to wear black to show that she is mourning her husband (Fasoranti & Aruna, 2007).

However, grief responses vary according to cultural and religious rituals. For example, due to the current impact of secularism and scientific values, people in the West believe in the finiteness of the individual life cycle (Mahat-Shameir & Leichtentrit, 2024). In contrast, the Christians is of the belief in resurrection and that death brings the believer into the presence of Christ. One may question how this is to be understood going by the fact that people experience death (be it sudden or expected) people still die. They are referring to the spiritual death which is the eternal separation from God. Among the Christian people of Nigeria, the intensity of the grieve is based on the love they have for the deceased. Therefore, the Christians' belief towards grief is driven by the belief in the love of Jesus Christ that holds the two opposites together (the dead and the living)

The Quran and the Hadiths are the main sources of the Muslim religious or spiritual belief and a guide to their life system. In the Muslim faith, death is considered as another journey through the spiritual world. The Quran states that every soul shall taste death, and even if one tries to escape it, death remains an inevitable part of life. When the appointed time arrives, Allah sends the angel of death to take

the soul from the body. (Perry & Rayan 2003, Quran 32:11). The religious practice of the Christian people of Nigeria, allows Christian to cry and mourn over the death of a loved one as it is seen in scriptures that, Jesus mourned and wept over the death of his close friend Lazarus. So, mourning and crying is expected after death in Christianity. In addition, there is the belief in life after death with the hope of joining the loved ones. Nevertheless, there is universality in the reaction to loss across religions and cultures.

In conclusion, most of the reviewed studies highlight cultural influences surrounding death and grieving practices done among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria (Yoruba Hausa and Igbo), and most of these studies are mostly on widows and widowers of Nigeria. However, there is a lack of research on the grief reactions of Nigerian Muslim and Christian families in cases of sudden death. Given this gap, further studies are needed to explore grief responses in these contexts, as such findings would provide valuable insights into the role of religious and cultural perspectives.

2.8 LOSS AND GRIEF AMONG MUSLIMS

Muslims believe in the oneness of Allah, His messengers and the Judgment Day. He or she is one who is safe and sound at peace in this world and the hereafter. The religion practiced by a Muslim person is called Islam. The word Islam means peace and the submission to the will of Allah (Farid 1996). According to Islam, every Muslims should be prepared for death in a true submission to the will of Allah as it is provided for in Q.3; 185, “Every soul will have a taste of death..”. Death is a reminder to all Muslim believers, constantly kept in his consciousness and should follow his duties in life as prescribed by Allah before his death. It is stated by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) that “no one should die except while in good faith believing in Allah’s mercy. In accordance with Islamic practice, it is a religious obligation for a Muslim to be buried as soon as possible after death. Death in Islam is seen as a shift and not an end from one existence to another. The life a deceased person live during his lifetime determines the afterlife. If a Muslim adheres to the teachings of the Quran and leads a righteous life, they are believed to be rewarded in the afterlife.

2.8.1 Upon the Last Breath

In Islam, when a person breathes his last breath, and dies, the first thing others said upon hearing the death is: *“innaLillahi Wa inna ilayhi raaji’un.”* From Allah we come and to Him is our return (Quran 2: 156). The family of the deceased is faced with boundless grief and pain upon the death of their loved ones, but, the pain is however relived when they are spiritually and mentally prepared to accept the will of Allah. A true Muslim believer finds inspiration from examples of the life of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) who, in many cases, had to cope with the death of his beloved ones, including his only son Ibrahim whom he loved so dearly. When his son died, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) expressed his grief by saying *“our eyes shed tears and our hearts grieve, but, we speak only in a manner that pleases the lord. O Ibrahim, we are indeed deeply pained by your death.”*(As reported by Muslim and Abu Dawud). Also, in another occasion when the Prophet lost his grandson, Hussein, he sent a message to his daughter saying, *“Allah has taken what is rightfully His to take, and gives what is rightfully His to give, and so be patient before the decree of Allah and seek reward from him”* (Bukhari).

Immediately after the soul has left the body, in Islam, it is expected of those who are present there to first close his eyes, remove all the personal ornaments such as rings, wristwatches, necklace and dentures from the body. The deceased will be draped in a white cloth with his chin tied to the head so that his mouth will not be left open, and his leg tied facing kiblah. Noted it is that, the use of coffin in Islam is optional. Congregational prayer is offered and special prayer is made to Allah for the dead person. These funeral rites are important as they give opportunity for relatives to grieve, pay respect to the deceased and remembrance about death. Islam disapproves expensive funeral rites Maqsood (2002).

The period for outward mourning lasts for not more than three days, and Muslims are advised to comfort the grieving person by visiting them, reading some portion of the Quran and offering them food. In accepting grief and loss in Islam, the relatives of the deceased are urged to observe complete patience (Sabr) and Allah’s decree.” Be sure that we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods and properties, some in life and the fruits of your toil, but give glad tiding to those who persevere. Who say, when afflicted with calamity: to Allah we belong and

to Him is our return” (Q 62 :) those who have patience in accepting Allah’s decree, will be rewarded.

2.8.2 Accepting the Loss

Muslims believe that there is an appointed time for every person to pass through from existence to the next, and that death is inevitable and when the time comes it happens by the will of Allah (Maqsood 2002). The death of a loved one is a tragedy which makes the survivor view death as the end of the story. Wailing, tearing of one’s clothes, eulogizing and uttering curses are discouraged in Islam, even though they are still common among some Muslims (Khattab 1998). A few certain words are accepted to be said when crying over the deceased but words should be guided and chosen wisely and not by showing dissatisfaction to the decree of Allah even in times of facing the loss. Example is seen when Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lost his son, Ibrahim, the prophet said, *“We are very sad for your death, O Ibrahim. This is not an indication of complain or discontent to the decree of Allah. (Buhari and Muslim).*

Individuals are encouraged to say good things about the dead and remember all the good deeds done during their lifetime. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), years after the death of his wife Khadijah, never forgot his love for her. Islam encourages Muslims to turn to Allah in their time of distress and grief. Reading from the story of Prophet Muhammad on the losses he had experienced of his loved ones are all helpful in terms of dealing with grief. Also some verses of the Holy Quran are beneficial in dealing with grief. *“He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in Patience and whose heart rest in the remembrance of Allah. Verily in the remembrance of Allah do heart find rest” (Q13:27-28).* A number of Hadiths (sayings of Prophet Muhammad PBUH) describe several occasions the Prophet accepted his loss with faith. Muslims are advised to accept and acknowledge the loss in a good faith as Allah’s decree.

2.8.3 Islamic Funeral Rites

The Muslim burial rites are conducted by Islamic officials known as imams, sheiks, and a few members of the families. In Islam, the ritual washing of the deceased, known as *Ghusl*, is usually performed by close relatives of the same sex such as parents, siblings, or adult children, to perform the spiritual bath called Ghusl, normally done three times and no more additional washes. After washing of the body, then they anoint it, then shroud it with a solid white unsewn clothe. Relatives, friends and community members of the deceased person perform a congregational prayer on the dead body. Attendance at the burial is traditionally restricted to adult males (Haddad, 2002, Hedayat, 2006; Rubin & YasenEsmael, 2004.).

After the burial of the deceased, the family begins to receive condolences and social support from people. People are required to bring cooked food to the bereaved family during those three days. A waiting period (Iddah) of 130 days is expected for a woman to enter if the deceased person is a man. This is provided for in the Quran: *“For those men who die amongst you and leave behind wives, they (the wives) must confine themselves (spend iddah) for four months and 10 days. Q2:234”*. She cannot leave the house except in urgencies like seeing the doctor because of a medical issue. The way people choose to express their grief is not characterized by religion, but by the family, local and national tradition. In Islam, death is regarded as a part of life. Everybody bears in mind that it can happen to anyone, anywhere and at any time.

2.9 GRIEF AMONG THE WHITE/CHRISTIANS

The Christian believes that everyone is going to die and return to God. “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 2:7). Christian belief according to the bible is that, if all are reborn, one day, they will be reborn in their physical existence. It is clearly stated in the New Testament that there is life after death, (John 11:12). Jesus said to Martha “I am the resurrection and life”, whoever believe in me though he died, yet shall he live. In Christianity, when a Christian dies, it is seen as the close of his or her earthly life. It is believed that the love that bind the living and the dead that makes the survivor grieve after the demise

of a loved one. Mourning is allowed in Christianity and grieving for a loved one is provided for in the Bible when Jesus Christ wept and mourned for his close friend Lazarus. While it is natural to grieve the loss of a loved one, Christians believe that the love of Christ unites mourning with hope.

In general, the Christians believe that it is love that makes death awfully painful; because the fact is that if individuals truly love someone, it means that they grieve when he or she is no more. It is also believed that love is what makes death bearable, because genuine love is not diminished by any circumstances and continues after death. Hence, it is the love of Jesus that holds these two opposites together (Sherrill Evans, personal communication, November 7, 2014). Mourning is allowed when expressing grief for a loved one; Jesus mourned and wept after the death of his close friend Lazarus, so mourning and crying are expected after death. “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted” Matthew 5:4 (New International Version). However, Christians believe that it is the love of Jesus that holds the mourning and the hope together.

2.9.1 Accepting the Loss upon the Last Breath

Unlike Islam, Christianity does not prescribe specific rites for handling the body immediately after death. In Islam, the deceased is buried following the ritual bath and shrouding, with the body positioned to face Mecca. By contrast, Christianity does not provide explicit instructions on the treatment of the body, although embalming is permitted, drawing on biblical accounts. For instance, when Jacob died, Joseph directed the physicians to embalm his father, which took forty days as was customary in Egypt (Genesis 50:2–3). Similarly, Joseph himself was embalmed (Genesis 50:26).

Jacob’s death was mourned for seventy days by the Egyptians, and his body was treated according to Egyptian burial customs. This account describes what was done with specific corpses but does not prescribe a mandatory practice for all Christians. Nevertheless, it could be argued that Christians are permitted to follow the culturally accepted methods of handling the dead, as reflected in the examples of Jacob and Joseph.

An extensive analysis of grief, loss, or mourning is not contained in the scriptures; however, they do provide many descriptions of mourning, loss, and seeking comfort in times of bereavement. For example, the death of Sarah is described in Genesis 23:1–2: she lived to be one hundred and twenty-seven years old, died, and was buried at Kiriath Arba. Abraham did not just weep but carried out traditional customs regarding mourning and death such as cutting off his beard, pouring dust on his fore head, and fasting. He buried her there in a cave he bought. However, the degree of mourning is not described nor is the length of time, but it is recorded that he is described as a man who wept over the death of his wife.

The Book of Genesis also described different losses experienced by Jacob during his life time. Upon the death of Joseph, Jacob cried, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son for many days. Additionally, following the birth of Benjamin, Rachel passed away and was buried in Bethlehem.

A pillar was set up over her tomb by Jacob and till date the pillar is regarded as Rachael's tomb (Genesis 35:20). A short description on the death of Abraham and Isaac is provided for by the author of Genesis, and the subsequent burials in the cave purchased by Abraham. (Genesis 25:8 and 35:29). Concerning Abraham's death, it records: "Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years before he breath his last breath and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years, and he was gathered to his people" (Genesis 25:7-8). Many examples on grief and a sudden death is provided for in Psalms. For example, in Psalm 13, David cries out,

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say,

"I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall. But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me (Psalm 13:1-6.). This is an honest cry from David, a cry of despair, he longs to know the answers to the deep questions of his hearth.

The scriptures provide many examples of how people mourn a loss and how the bodies of the dead are treated. For instance, going by scriptures, the orthodox Christians honor the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. The body is regarded as God's creation and blessing and any act that intentionally defiles it like cremation, is an abomination to the Orthodox faith. The body is seen as important as the soul. According to biblical teaching, Christians believe that all who are reborn in Christ will one day experience resurrection in their physical form, just as Jesus Christ was raised from the dead.

Furthermore, in addressing the loss of a Christian, Paul the Apostle offered guidance to the church in Thessalonica, which struggled with questions about death. He wrote, "brothers, you should not be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope." (Thessalonians 4:13). Here, the word sleep as used by Paul is a euphemism for death. Paul acknowledged that grief is a natural human response to loss and that it is impossible to remain indifferent in the face of death. However, he cautioned against excessive grief, as it can be harmful and contrary to faith. His teaching does not prohibit mourning but rather encourages believers not to grieve in the same way as those without hope. (G. L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2002, p. 218).

2.9.2 The Christian Funeral Rites

In Christian culture, organizing a proper funeral is considered an important part of supporting a bereaved family. Once an individual is dead, his body will first be deposited at the mortuary until when the relatives are financially capable of carrying out the funeral rights. The funeral ceremony has to comply with certain standards to be regarded as successful such as, the number of the mourners, the coffin size and condition, the social status of those in attendance, the availability of good food and drinks served, and the venue size.

Christianity is against cremation of the body because it is seen as a pervasion of the work of God. Going by the Eastern orthodox doctrine and the Bible, the body is not just here for this life time, but if he or she were reborn, they will be reborn in their physical form, just as Jesus Christ was. Jesus Christ's body was not cremated but buried after his crucifixion, thus the orthodox Christian considered burial as per of following Christ's example. Similarly, the Catholic Church has historically rejected cremation on the fact that the body is sacred and thus belongs to God.

When a Christian dies, a funeral is being held to mourn his departure by friends and family in thanking God for the end of his or her life. If a person dies after a long illness, his body will be prepared by a minister in a room alongside a family member or a friend. The deceased will have made a details on how his funeral to be carried out or if he chooses to be buried or be cremated. Usually, Christian corps are kept in mortuary for up to a year and less than a year if the deceased is relatively a young person. A week after a person passes on only then the funeral commences and it could be either in the Church or at the crematorium. A Christian funeral service typically begins with scripture readings by the priest, including Psalm 23, "The Lord is my shepherd." Additional readings are done from the old and new testament, special readings about the deceased person where the priest shall give a person talk on the life spent and the role of the individual in the Christian church. A bible poem or a verse from the bible will be read out by a friend or a family member, prayers, thanksgiving are said, penance and preparation for death. Reflection, commendation and tribute still be carried out by the priest. The congregation will be given some minutes to reflect on death and about the life of the dead. At the graveside, the priest prays, "Let us all salute God's grace, our Creator and Redeemer," and offers the final commendation. As the coffin is lowered, the priest declares, "We commit this body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life."

The Christian funeral usually takes about half an hour most especially the grave services. The program could be long if the deceased is well known or a loving person. In some cases, the event can be longer than expected if the deceased person is well known and a loving person, mourners are allowed to exit secretly through a back door. It is not allowed to talk or interact or engage in any form of conversation with

mourners or relatives while the funeral program is on. All people in attendance are required to pay attention to the service and reflect. The final stage of the Christian funeral activities involved interment and social get-together by mourners. Black color dresses are worn as black is considered a colour of mourning. The mourning period different for everyone is different. It is a process that everyone will go through but each individual goes through a slightly different way. Due to the diversity within Christianity, mourning practices vary widely. One common ritual following the burial or funeral is a gathering and shared meal, which may take place at the family home, a relative's residence, the church, or another designated venue. This event in most cases is catered for by the family.

2.10 GRIEF ARISING FROM SUDDEN DEATH

Sudden death is conceptualized to be any type of death that happens unexpectedly without prior notice, no warning, no anticipation or preparation (Hauser 1987). A sudden death is not prepared for and is not predicted for or being expected and usually causes a traumatic experience bringing shock to the bereaved. The survival of a sudden death is caught by surprise as it is different from a natural death through prolonged sickness. The sudden death of a loved one often brings a profound and unexpected shock to family members, underscoring the need to study, understand, and develop targeted interventions for the bereaved as they cope with their loss (Worden, 2009). Clinically, bereaved individuals following sudden death are reported to experience both short- and long-term coping difficulties more frequently than those grieving an expected death (Barrett & Scott, 1990; Lehman, Wortman, & Williams, 1987).

In an attempt to understand sudden death, Reed (1998) described it as multidimensional and complex, encompassing social, physical, and psychological domains. To avoid underestimating its clinical significance, it is essential to further understand the associated stress and identify potential risk factors. Rando (1993) also noted that unnatural death may fall within the category of sudden death, which can result from causes such as heart attack, accidents, homicide, or other violent events.

Sudden death affects the outcome and adjustment of the bereaved, unlike anticipatory death that mollifies the grief process (Levinson 1972). This is supported by the theory of increased psychopathology after sudden death held by several researchers. For example, individuals who lose a family member suddenly are more likely to experience intense mourning, heightened guilt, emotional numbness, frequent crying, and stronger feelings of longing than those facing an expected death, often leading to prolonged grief reactions (Wright, 2020). In examining risk factors that influence variations in grief reactions, Shear (2012) found that the manner of death and the level of social support from family and close friends played a critical role in mitigating separation anxiety, depressive symptoms, and feelings of rejection among the bereaved.

Kaltman and Bonanno (2003) identified different types of sudden death, including accidental death, suicide, and homicide, while deaths from natural causes such as heart attacks are also categorized as sudden. Their research showed that natural sudden deaths may not necessarily predict depression, whereas deaths from violent causes are more strongly associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. Murphy, Jonson, Chung and Beaton (2003) in a study of parents who had lost a child five years earlier, found that 28% of mothers and 13% of fathers met the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as compared to the normal sample 10% of women and 6% of men met the criteria for PTSD. These findings suggest that careful consideration of the type of sudden death is essential, as understanding the cause can help in assessing the risk factors that may precipitate depressive disorders (Kaltman & Bonanno, 2003).

2.11 GRIEF IN FAMILIES

The sudden death of a loved one is a difficult experience and a transition stage for the bereaved family members. Individual members of the family unit may grieve differently as they encounter different range of stressful life events. However, there are circumstances that families' grieve together, whereby they collectively deal with shock and disorganization (Zajac and Boyatzis, 2020). Grieving of families from a sudden death is more profound, more lingering, and more complex than normal grief (Sprang

McNeil, and Wright 1989, pp.159). Family members try to identify ways together as they struggle with their loss. For example, Rosen (1999) suggested four tasks that family members experience; (1) shared acknowledgement of the reality of the death, (2) shared experience of the pain of grief, (3) reorganization of the family system, and (4) redirection of the family's relational goals.

The reactions following loss for family members are not the same and are nonspecific. Examples include avoiding conversations about the deceased, isolating oneself from other family members due to feelings of intense anger, remaining silent when communication is needed, and experiencing heightened anxiety and distress (Worden, 2018). When a loss is not openly acknowledged or socially discussed, it may contribute to the development of complicated grief.

2.11.1 Parental Grief

The death of a child creates a total dysfunction in the family system and puts the family in almost crisis like situation (Packman, 2006). According to Flahault et al. (2018), a major challenge of parental grief is that at the very moment when surviving children or a member of the family is in a vulnerable state and most needs the stability and security of parental support, parents may be unable to provide this. Sometimes, parents find it so difficult to look after the need of their other children because they are so overwhelmed by their grief. Their ability and capacity to look after the need of their other children are limited. They do not have the emotional energy to look after the family. According to Zajac and Boyatzis (2020) parental grief is described as a “double loss” because children experience the death of their sibling and the loss of parental support.

Parental grief is a long term progression that involves movement through several stages of grief work and can be complicated when the death of the child is a sudden one (Stroebe & Schut 1999). The process of parental grief does not have an end, and the memory of the child remains vivid in their mind. Most often, parents feel the need to protect themselves from memories or events surrounding the death. Parents viewed saying goodbye to the child at the time of death as critically important

and a part of working through grief. Winjgaards-deMeij et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study in which parents were interviewed and surveyed at 6, 13, and 20 months following their child's death. The study found that parents who had the opportunity to say goodbye reported lower levels of grief compared to those who did not. However, when parents are not provided with sufficient details about their child's death, or the opportunity given to ask questions are limited regarding the loss might lead to misunderstanding. Such gaps in information can lead to distorted perceptions of the death, particularly among mothers, whose imaginations may intensify these distortions (Schwab, 1997). These cognitive distortions can hinder progress through the grief process and may contribute to maladaptive behaviors after the loss.

2.11.2 Sibling Grief

The death of a sibling reflects a significant shift in the life of the surviving siblings due to the powerful bond that exist between them. Siblings typically spend most of their days together and may share many of their experiences with each other that they do not share with anyone else. This relationship last in a long term but the death of a siblings in the family changes the whole system of functioning (Brown, 2009). Bereavement in children has so many psychological effects because children have little or less adequate coping skills as compared to adults (Birenbaum, 2000; Brown, 2009; Tonkins & Lambert, 1996).

The grief reactions of siblings on death may be more intense and prolonged, as their understanding of the irreversible nature of loss is continually processed and can interfere with cognitive development as they mature (Paris et al., 2009). Factors such as the cause of death, gender, age, and coping style contribute to variations in siblings' grief responses (Brown, 2009; Pearson, 2005). Moreover, children's grief reactions are dependent on adults for support, given their limited cognitive abilities, differing coping mechanisms, and need for guidance and identification.

2.12 COUNSELLING THE BEREAVED FAMILIES

In this study, counselling the bereaved family is seen as any type of grief support that is rendered by a qualified individual or a person that is certified to assist a group of people, the young, families or individuals in understanding grief and death. This counselling services can take place in groups with other families who are also dealing with death of a loved one. In counselling the bereaved families, professionals need to recognize the fact that families are the main support system for counsellors and should always involve them in the counselling process using open communication and engaging all family members throughout the healing process. Some of the main concepts involved in counselling the bereaved families are information sharing, participation, and respect (Worden 2018). Bereavement professionals should recognize the key concepts in counseling bereaved families, as this knowledge benefits families participating in ongoing bereavement support programs.

Zajac and Boyatzis (2023) studied the effectiveness of bereavement counseling with two families who had lost children to sudden death. The study examined whether family who received bereavement counselling had a decrease in symptoms associated with bereavement as compared to families who did not receive treatment at all. Results indicated that families who received counseling showed a significant decrease in emotions such as anger, withdrawal, sadness, guilt, anxiety, and loneliness, compared to families who did not receive treatment.

Counselling the bereaved family helps counsellors or bereavement professionals to understand the family dynamics and help in rebuilding the bond, self-esteem, growth and having more understanding of self and others. Siblings and other family members in a family counselling are encouraged to share their emotions and not to feel guilty about moving on with their lives (Peckman et al., 2006). Hooge, Neimeyer, and Rober (2013) observed that individuals often struggle between sharing their grief and keeping certain feelings private. In a family counselling setting, members tend to engage more effectively in the bereavement process (Barrera et al., 2013).

2.13 THE FAMILY LIFE CIRCLE

Family is defined as a group of two or more related persons who maintain a common household (Glick 1989). As part of the broader socio-political culture, an individual's life cycle develops and progresses within the framework of the family life cycle (Zajac & Boyatzis 2020). Families often experience crises as they transition from one stage of the life cycle to another (Carter & McGoldrick, 2004). If the crises are left unresolved, it can lead to family conflict and divorce (Congress 2016).

2.13.1 Triangle

A triangle is a network of three people relationship (Zajac & Boyatzis 2023). The driving force behind emotional triangles is as a result of chronic anxiety, as a two-person dyad may be unstable and require cooperation to maintain balance (Gehart & Tuttle, 2003; Nichols, 2010). The Bowen's concept of differentiations is linked closely with triangles, such as the greater the degree of fusion in a relationship, the more pressured is pulled to preserve emotional balance by forming triangles (Brown 1999). Most family issues are triangular (Nichols 2010). For instance, helping a mother on better parenting skills will not solve the problem if she is over involved with her son because of the father's emotional distance (Nichols 2010). The lower the system's adaptive functioning or ability to cope with stress, the more likely its members are to form triangles (Gurman & Jacobson, 2002; Nichols, 2010).

2.13.2 Family Communication

Communication plays an important role in grieving. Walsh and McGoldrick (2004) noted that an open and honest communication among family members gives great importance in the adaptation of death. Members of the family may avoid communication with one another and become less expressive because of the fear of saying the wrong thing or doing the wrong thing in reminding themselves of the death, resulting into deep mourning (Toller 2005). It is believed that individuals limit their communication to prevent them from further harm (Toller 2005). Levinger and Senn (1967) stated that communication is a basic need for the development and

maintenance of interpersonal relationships. Additionally, expressing feelings is a critical task in the grieving process (Carroll & Shaefer, 1993–94).

Most family emotional reaction and long term difficulties arising from death originate in the lack of openness in the system (Bowen 1998). Communication is two ways, either open or close and when it is closed, grievors draw into themselves (Bowen 1976). A close communication is one in which person is not free to communicate a high level of inner thoughts, feelings and fantasies to another who can reciprocate. Mourners from a close communication pattern negatively influence the family and as a result of that they avoid their family members (Bowen 1978, p.322; Bowen, 1976). He also recommended that the grief should be explicit and direct in the use of their language. He further noted that this communication system is amenable to change.

2.14 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A considerable literature search is carried out in order to identify the most suitable theory for the study. This search helped inform the methodology by guiding the translation of the research questions into a practical research design.

The family system theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study, focusing on the organization, structure, and the complexity of families and the relationships within families (Helm, 2014). It is particularly suitable for examining the death of a family member and its impact on surviving family members. The family system theory was developed on the foundation of the marked disruption and the eventual rebuilding of family relationship as a result of the Second World War II (Helm, 2014). The family systems theory is unique because it views family as a whole, where the qualities of the system emerge from the interactions among its parts (Jurich & Myers Bowman, 1998). From the Bowen point of view, patterns of functioning, including the thoughts, emotions, and feeling, are passed down from previous generations and often become part of the nuclear family or other relationships (Nichols, 2010).

The family systems theory describes how a system comprised of its units, right from the smaller units, known as the subsystems, to the larger units called suprasystems (Jurich & Myers-Bowman, 1998). The subsystem in the family includes sibling-sibling relationship and the sibling-parent relationship. Each of this subsystem is affected after the death of any of its unit. The surviving members of the family lost their sense of normalcy following the death of a family member, and they are left to navigate the relationship as well as to define their new relationship with others (Packman et al., 2006).

The main idea behind Bowen family Systems Theory is that people can distinguish between emotional process and intellectual process (Papero, 1999, p., 35). The theory emphasizes the functional aspects of family relationships, highlighting the ability to think in systemic terms and apply these concepts to everyday life (Friedman, 1991). As opined by Bowen, individuals or families with low differentiation levels would be most likely to respond to stress poorly (Bowen 1976). Family as a whole function as an interdependent system, so a change affecting one member impacts the entire system. When a parent or a child dies in the family, the entire family system is affected, so new roles and relationship must be formed. Therefore, examining the family as a whole during bereavement is essential, as the loss affects relationships and the family's ability to fulfill its roles (McBride & Simms, 2001; Schwab, 1997).

Human attachment helps individuals to maintain affectionate bonding, supports and safety. Attachment theory has been specifically useful in family and couple's therapy. It explains how even healthy adults need to depend on each other. The way they talk about each other and expressed the value of the relationship or friendship. The quality of the relationship and the importance of the closeness with each other affects the intensity of grieve when it comes to loss (Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022). Attachment can be seen in cuddling up to mother's warm body, trust for one another in the family, intimacy and the support for one another (Fraley, et al., 2000). The security in the relationship with an attachment figure indicates that an individual is able to rely on that care givers as source of comfort and protection. When treats arise, individuals in a secure relationship are able to direct attachment behaviour (approaching, crying, reaching out) to their care givers and take comfort in their reassurance (Nichols 2010, Johnsen & Tommeraas, 2022).

2.14.1 Family Counselling

In this study, family counselling is defined as a therapeutic work with families who are concerned with the death of a family member. A professional counsellor employs interventions and theoretical approaches to help the bereaved manage their emotional, mental, physical and spiritual response to the loss of the person. Counsellors and family members entering the family counselling explore the death of the person and the members' different thoughts and feelings as many clients may appear with symptoms of anxiety and depression associated with the loss of the significant person in their life (Worden 2002).

2.14.2 Meaning Making

Meaning making is one of the most important steps in promoting growth after the sudden death of a loved one in the family. It involves the ability to understand a loss and eventually accept it (Park, 2010). Individuals construct unique, coherent, and meaningful life narratives that reflect the identity of the deceased (Neimeyer 2019). Bereaved persons often grapple with questions such as: Why did the death occur? Why did this happen to me? Is there a meaning to life without the dead? Seeking answers to these questions by the bereaved person is called meaning making (Gillies & Neimeyer 2006).

2.15 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 2

Various studies on sudden death and grief have been presented in the literature review. Specifically, studies on sudden death and grief among the Nigeria Muslims and Christian families is lacking but studies on grief and bereavement as conducted elsewhere are enormous. Literature reviewed showed variation in cultures and religions regarding death and loss. The reviewed literature also provided the understanding of individual family experiences on the concept of sudden death, their response to loss of a loved one and the funeral rites. The experiences of the bereaved family members can be further explored through family counselling, where participants have the opportunity to express their personal experiences of loss. Finally,

to capture the grief reaction of family members from the two religious group in Nigeria, a qualitative research approach is considered the most suitable method for describing their experiences.



CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the methodological procedures employed to address the research questions of this study, which aims to explore the grief reactions of Nigerian Muslim and Christian families following the sudden death of a loved one. The chapter discusses the research design, participant selection criteria, data collection and analysis procedures, and measures taken to ensure rigor and trustworthiness. The study employed the qualitative phenomenological method. The researcher conducted the interview session with family members who are qualified under the selection criteria and have lost their loved one to sudden death. The researcher contacted the participant on an agree place for the interview to take place. Participants privacy was ensured, and the interview session was conducted in English lasting for 45-60 minutes using an Mp3 audio recorder. This process allowed participants to express their grief experiences while the researcher observed their interactions. All the participants were encouraged to share their grief experiences, the effects of the loss and the coping strategies they employed.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGNS

Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as the chosen method of inquiry due to its focus on exploring lived experiences. Specifically, the phenomenological approach was employed, as it seeks to understand the experiences of selected individuals within a particular phenomenon—in this case, bereaved family members coping with sudden death. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants' grief, the emotional pain associated with the loss, and the ways in which they make sense of and find meaning in their experiences. The study was conducted within the family setting in a support group, where affected family members shared their experience of losing a loved family member to a sudden death. The session was

conducted by the researcher, providing an opportunity to observe the dynamics of the participants as they recounted their grief experiences through focus group discussions and observation.

3.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the grief experiences shared by the bereaved Nigerian families of different religions (Islam and Christianity) following the death of loved ones.
2. To explore the effects of sudden loss on the Nigerian family members after after the death of loved ones.
3. To investigate the culturally specific grief responses of family members (from the Muslim and Christian background) in Nigeria to the sudden loss of their loved ones.

3.4 PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of the study is to explore the responses of Nigerian Muslim and Christian family members to the sudden death of a loved on. It aims to examine their grief experiences, and the challenges faced by the bereaved participants in the process of their grief and how they construct meaning after the death of a loved one. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. What grief experiences are shared by the bereaved Nigerian families of different religion (Islam and Christianity)?
2. How are family members (Christian and Muslim) affected by the sudden loss of a family member?
3. What are the cultural-specific grief responses of Nigerian family members (with Muslims and Christian background) in reaction to the sudden loss of a loved ones?

The interview protocols were validated by two practicing counsellors and two experts in qualitative research. The process of drafting and finalizing were closely supervised by the main supervisor who is a registered counsellor, and counsellor educator as well as grief counselling expert.

The researcher for this study also assumed the role as the facilitator for the interview in the family session to observe the participants in the process of sharing of their experiences. The followed a set of protocols and took time to explain and clarify of specific information of the nature of the study using the information sheet prior to obtaining participants' consent. The presence of the researcher in the family support group session ensured a clear understanding of the participants' narratives and facilitated accurate interpretation of the information, thereby capturing the personal meaning conveyed by the participants (Giorgi, 2009; Jones & Abes, 2013, p.64).

3.5 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The data for the study were collected in Nigeria through a family support group discussion. Participants were family members who had experienced the sudden death of a loved one within the family between one and five years prior to the study. The family members were selected based on four inclusion criteria, i.e. having experience the sudden death of a family member, must be from Nigeria, must belong to a Muslim or Christian family, and must be at least twenty years of age. Each participant was contacted to confirm an appointment at a central location, specifically the University of Ilorin conference room, at a mutually agreed time. The researcher ensured the participants privacy during the group discussion, and permission to conduct was obtained from the chief secretary officer of the university. The session lasted for 55 minutes, was conducted in English, and was recorded using an Mp3 voice recorder. Notes were taken down during the discussion. All questions were open ended and participants were asked to describe their grief experiences, the challenges they faced, and the coping mechanisms they employed in managing their loss. The family group session aimed to capture the authentic experiences of participants, explore the emotional impact of sudden death, and understand how the challenges encountered affected their lives, both directly and indirectly.

3.6 RIGOR, CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

In qualitative research, the term credibility, consistency, transferability, and conformability are used interchangeably to refer to a qualitative research. Researchers in qualitative studies must consider two key aspects traditionally associated with quantitative research: validity and reliability (Patton, 2001). Although the terms “reliability” and “validity” are most frequently applied in quantitative research, they are also relevant in qualitative inquiry. According to Creswell (2007), validity in research refers to the strength and accuracy of the research. Threats to validity may arise when the phenomenon under investigation relies solely on the researcher’s interpretation of participants’ accounts, which may not be fully accurate or complete. In this study, interviews were recorded using MP3 recorder and after the interview, and the researcher subsequently transcribed them to capture the essence of the participants’ responses. Creswell noted also that, interviews allow researcher to establish a rapport with the participant, which increases the validity and data collection process. On the other hand, reliability concerns the consistency and accuracy of the measurement tools in producing dependable data. In qualitative research, achieving reliability depends on the researcher’s careful evaluation and contribution of meaningful data that can be systematically analyzed (Cooper & Schindler, 2003).

3.7 THE STUDY PARTICIPANTS/INFORMANTS

Participants for the study were selected based on the following criteria;

- a) Having experienced the sudden and unexpected loss of a family member;
- b) Being Nigerian and currently residing in Nigeria;
- c) Belonging to either a Muslim or Christian family;
- d) Being at least 20 years of age.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and snowballing sampling. Through purposive sampling, the researcher was able to select participants who possessed specific characteristics, experiences, or unique attitudes relevant to the study (Cooper and Schindler 2003). Also, the snowballing sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, is a non-probability method of survey sample selection commonly employed in qualitative research to locate and reach hidden or hard-to-find populations. This method is cost-effective, efficient, and allows researchers to quickly identify suitable participants (Johnson, 2003). Using these approaches, the researcher successfully identified the target population for the study, which included two families—one Christian and one Muslim.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some ethical issues were addressed before the study was conducted. The research ensured the protection of participants' identities and upheld principles of confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, and intellectual property. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and the procedures involved, including that the sessions would be audio-recorded and later transcribed for research purposes. All information collected was treated as confidential, with only selected portions of the transcripts disclosed when necessary for reporting or analysis.

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The aim of the study is to understand sudden death in families and the grief experience of Nigeria Muslim and Christian families. The interview was transcribed by the researcher and analyzed following the phenomenological approach described by Creswell (2017). Creswell explained that, qualitative research is particularly suitable when research questions cannot be addressed or quantified using closed-ended questionnaires. In this study, the meaning that best described the participant's experiences shall be interpreted concurrently, while data collected shall be sorted and organized into themes.

3.10 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

After collecting all the data through interviews, the researcher followed five stages of analysis: (1) data transcribing; (2) identifying recurring patterns and trends; (3) grouping and combining similar trends and patterns into categories; (4) determining the frequencies and occurrences of the trends and patterns; (5) labelling the categories as themes and sub-themes. The researcher organized the materials and created folder for each of the data collected. All the recorded interviews were transcribed and coded with numbers and the name of respondents. Researcher carefully read the transcripts, and listened to the recordings for significant statement that explains the experience and reactions relating to sudden death and grief reactions. The researcher analysed the data by organizing the data according to the main theme. Themes are conceptual elements that covers the data (Merriam 2009).

A thematic analysis is a commonly used research approach in a qualitative data set, it analyses all textual materials to identify main themes in the context. The aim of a thematic analysis is to find limited numbers of themes or categories to explain what is in the data (Howitt 2010). Thematic analysis is easier and flexible to use. This study employed thematic analysis, as this method is evidently proven to provide meaningful interpretation and clarity in understanding participants' experiences (Bryman, 2012). Braun and Clarke (2006) further claimed that thematic analysis ought to be a foundational approach of qualitative data analysis. They argued that thematic analysis serves as a foundational approach in qualitative research, as it can be applied across various epistemologies and phenomena. It is a method for "identifying, analysing, organizing, describing", and reporting themes within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a method that it enables to organize the findings of the study (Pope, Mays & Popay, 2007). The first stage in analysis is coding by organizing and reviewing the raw data set. The second stage is to find sub-themes and themes from the data set, based on the transcript of the interviews (Bryman 2008). The themes identified were compared and described with other sources of data. In this study, the researcher followed the stages of data analysis outlined by Ismail Sheikh Ahmad (2017), as summarized in Table 3.1.

3.11 ANALYZING TRANSCRIBED DATA TO GENERATE MAIN IDEAS

According to Ahmad Sheikh (2017), transcribed data can be analyzed through several steps. The first step is familiarization, where the researcher reads and re-reads the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding of the data. The next step is initial coding where all relevant features in the dataset are systematically coded and compiled to generate the main idea. A coding template was developed for each participant, consisting of seven columns. The interview questions are written on the first column. The second column is the superordinate comprising all the explanations from the interview. Next is the third column, the subordinate, which emphasizes the main idea given by the informant base on the responses given from each interview questions and not the summary of the ideas. The fourth column is the elaboration, which records additional explanations of the main ideas. Column five and six track the occurrence and frequency of the occurrence. And lastly is column seven, the discourse unit. This column allows the researcher to locate and reference each main ideas. This system ensures transparency and helps examiners understand the context in which themes are derived. A main idea may appear in multiple discourse units, sometimes occurring 20–25 times within a transcript. See Table 3.1: coding templates for generating main Ideas.

Table 3.1 Coding Templates for Generating Main Ideas

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Interview questions	Superordinate key words of the questions	Subordinate Main points from the conversation	Elaboration Main ideas of the conversation to support the subordinate	Occurrences, Summaries of the main idea	Frequency of occurrences shows numbers of time of a main idea	Discourse of unit

3.12 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 3

This chapter explained the ways the research questions were addressed in this study. Also, it presented the design of the study, which employed the qualitative method in answering the research question and objective of the study is included. Included also in this chapter was a detailed description of the phenomenological approach used in this qualitative study. Data collection, data analysis, credibility, conformability and consistency, sampling, the respondent's biographic profile, and ethical consideration were all discussed in this chapter.



CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings from a qualitative phenomenological study exploring the grief experiences of two Nigerian families—one Muslim and one Christian—who have experienced the sudden death of a loved one. This chapter is divided into five parts. The first part comprises of the participants' demographic information using pseudonym in order to protect with identity of the participants. The procedures for the development of themes and participants quotes from the data is provided in part two. Part three presents the brief cross analysis of major themes from the participants' grief experiences. Part four is the interpretation of major themes based on the research objectives and research questions. Lastly, part five is the summary of the whole process of analysis.

4.2 PARTICIPANTS DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

The demographics of the 2 bereaved family members are presented in this section. Their ages ranged from 30-70 years. There were four males and four females from each family, with the Muslim family including three males and one female, and the Christian family including three females and one male. The time since the loss of their loved one ranged from two to ten years.

Table 4.1 Participants' Demographic Profile

Participants demographic							
Name	Age	Religion	Gender	Education	Occupation	Relationship	Cause/year of loss
Jalala	50Yo	Muslim	Male	MSc	Lecturer	Father	Sudden/5yo
Adafila	60Yo	Muslim	Male	HND	Civil servant	Mother	Sudden/4Yo
Bakare	32Yo	Muslim	Male	B.Ed.	Teacher	Father	Sudden/10Yo
Adeola	45Yo	Christian	Female	B.Ed.	Teacher	Husband	Sudden/5Yo
Sunday	35Yo	Christian	Male	HND	Teacher	Mother	Sudden/7Yo
Ayilara	46Yo	Christian	Female	B.Sc.	Civil servant	Husband	Sudden/9Yo
Mope	47Yo	Christian	Female	Diploma	Social worker	Husband	Sudden/9Yo
Bukola	47Yo	Muslim	Female	B.Ed.	Teacher	Mother	Sudden/4Yo

Note: the education qualifications are – Ordinary Diploma (diploma), Higher National Diploma (HND), Bachelor's degree (B.Ed.) Master degree (MSc).

Jalala, is a 50-year-old male-Muslim. He was born and raised in Nigeria. He is a lecturer at one of the state universities in Nigeria. He is married for 22 years and has 4 children. He lost his father five years ago from a sudden death. Jalala is a practicing Muslim and had a good relationship with his late father. He described his relationship as the closest and will forever miss him.

The second participant, Adafila, a 60-year-old male Muslim, was born and raised in Nigeria, Africa. He is a retired civil servant from one of the state local government sectors. He currently lives with his family in the capital of the state. He lives on his retirement fund. He is married for 25 years and has four children. Adafila experienced the sudden death of his mother four years ago, who was 80 years old at the time. The death of his mother resulted in additional responsibilities as he now provides support for of his father and siblings.

The third participant is Bakare, a 32-year-old male Muslim. He was still an undergraduate student and was not married at the time his loss of his father. He was preparing for a promotional exam when his father died. His father died from a sudden death 10 years ago. Bakare expressed a strong desire for his father to have been alive to continue guiding him through life, to witness the birth of his children, and to share in the happiness of his marriage.

Adeola, a 45-year-old widow was the fourth participant. She is a citizen of Nigeria, born and raised in a Christian family in Nigeria. She works as a teacher and is a practicing Catholic. Her husband died suddenly 5 years ago without prior sickness or warnings signs. She was married for 15 years and has 3 children with her late husband. She said she was deeply affected by her loss. She vowed to spend the rest of her life as a widow with her children.

Sunday, is the fifth participant. He is 35 years old. He is a higher national diploma student at a state polytechnic in Nigeria. He was born and brought up in Nigeria from a Christian family. He lost his mother 7 years ago. He is the youngest child. The mother died from a sudden death. Sunday said the death of his mother was a sad and a painful experience for him as she did not live long to bless his wedding and did not enjoy the fruit of her labour. He missed her presence. The mother died as a Catholic and Sunday is a practicing catholic Christian.

The sixth participant, Ayilara, is a widow who lost her husband to sudden death nine years ago at the age of 37; her husband was 46 at the time of his passing. Ayilara is a Christian, born and brought up in Nigeria in a Christian family. She has a higher national diploma; she works at the federal Ministry of Work and Housing in Nigeria. She has three children and currently lives alone with them. Ayilara described her husband's death as leaving a profound sense of emptiness and expressed her intention to remain a widow for the rest of her life..

The seventh participant, Mopelola, is a 47-year-old widow and a practicing Catholic Christian. She works as a non-academic staff member at a university in Nigeria and holds a diploma in Social Work; she had planned to pursue a degree when her husband died suddenly nine years ago. Mopelola has three children and currently

lives with them. She reported that the loss has been extremely challenging and expressed her intention to remain a widow while raising her children.

The eighth participant, Bukola, is a 47-year-old teacher at a public school in Nigeria. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Physical Health Education and was born and raised in a Muslim family in Nigeria. Bukola is a practicing Muslim and lives with her husband and four children. She experienced the sudden death of her mother four years ago and expressed that no one could fill the void left by her mother's absence.

Family Profiles: Participant Demographic Information

Muslim Family 1 (Jalala)

Age: 50

Relationship with the deceased: father

Year of loss: 5years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 70 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 45 years old

Jalala was the second born of 9. He lost his father when he was 45 years old. His father died suddenly with no previous sickness. His father died at the age 70, leaving behind his mother, and 8 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 2 (Adafila)

Age: 60

Relationship with the deceased: Mother

Year of loss: 4years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 80 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 66 years old

Adafila was the second born of 3. He lost his mother when he was 66 years old. His mother died suddenly with no previous sickness at the age 76 leaving behind his father, and 2 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 3 (Bakare)

Age: 32

Relationship with the deceased: father

Year of loss: 10years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 75 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 22 years old

Bakare was the fourth born out of 6. He lost his father when he was 22 years old. His father died suddenly with no previous sickness. His father died at the age 65 leaving behind his mother, and 5 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 4 (Bukola)

Age: 47

Relationship with the deceased: mother

Year of loss: 4years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 64 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 43 years old

Bukola was the only daughter of her mother. She lost her mother when she was 43 years old. Her mother died suddenly with no previous sickness. Her mother died at the age 64.

Christian Family 1 (Adeola)

Age: 45

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 5years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 43 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 40 years old

Adeola is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 40 years old. Her Husband died suddenly after complaining of stomach pain. Her husband was 43 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 2 (Mopeola)

Age: 47

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 9years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 41 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 38 years old

Mopelola is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 38 years old. Her Husband died suddenly after complaining of headache. Her husband was 38 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 3 (Ayilara)

Age: 46 years old

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 9years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 40 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 37 years old

Ayilara is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 37 years old. Her husband died suddenly after complaining of headache. Her husband was 37 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 4 (Sunday)

Age: 35 years old

Relationship with the deceased: mother

Year of loss: 7years old

Age of deceased at the time of death: 50 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 28 years old

Sunday is the last child out of three children. He lost his mother when he was 28 years old. He was in school when they called to tell him his mother died. His mother was 50 years old at the time of her death.

4.3 THE ANALYSIS PROCESS OF THE STUDY

The bereaved participants' grief experiences were coded according to the descriptive terms from the data taken from the interviews. According to Giorgi and Wertz (2005), data analysis involves determining the themes by which data will be labeled, sorted, and compared. The researcher first reviewed each interview transcript thoroughly. The next step involved identifying the patterns, idea, concepts, and category to be coded within the similar shared points. Significant statements and related ideas used by participants that resulted into similar themes were combined. Themes were then derived from the content of each category to capture the essence of each participant's experience and the meaning of their loss within a religious context. To analyze each participants' responses, the researcher used the data one at a time, then organized the generated themes into major common themes across all the participants.

4.4 RQ 1. PARTICIPANTS SHARED GRIEF EXPERIENCE

The grief experiences shared by all participants were categorized into eight themes: loss of connection, religious practices and beliefs, support systems, financial challenges, circumstances of the death, meaning-making, unforgettable experiences, and counselling.

4.4.1 Jalala's Grief Story

Jalala reported that since the death of his father, he had to work twice as hard to support his mother, as the responsibility now fell on him as the firstborn. He described feeling deep sadness and facing a very difficult time coping with the loss. He also expressed the sense of absence whenever he visited his family home, noting that his father's room door is now permanently locked.

“His presence, seeing him alone, gives me joy. I feel relieved to stay with my dad. There is no one I spent most time with when chatting like my dad. I could be with him for hours, we will be laughing, and he will be telling me stories of his own time, and stories about how life is. That's why I say anytime I am with him, we talk for hours and when I'm about to leave, he showered me with prayers but that very day he died he does not want me to go not knowing to me that, that will be our last time together”.

However, he mentioned the role and support received from community, including Imams and Islamic scholars.

“With the help and advice from religious leader such as our Imam, Islamic scholars and religious head in the community, who stood with me and my family in prayers, I was able to accept the loss and focus on life”.

Jalalas' religious practice and beliefs has helped him in accepting the reality of his loss. He said, the role played by the Islamic leaders and the religious rites contributed positively to his grief process. He was, initially in a state of shock, disbelief, adamant and confused. Not wanting to accept the loss, but he eventually accepted the fact that his father was dead for real.

4.4.2 Adafila's Grief Story

Adafila unfulfilled promise to his mothers' wish has affected his ability to accept and adapt to the loss as reflected in the themes from his interview.

He said, *“I became so emotional, I always want to be alone feeling not fulfilled.” I wanted to make it a surprise for her not knowing she have the unforgettable gift for me”*

He said, since his mothers' death, he has felt guilty for not having done the best for his mother before her death. Adafila stated that, it had been his mother's wish to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj) before her passing. He explained that the money he paid for her hajj fee has not been refunded back to him till date and the stress he is going through just to make sure he gets the refund is weighing him down. He explained that he needed money to do good things in the name of his mother, including building a mosque and contributing to charity to help the needy. Adafila said that his mother's death was sudden and despite the financial challenges he faced, his religion played an important role in his grieving process. His mother was a very devoted Muslim in the community, and this has earned her respect and recognition from various Islamic organizations she belongs to. Family members, religious leaders, and imams all supported him during this difficult time.

4.4.3 Bakares' Grief Story

Bakare narrated he was destabilized by the loss of his father and is not able to forget about it. His experience is seen in the themes gathered from his data. Bakare said he wasn't expecting his father's death at that time, neither did he think of it. He said every time he has something important to do which requires a significant figure, it automatically reopens his grief experience to the surface. Sometimes, when the people he looked up to, to be there for him or assist him turns him down, reminds him of his father. Bakare said his father was his role model and cannot be replaced ever. The pain is doubled for him when he got married. He stated that he needed guidance and education on how to navigate marriage, but there was no one to provide it. All of these brings back the memory and the pain of his fathers' absence. His religion has played a vital role in enabling him to accept and cope more effectively with his loss. Bakare believed that death is inevitable, and everyone shall taste it. He said "*Islam teaches us that every man is putting on the garment of death. Death is inevitable, everyone will taste it.*".

4.4.4 Adeolas' Grief Story

Adeola reported that her husbands' death was traumatic and a shattered dream to her. She and the kids spoke with him on the phone the night before his death and he promised to be with them the next day only for her to receive the bad news of his death from his brother the next day. Adeola stated that she misses his companionship, but his death had made her more independent now. She now has more responsibility to care for the kids, provide for their basic needs and ensure their safety and security. Her husband was the breadwinner of the family, he provided, support, direct and advice members of the family when he was alive. She stated that since her husbands' death, there has been poor communication and disunity in the family. Adeola noted that she is a choir member in the church and has participated in so many events in the church. This has helped her accept the loss as church members were all supportive during her loss. She said during his burial *"I remember the pastor said since the time I knew her husband, he was a humble person, friendly, caring and a cheerful giver"*. She said, *"I felt relieved knowing my husband spent a good life from the testimonies people gave"*. His friends also testify to what the pastor has said about him that *"Since I knew him, he was a clam and an easy-going man"*.

4.4.5 Sundays' Grief Story

Sunday described his mothers' death as traumatic. He said he fainted and could not remember anything after he gained his consciousness at the hospital. His friend who was with him at the time he received the news told him to accept that his mother has died and gone for real, only then he believed it was true. Sunday explained how difficult life was without his mother because he said he was his 'mummy's boy' and everybody hated him for that. Sunday said:

"I started wondering how to cope without being laughed at. Because during her lifetime, I am a mummy's boy, I never lack anything even as I am in school. She is always there for me being the last child, I was over pampered, and this has brought a huge pain on me and has really affected me so much."

He explained that the family could not afford an elaborate burial, and his mother was buried three days after all family members had gathered. The mortuary fees for the three-day period were considered high and burdensome, particularly as he was still a student. He also noted that his father had been largely irresponsible, which intensified his sense of hurt and loss. Despite these challenges, his mother had been a generous person, and the community, including the church, provided support. A church member covered the burial expenses, and the pastor, along with church elders, counselled him and his elder sisters, advising them to stay focused in life. The pastor encouraged them to forgive their father and to pray for his guidance.

4.4.6 Ayilara's Grief Story

Ayilara said the death of her husband came as a shock to her because she never thought he would die just like that. She said ' *someone who complained of headache in a minute and the next minutes he is gone* ' She said it was such a sudden and unexpected experience for her. Ayilara said all she could say at that time was, "Thank you Jesus" as she was short of words. She was not crying but yet water was just rolling down her eyes. She said every part of her body was dead. She was emotional and scared. She talked about her fear of the unknown, how to carter for the kids, who will be there for her at her time of need, who to advise her, her loneliness, her conflicts with her brother in-law, abandonment from the family. The support she got was from her church, her siblings, and her mother in-law. Her pastor was fully supportive. She reported that their role played a significant role in her grieving. She said when she could not sleep and feels her husband is always with her talking to her, her pastor moved her into his house where she stayed until she could accept the reality of her loss.

4.4.7 Mopelola's Grief Story

According to Mopelola, the death of her husband was a sad experience, traumatic and painful. She said that she fainted upon hearing that her husband was dead. She said she felt like her life had ended. Mopelola said the night before he died, he complained of headache, and she gave him pain killer, believing it might help. He woke up the following day and was still complaining of it. Therefore, she had to take him to the hospital. At the hospital, few hours later, the Doctor gave her the unforgettable news of her life that her husband was dead. However, with the intervention and support of her pastor and church members, she survived it. Mopelola explained that the role her pastor and the church members played cannot be compared to others. She said they always came to her house to say mass, ensured that she eats, and advised her to rest. She got strength from their support and words of divine.

4.4.8 Bukola's Grief Story

Bukola narrated that the death of her mother was like a burden placed on her as she expresses herself with flattened effect. She stopped going to the family house to see her dad. Going there affects her mental health as it brings back the memory of her mother. She said she could not believe her mother had died at that time. Her mothers' death was so devastating. However, she was able to accept the death with the believe that it was her time and there was nothing she could do to stop her from dying. She said being the only girl child, her mother was her confidant even as she is married. She still feels the pain. The emerged themes from her data supported her statement. She said she feels helpless most of the time especially when she sees her friends talking to their mothers or sharing their mothers' stories. Since her mothers' death, she has reduced the number of times she goes to the family house. She said no one can fill the emptiness when her mother left. She said those who come to console do not choose their words carefully, and some inadvertently cause her more pain through what they say.

This section presents the common themes of the participants' experiences to address the main research question regarding grief experiences. The unique grief stories and participants' profiles provide context for the shared content. The specific thematic content of the shared experiences highlights the specific experiences that appeared most frequently across participants' conversations, as reflected in the verbatim transcripts.

The analysis process involved identifying codes and themes, followed by collapsing or refining them into meaningful themes supported by evidence, using the constant comparative technique. Across all eight participants, the initial analysis generated approximately 64 themes reflecting the grief experiences associated with sudden family loss, revealing recurring ideas, patterns, and categories supported by interview transcripts and observations. These themes were subsequently collapsed into nine overarching themes. The effects of and reactions to sudden loss are presented and discussed within the context of the participants' shared experiences. Therefore, the answers for research questions 2 and research question 3 will be elaborated under the main question on the grief experience.

The main themes identified from the participants' grief experiences are: (1) loss of connection, (2) religious practices and beliefs, (3) support systems, (4) financial challenges, (5) circumstances of the death, (6) unforgettable experiences, (7) family conflict, (8) meaning-making, and (9) counseling. Table 2 presents these nine main themes along with the frequency of their occurrence for each participant.

4.5 RQ 2. THE EFFECTS OF THE LOSS ON THE BEREAVED FAMILY MEMBERS

1. Difficulty concentrating
2. Shift in responsibilities
3. Social effects
4. Financial effects

Loss of connection emerged as a central theme, reflecting the effects of loss as expressed by all participants (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola) from the two religions following the sudden death of their loved ones. The absence of the deceased evoked the feelings of loss, empty, extreme sad, confused, guilt, and many different mixed emotions. Participants also reported difficulties with concentration, the burden of new responsibilities, stigma, and unpreparedness for their new roles.

Jalala highlighted this theme when he described his confusion, troubles and thought of his fathers' death. He said,

“I was confused, I was troubled, and my head was swollen because I couldn't just imagine someone, I spoke with not quite long passed away” “After some hours I start realizing that, so, my dad has gone. That means I won't see him again because he has gone forever”. I was just remembering what we discussed and what he said before we departed earlier. All those things were just coming back to me that, someone I have just spoken with, someone I have just left, someone I have just seen, and someone I have been together with since daybreak. How could it be?” (Bukola)

Adafilas' described his pain as an experience of guilt and not fulfilled. He said,

“I have the plan on sending her to mecca that year before she died which was unknown to her. I wanted to make it a surprise for her not knowing she have the unforgettable gift for me. This really made it difficult for me to face because she usually tells us that the best gift she want from us is to send her to mecca and which I wanted to fulfil before death took her. This really weighed me down. I became so emotional; I always want to be alone feeling not fulfilled. I felt I have not done the best enough for her before she died” “when all our relatives had gathered for us to bury her, and they called me to come closer being her first son and the second born in the family. Then I realized she is dead for real. I did not cry that moment. It was when I got to my house, I burst into crying realizing that I cannot see her again. I no longer have a mother again.” Bakares' experience is similar to Jalala. He said” I saw him in the afternoon, we discuss a lot of things. I was called around evening time to come to the family house that my daddy said I should come and collect the money I requested for. When I got there, I saw many people outside. It was like a film trick. When they broke the news to me that my dad is dead. I was like, this is not real, it's as if they were joking. I saw his body lying on the floor covered up, yet I still can't

believe it, I thought he was sleeping. Someone I saw not quite long in the afternoon has gone forever? (Adafila)

Adafila said losing her husband and having to care for the children alone felt like a shattered dream and future. She said,

“His death is just like a shattered dream, shattered future because we plan to celebrate the kids wedding but suddenly the journey of two became one and the fear of how am I going to raise the children and the fear of the unknown that what will happen to these kids? Are they going to go the way their father left? So all those things were really bothering me. In fact, it took me up to a year before I started eating. (Adafila)

Adeola’s social life and identity in the society was affected. She said,

“It was so challenging for me because most people see it as a stigma, like anyone who comes closer to me will contract it. And also I am a very jovial person but since the death of my husband, I limit my jokes with people so that it will not look like I am not serious or to some women maybe I am trying to snatch their husband. (Adeola)

Sunday described his reaction to his mother’s death, saying,

“I am a mummy’s boy; I never lack anything even as I am in school. She was always there for me being the last child, I was over pampered and this has brought a huge pain on me and has really affected me so much.” (Adeola)

He further explained the adverse effect of his mother’s death.

“I had to drop out of school for the first two years of her death because there was no one to support me. My father do not take part in my education and that was why it was very difficult for me to complete my study and a bit hard for me then.” . (Adeola)

Ayilara described her experience of her husband's death as traumatic and life-threatening. She said,

"It came as a shock to me because I was not expecting his death. Someone that said he is having headache in a minute and the next moment he is dead." I almost died because I do not have friends. It's only me and my husband, if my husband goes out to anywhere, by the time it is 6pm he will be back. So, I almost die. Even when they checked my blood pressure that time it was around 230. So they had to rush some medicine for me to reduce my blood pressure" (Ayilaras)

Mopelola described her emotional pain as an experience of sadness, traumatic and a painful exit. She said,

"I felt so bad. I cannot believe my husband was dead. I was waiting for him to wake up. I thought I was dreaming. But when I woke up, I still see that he is lifeless"and the pain became intense because I never thought he would die that time. We have so many plans together. He has so many dreams to accomplish. My children have no father at a very early age of their life. I no longer have someone I can talk to again. I had to start thinking and acting like a man" (Mopelola)

Bukolas' experience was more to a burden and emptiness. She said,

"Her death affected my health, I felt sick because it was a big shock for me. The news got to me as a shock, so it affected my health, I felt mentally disturbed at times. I couldn't think straight, I was stuck. The thought of her was always in me, her image, the nice time and good time I had shared with her and her motherly advice, her thought in my memory kept occurring. Everything kept coming to me which led to my sickness. It took me sometimes to take off my memory." (Bukola)

4.6 RQ 3. THE SPECIFIC GRIEF RESPONSES OF THE MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

1. Religious practice and belief
2. Family and Social Coping

The religious practices and beliefs of each of the participants appeared in the descriptions of all the participants' grief experiences (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola). This particular theme revealed the coping reactions of the participants starting at time of death until later as they were interviewed. Some of the spiritual copings are discussed and elaborated with the quotes shared by the participants. Some of the moments shared showed how the individual in the families used the religious practice to cope and manage their personal and interpersonal grief reactions as they faced the unexpected loss.

Jalala shared some his Islamic practice like prayers, sadaqah, reciting Quran and other spiritual thoughts after the death of loved one occurred. This finding reinforced the positive roles of religious coping found in earlier studies by Rais (2007, 2016, 2020), which documented similar practices among bereaved Muslims participating in grief and bereavement support groups in Malaysia.

“In Islam, it is not allowed to say bad words when someone passes on. Crying or saying many kinds of words that are very odd is not allowed in Islam. However, we can cry in a normal way but we can't say Allah is bad or question Allah. But that moment Allah took that person from you without any notice, you will feel it and when you feel it you must accept it as the will of Allah and react in moderate. “In Islam if someone dies, we have to bury him within twenty hours. We had Fidau prayer from one to seven days for him and give sadaqah often. We organize prayers and reading of the Quran every Monday and Thursday for him. We ask Allah for the blessings from it to go to the dead person”. “Anytime the memory just comes, I take it as necessary mood for me to offer prayer for him.” (Jalala)

Jalala applied his religious knowledge the minute he realized the death was real that happened his loved one.

“There is nothing I could do to her death. The first thing I said was innalillah wainnailayhi rajihuun. Which means, from Allah we come and to Him we return. Although we can cry but it should be reasonable. Because some people sometimes will be crying and be saying all sorts of bad words to them elves or like asking Allah why such thing has happened. You know, no one can question Allah. Like I said earlier that this world is a temporary place.”(Jalala).

He further explained the regular religious practice done after the death occur to the Muslim families.

“In Islam, when a person dies, his or her body will be buried within twenty-four hours of his death. And In cases where his children are far, or perhaps he died in the night, he can be buried the next day. When my mom died, we buried her that same day she died, and we started cooking for those who come to pay condolence with us. We had her fidau prayer right from the day she died until seven days. Reading quran and having voluntary prayer for her”(Jalala)

Bakare and Bukola shared similar experiences to those of Jalala and Adafila. Their process of accepting the death was guided by Islamic views on death. The teachings of the Quran and the practices of the Prophet (Sunnah) provide Muslims with guidance to foster acceptance of loss. Jalala emphasized that Islamic teachings played a significant role in helping him manage his grief and navigate the grieving process.

“It is stated in the Quran that we should accept loss. Islam teaches us to be prepared for any shortcomings that can happen to us. We should not overact to any loss. Islam Forbid crying, shout and saying bad words when we lose someone. Islam teaches us that every man is putting on the garment of death. Death is inevitable, everyone will taste it. And it is said that form Allah we come and to Him is our return” (Jalala)

The process of funeral seemed to be an obligation that helped the Muslim focused on how to react immediately. Somehow translated to the immediate coping to the sudden loss. Some typical religious practice was observed.

“In Islam, we don’t delay in burying the deceased. The body should be buried within twenty-four hours of death. Right from the first day of his death, we organize prayers for the death and reading of the Quran until seven days of his death.” Bukola “in Islam, we don’t delay in burying the corpse. The corpse should be buried within 24 hours of death. Right from the first day of his death”Jalala)

Jalala shared the view in Islam about acceptance of death.

“In Islam it is believed that if anything happens to us in this world, we should accept it with faith as a will of Allah (Qadar). It is Allah’s way of testing our eeman. That brings us about the sayings “Innalillah Wainna Ilaehi Rojihun” from Allah we come and to Him we will return.” (Jalala)

Similarly, Adeola described that her religious practices and beliefs helped her cope with her pain and confront the reality of her loss. She said,

“In Christianity we do not have any specific way to react to death. But our doctrine believes that after death is the judgment day. We don’t pray for the dead person. The pastor prayed for the living and the entire household. I did not organize a big burial for him. He was buried seven days after his death because we had to wait for other members of the family to arrive. We arranged his burial. The pastor asked people to give testimony of the kind of person he is and the kind of life he lived. He prayed for the living and not for the dead. And we all came back home. The following week, I resumed back to work because I cannot continue to dwell in pain.” (Adeola)

Sunday also added that, *“On the contrary to what the Muslim practice, the Nigerian Christians focus on the forgiveness to those who are left behind not to the deceased. The struggle to cover the cost seemed to be the concern.”*

“In Christianity God is the giver of life and God is the taker. After death is judgment. When a person dies as a Christian, we don’t pray for God to forgive his sins just like in the Muslim faith. We only pray for the family he left behind..... She was buried after ten days. We needed to get money and bury her. We did not give her a befitting burial because that comes with a huge amount of money. Our church members have been supportive. They came around, they supported us with food, clothe and give advice to us. Our pastor visits us throughout our grieving time

to make sure we receive the support that we need. Leaders in the church are also coming to council us.

Mopelola and Ayilara both described similar view on her religious practice and beliefs with regards to praying for the deceased. The Eulogy at the funeral and the good words by friends and relatives became source of strengths to the bereaved. Singing spiritual songs is a religious practice that help bereaved Christian's cope with the grief reactions.

“When he died, I did not expect it, I was just saying thank you Jesus. The pastors came and were counselling me. We buried my husband after forty days. The pastor prayed for me, the children, his mother, and every other people he left behind. Usually, we don't pray for the dead in my religion. People give testimony of the kind of person he was during his lifetime. From his friends and member of the family. Then comes the dust to dust by his family.. Sometimes when I fell his impact, I bend down praying for God to give me the strengthen me and help me through my life.” (Mopelola)

“As a Christian, we don't pray for the dead. We pray for the living and the family he leaves behind. We believe that after death comes judgment. Not like the Muslims used to say that all the good work the dead person did will follow him and that God should forgive his sin. But in our religion, there is no forgiveness. After death comes judgment..... Through prayers, songs of worship, and praise. Anytime I am stressed of sometimes and I want to start crying or thinking about him, I just kneel down and pray. After the prayer, I start singing songs of worship. (Ayilara)

4.7 SOURCES OF SUPPORT AND THE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Having a support system appeared to be highly beneficial during times of grief, as reported by all eight bereaved participants (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola).

Jalala found that community had eased his difficult moments during the death of his wife. Relatives, friends and religious leaders and other community members all contributed in providing both the physical and psycho-emotional support.

“My religion, my immediate family, my wife and children, my work, my commitment, my relationship with others and my conscious about death itself. The help of religious leader such as our Imam, Islamic scholars and religious head in the community really helped me in preparing his janazah (grave) I do not have any prior experience on how to go about his burial. But they were all with me. The imams would tell me what to do, when to do it and what next to do. They were helpful to me. With their sincere support, I was able to accept with the loss and well focus in life’ (Jalala)

On a similar note, Adafila stated that the support he received was helpful, especially while he was in a state of denial. He said,

“My wife, my siblings, my friends, and relatives. And also, the imams who came to console us. Without them I do not know what could have happened to me because, sincerely, I felt disappointed. I felt not fulfilled. I felt guilty. I felt I could have at least told her my plans of sending her to mecca that year. At least I would have been relived if she knew her wish was about to come true. But all those people around me were helpful and this helped me to slowly accept the loss.” (Adafila)

Bakare said that her spouse helped him with her good words of wisdom and was always be there for him.

“My wife, she is a good woman, she encouraged me. She let me know that without my father I can do better. “You can excel in life without your father”. She said, she motivated me, gave me advice, encouraged me and lot more. She stood by me since the beginning of this journey. Also, I would say the support I received from religious leaders who came for the burial was so pleasing to me. They stood in all ways to ensure myself and other members of the family are guided according to Islam. They were so supportive to us” (Bakare)

According to Sunday, the support he got from his mother’s relatives reinforced his belief that the memory of his mother lives on. He said,

“The living God that I serve and my mother’s relative, my siblings and my friend. When my mother died, my mother relatives moved us in with them. They gave us shelter, the feed us and made us feel comfortable with them unlike my fathers’ relatives. In fact, it was one of my mother’s relatives that encouraged me to go back to school and gave me transport fare then when they knew I dropped out of school. They took

care of all of us and made us what we are today. And till date they are still there for us.” (Sunday)

Adeola, said that the church provided her the support in managing her grief.

“My church really helped me during my grief. The pastor, elders from the church and the choir member. You know, I am a member of the choir in church and my participation in so many activities have made all of them helpful to me. They gave good testimony about the life of my husband. I remember the pastor said since the time he knew her husband, he is a humble person, friendly, caring and a cheerful giver. He usually donated to the church, he helps the orphan in the church and the widows. He is dead today, but his good ways will live forever. His friend also gave testimony that ever since he knew my husband, he is a calm person and easy going. I would say in general, his friend, our church, my siblings and relatives were all with me for some time because they cannot leave their work. My sister-in-law, my mom and my sister.” (Adeola)

Ayilara explained that the support she received from her husbands’ friend and some of her husbands’ relatives had been helpful up to the time of the interview. She said, the job she currently holds to provide for her children was obtained through the assistance of one of her husband’s relatives. She received financial help from friends and relative.

“When the children want to resume next session now, some of my husband friends send money to me for new session and my church members, they use to render help also.” She said her experience losing her husband is very hard for her but with the support of this people around her, she was able to move on. She said all the people who attended her husband funeral came because he was a good person during his lifetime and some of them came to console her as well.

For Mopelola, her support system included church members, her pastor, and church elders, whose visits and preaching of the Word of God helped her cope with her emotions and thoughts about the loss. She said,

“When I lost my husband, it was my pastor and elders from the church that firstly came to console me. They preach the word of God to me, counselled me, and stayed with me for several days. They really stood by me. They gave me the support I needed at that time. (Mopelola)

Bukola said she is grateful for the support systems she received from her immediate family. She said,

“I was really affected to the point of being admitted at the hospital. The people I have with me then was my immediate family member. My husband and my children were always near me, praying for me and wishing me well. I feel good having them around me and I was really consoled”. (Bukola)

4.8 SUMMARIES OF THE THEMES FROM THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Financial challenge also appeared to be the shared major theme shared by all participants (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola). This financial challenge placed additional burden to the family, as they need to gather funds to prepare and make arrangement for the burial, including food and drinks. Also, due to the unexpected nature of the deaths, families also had to manage debts owed by the deceased to creditors.

Regarding financial challenges, Jalala reflected on the difficulties his family faced due to the unexpected nature of the death. They had to quickly gather funds to prepare food for visitors, arrange chairs and tents, and settle debts owed by the deceased. Jalala said,

“The one thing I would say was very challenging for me was that his death came suddenly without us being prepared. I do not have any money with me when he died because we need to make preparation and arrangement on how he is going to be buried and all this involves money. Jalala explained that even after the death of his father there is shift in roles and responsibility for him as he has to provide for the need of his mother and his younger siblings”.(Jalala)

Adafila explained that, as the first son, all financial responsibilities now fall on him. He said,

“My father is old and is no more working. All the financial expenses are on me. I have to provide for the food and drinks people will eat until the last day of the fidau prayer.” Subsequently, I must pay her debt if she is owing anyone. I already paid for her hajj, but the agency I paid to did not refund my money when I needed it most. I never thought she would die then as I did not have money in preparation for her death.

Bakare described his financial challenges, saying,

“What I remembered first when my father died was, where am I going to get money to finance myself. How do I get money to move on with my life, how do I cope with life without my father being around me? Now that he is dead how do I contribute to his funeral? No matter how the death is, the dead had to be buried. (Bakare)

Adeola explained that her family initially covered the financial costs of her husband’s funeral (fidau). However, after his death, the financial burden shifted to her, and hoped that families understand the feelings of the bereaved. She said,

“My mother-in-law was always asking me for money to buy stuffs, you know when people come around they give me money. So, if they want to buy anything, it is from me they will ask from” and “I have much task on me to attend to. Such as paying the kid’s school fees, feeding them, clothing them, providing their basic needs. You know, the responsibility of two people suddenly became one.”

Sunday highlighted the financial challenges surrounding his mother’s death when they could not afford the mortuary fees to keep her body until other family members arrived. He said,

“Embalming and keeping corpse in the mortuary can take days, weeks, and even some takes months. But in the case of my mother, we did not embalm her, because it involved money and we don’t have money. So, we went on doing her burial when other members of the family have arrived. The cost for the burial also is much but they conducted the funeral in a small way after all members of the family were present. (Sunday)

Ayilara confirmed that financial challenges were her primary challenge following the death of her husband.

“You know, husband is the one that takes responsibilities of the family. All the responsibilities shifted to me immediately just ten days after his death. I had to rush my last baby to the hospital on emergency which I so much needed money and support then.” I go to the clinic every time. It was very hard for me to get money” (Avilara)

For Mopelola, her financial challenge was when she needed money to provide for her children’s basic needs.

“Sometimes I go a whole week without money” “I remembered after the death of my husband, my son got admission into the university and needed help, but there was no one I could turn to for financial help” if my husband was alive, he would have helped his son out.” (Mapelola)

Bukola narrated that she sometimes borrowed money from her mother when she ran out of funds. She said, *“The day she died, I was planning to see if I could borrow money from her till the month end. Unfortunately, I could not get the money I needed from other person.”* He added, *“When you lose someone meaningful and important in your life, that is when you know the real people you are surrounded with.”*

Circumstance of the Death

The circumstance of the death emerged as a theme across all participants (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Sunday, Adeola, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola) and were reflected in their experience. From Jalala experience, the circumstance of the death was reflected when he said,

“I was with him till evening before I left for my home. On getting home 30min after departure, I had a call, a sudden call as well just as the incident was sudden too, that my dad is late, I should come back and see him, and the call went off. The person that called was not even any of my siblings, he was my cousin. He called me and said, "Your dad is late, come back on time and see him". I got there and for real he was dead; it was unbelievable that someone I was with since morning died just few minutes I left his place. Adafila circumstance of the death appeared where he said “I received an urgent call from my father that my mother is vomiting, I should come quickly so that we can take my mother to the hospital. I got there and we quickly rushed her to the hospital. But before we arrived at the hospital, she had already stopped breathing.” We had to return her back home dead. It was a very sad day for me. (Jalala)

Bakare described the circumstance of the death by saying,

“I saw him in the afternoon, we discuss a lot of things, even then I was about to register my NECO and NABTEB to further my education to university level, so he promised me to come back that same day for the registration fee after Maghrib prayer. Unfortunately, he died around that Mahgrib time. It was such a sad experience for me.”

Adeola said, the circumstance of the death was unbelievable to her. She said.

“He went for a business trip and someone that did not fall sick, we just heard about his death. The night prior to his death we spoke till around 10:30pm and that was February 13th, he even told his children that he will be coming for valentine being the next day February 14th. I was expecting his call in the morning as usual, but he didn't call, so I called, but his phone was ringing with no response, then I called his brother he went with and the brother just broke the news to me that my husband is dead.’ It was just unbelievable for me.” (Adeola)

Sunday said,

“I was in school when I received the death of my mother through a text message telling me my mother is death. It came as a big shock to me, and I fainted.”

The circumstance of the death is explained by Ayilara that,

“When he came back from work that day, he complained of headache, and I gave him medicine, but the headache did not stop so I had to rush him to the hospital on emergency. Getting to the hospital, the doctor told me to go out knowing already my husband was dead but could not tell me because I just put to bed and my child was just three months old. He called my pastor and told me and they tricky told me to go back home to get money for his treatment. It was such an unexpected experience for me.” (Ayilara)

Mopelola circumstance of the death was explained where she said I fainted when the doctor told me he is dead.

“I woke up and found myself wet with water. I cannot believe my husband was dead. Someone I took the hospital myself is dead. It was a very strange moment for me.” (Mapeola)

Bukola reflected the circumstance of the death when she said.

“I never expected her death....it was like a heavy load or a burden on me because she was not sick. I was called to come down the family house, I got there and found her gasping for breath and the next minute she is dead. I never thought she would die that moment.” (Bukola)

Unforgettable Experience

The theme unforgettable experience appeared across all eight participants (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Sunday, Adeola, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola) in their descriptions of their grief. The interview data revealed that the death of a loved one leaves a profound void in the hearts of the survivors—one that cannot be replaced—and imposes an enduring burden on bereaved families and individuals. Jalala narrated that he had spent more time with his father than anyone else, and the absence of those moments remains his most painful and unforgettable experience; *“There is no other person that can give me a listening ear like my father”*.

Adafila said,

“What I cannot forget about my mother was her wish to go for hajj. I have registered her name and I have paid for it not knowing to her just to make it a surprise, but she died unexpectedly. This I can never forget.” (Adafila)

Bakare described his unforgettable experience when he said,

“My father was my mentor, my role model, and my support system. I have sought for help from people who promise to be there for me after my fathers’ death but they did not fulfil it. My father was always there for me no matter what”

Adeola described her unforgettable experience thriving through the challenges of raising her children as a single mother. She said, *“His is death is just like a shattered dream, a shattered future because we plan to celebrate the kids wedding but suddenly the journey of two became one.*

Sunday said *“my fathers’ relatives rejected us. It was my mothers’ relatives that stood with us throughout our grieving time. You know I used to be a mummy’s’ boy. But the death of my mother has made me more focus hard working which I cannot forget in my life. Now I am successful, but I have no mother I can spend on.”*

The unforgettable experience for Ayilara is *“there are some things that husband used to do to his wife, and you know the husband is the one that takes responsibility of everything. When I was single, I use to say I cannot share responsibilities with a man, so when it happened, all the responsibilities and caring is now on me.”*

Mopelola narrated that her children did not get the father mentorship she wished for. It takes the grace of God for a woman to single handedly bring up a child these days. *“I always wish my husband was here with me just for the sake of the children. But I cannot question the work of God.”*

On the same theme, Bukola narrated her unforgettable experience, explaining that as the only daughter among her siblings, the loss of her mother in her life really affected her as there is no one she can turn to that will be like her mother to her.

“When my mother died, what came to my mind was, who will be there for me when am down to console me and who will be there for me to confide with when I have any issue burning me or any issue that is hurting me because she has been my advisor, my mentor, my guardian angel since I was young till then, even when I was married she has been there for me. So, when I lost her I felt like a kind of emptiness in me that who am I going to confide in?” (Bukola)

Family Conflict

Family conflict as a major theme was described by four of the participants; Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara and Mopelola. Adeola explained her family conflict.

“As I struggle to grieve in peace my mother in law and my brother in law were my greatest problem. But I conquered them by the support I got from my mother and my siblings.” Her emotional pain was intensified by the attitude and the conflict from her in laws. (Adeola)

She further added,

“My relationship with my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law was disunited, and everyone maintained their ways. My mother-in-law was always asking me for money to buy stuffs, you know when people come around, they give me money, so if they want to buy anything, it is from me they will ask from. So, when my mother came, she said they should relieve me of what I am going through. So, my mother-in-law did not help at all. And also, my brother-in-law was a suspect to the death of my husband. So seeing him around me was a burden for me because he is the one using my husband’s phone and also putting on his clothes.” (Adeola)

As for Sunday, the conflict arose with his father and his father's relatives due to his father's irresponsibility and alcoholism. Therefore, his relatives denied them the support and shelter he needed when his mother died. The experience of denial from the relatives and the irresponsibility attitude of their father was a major source of pain to him.

Ayilara described her family conflict,

“My husband elder brother was not helpful at all. He does not care about the children welfare. He is in possession of my husbands' will. All the rite of my husband that I am supposed to use in taking care of my children up till now, he did not release it and anytime we go to meet him, he will say he is not around. If I call him he will not answer his call” (Ayilara)

In the case of Mopelola, conflict arose from cultural expectations when they asked her to remarry her husband's younger brother and she denied. All members of the family distanced themselves from her. And her brother-in-law spread news around that she killed her husband which led to a big conflict and disunity in the family.

Meaning making

The theme meaning making was identified in the narratives of four bereaved participants (Jalala, Ayilara, Mopeola and Bukola). Regarding Jalala's cognitive reactions to his father's death, he said,

“He died when every one of his children were around. He died when everyone could come to pay farewell, he died when everybody was shocked and was really terrified and could even signifies or recognize his presence while alive.” (Ayilara)

Similarly, Ayilara came to accept her loss by reflecting on and accommodating the experiences of others who had faced similar losses.

“I have a friend that became wayward after the death of her husband. Because the husband was bedridden before he died. So from her experience I was able to accept the reality of my loss”. (Ailara)

Mopelola said *“if he was sick or bed ridden for a long time that we need to spend so much money on him, maybe I would be praying for him to die. Or if he was walking on the street as a mad man, that would have been a big shame on me. I thank God for life because since after his death, nothing happened to me and the children.”*

Bukola said *“he lived a positive life. I pray to Almighty Allah to help me take to her footsteps because she was a very good woman who if I take to her steps, I will be proud and happy.*

Counseling Support

Counseling appeared as a major theme in all of the eight bereaved participants' description and experiences of their grief (Jalala, Adafila, Bakare, Adeola, Sunday, Ayilara, Mopelola and Bukola). Although they did not receive support from professional counselors, they sought guidance from religious leaders and individuals with similar experiences. Jalala said.

“It is very important to get professional help. I seek professional help from Islamic scholars for counselling whenever I'm in a confused mood. So that I would be able to clarify some ordeals in my mind and my state of mood. They based everything on Islamic jurisprudent. (Jalala)

Adafila described his experience with counseling when he said, *“Actually, it is important to get counseling when someone is bereaved to put in check some reactions to the loss and not to affect the health functioning.”*

Bakare commented on counselling, saying,

“Yes I got counselling help. When my father died, his death caused trauma to me and my siblings, we could not move away from the shock of his sudden death. A counsellor and our family doctor came had to talk to us, counseled us and gave us some ways on how we can gradually move out of the shock. (Bakare)

Adeola stated that the availability and support of her pastor her helped managed the grieving process.

“Yes I got counselling help from my pastors, elders in the church and from others who have had similar experience.” Sundays responded that “I did not get professional help but it is the role of the pastor in their church to counsel the bereaved person and the family.” (Adeola)

Ayilara recognized the need for counselling even though she did not get a professional counselling help and had never attended any counselling session. She found that counselling help with the experiences and expertise shared.

“I got counselled from my Pastor and some elderly people that have the kind of experience and some people that have same experience that have raised their children alone. “They counselled me based on their own experience. It is important to get counselling because it helps to calm the emotions and feelings of the family. As a professional with experience, their advice can be followed not to go astray” (Avilara)

Counseling to Mopelola is very important as she finds it help in guiding her back on track during her grieving process.

“Yes I got counselling help from my pastor and those that have passed through my shoes because I do not know how to move on in life without my husband. So it helps me to redirect my steps and guide me on the path to follow and the path not to follow’.(Mapelola)

Bukola provided very good testimony on the needs for counseling.

“Yes, I got counseled from Islamic scholars when I was sick and admitted at the hospital. They were there for me until I am much better. They advised me on how to move on and take things easy with myself. The sheikhs were aware of my health after the death of my mother, and they knew it was as a result of the loss. That is why they came around for me. Honestly, I see counseling to be very important because the pain that comes after the loss cannot be quantified.”

Table 4.2 Participants’ Major Themes on the Grief Experiences

Main themes	Total themes	Jalala 8	Adafila 7	Bakare 7	Adeola 8	Sunday 8	Ayilara 9	Mopelola 9	Bukola 8
1.Loss of Connection	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
2.Religious Practice	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
3.Support System	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
4.Financial Challenge	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
5.Circumstance of the Death	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
6.Unforgettable Experience	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
7.Family Conflict	4				*	*	*	*	*
8.Meaning Making	4	*					*	*	*
9.Counseling	8	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

4.9 INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS USING THE MAIN THEMES

This study identified nine major themes in response to the research questions. The research questions are; (1) what shared grief experience are shared by bereaved Nigeria families of different religion (Islam & Christian), (2) How are family members affected by the sudden death of their loved one? (3) What are the cultural specific grief reactions of family members, Christian and Islamic background in Nigeria react to the sudden death of their loved ones, and (4) How do their cultural and religious beliefs and practices contribute to their coping in managing the grief?

4.9.1 Bereaved Families Shared Grief Experiences

In response to the first research question on the grief experiences shared by bereaved Nigerian families of different religions (Islam and Christianity), nine major themes were identified: loss of connection, religious practice, support systems, financial challenges, circumstances of the death, unforgettable experiences, family conflict, meaning making, and counselling.

Loss of connections was the most frequently reported theme across all eight participants. They admitted the shift and the new challenges in their roles, identities, and responsibilities as a result of the loss of connection with their loved one. Participants described this loss as shocking, confusing, and frightening. For example, Jalala explained that since his father's death, he has had to work extra hard to support his siblings and provide for his widowed mother, stating "now that my father is late, I have to work extra hard for my immediate family, my siblings and my mom". On the other hand, Adeola and Ayilara were scared of the unknown and felt as though their world had collapsed without their husbands.

Religious practice was another major theme expressed by all of the eight participants. Their religious belief triggered their emotional experience consciously and unconsciously to the loss of their connection. Both Islam and Christianity discourage uttering negative words or questioning divine will, which influenced how participants managed their grief. For example, Adafila had paid and completed all

necessary arrangement for his mothers' hajj (holy pilgrimage) but she died unexpectedly. His plan for his mother to complete one of the five pillars of Islam shattered, he could not question God and instead had to accept the loss with faith despite the pain. On the other hand, Ayilara had never expected to share responsibilities with her husband. But when her husband died, she could not ask questions nor judge God for the loss of her husband. She accepted her loss and all she could say that moment was "thank you Jesus".

Support systems emerged as a major theme for all of the eight participants. Family members, communities and religious head supported them and helped relive their worries. For example, Bukola said the help from her family and religious leader helped reduced her pressure from her experience after she fainted. Friends and relatives helped her in cooking and arranging chairs for people to sit. In contrast, Sunday's experience was marked by a lack of support from his father's relatives, who instead apportioned blame to the deceased, intensifying his grief.

Sunday said, the support from church and community was important. Bukola said she was devastated and shattered, she fainted and was in denial, but the support of religious head, and her immediate family members played a vital role in healing. Mopelola recalled that the support she received from her husband relatives and her church members was encouraging. Adeola was grateful to her small Christian family for their support.

Financial challenge is another strong major theme impacted eight of the participants. Funeral preparations, including cooking, burial arrangements, and related expenses, placed significant financial pressure on the families. Four of the Christian participants noted that the cost of keeping the deceased in the hospital mortuary was exorbitant, limiting the time they could leave the body before burial. As for the Muslims' their corpse is to be buried within 24 hours of the dead. Ayilara highlighted that a major source of stress for bereaved families was the pressure of arranging the corpse and funeral in a way that allowed people to gather for a proper ceremony, adding to their overall burden. She said,

“Our burial is different from the Muslism that is done within 24 hours of the death. We have to look for money to first keep the corpse in mortuary which is really not necessary. I will like the community and churches to look into this”. (Avilira)

Sunday said, his mother was buried three days after her death as they could not afford money for her embalming and big burial.

Circumstance of the death was a major theme that impacted eight participants shared grieve experience. The circumstance of the death impacted the acceptance of the loss for the bereaved families. Participants explained that they had difficulty accepting and adjusting to their loss due to the circumstance of the death being a sudden death. no sickness, no warning or sign. For example, Bakare experience was intense as he just left his fathers’ place on a promise that he should come back that same day at night for the morning he requested for. He said he was shocked when he got to their main house only to find out that his father is dead. He was shocked and in disbelief. Also, Bukolas’ loss of her mother was very painful, sudden and difficult for her to believe. Bukola said her loss was a complete shock and will take a long time for her to completely recover. Jalala was also in disbelief and could not imagine someone he had just left was now dead. Due to the circumstance of the death, Jalala could not hold back his tears.

Another major theme, Unforgettable Experience, emerged for all eight participants, reflecting how memories and events following the loss shaped their grieving process. For example, Bukola said, “What is important is how my mother lived her life. She left behind a good example for me and my siblings to emulate. She was a very religious woman everyone would want to be like” I am happy for her life well spent, it worth emulating.” Adeola said “I was encouraged with the words, the testimonies, and what people shared about his life, and commitment.” Ayilara said, “The people from his community requested to bury him in his hometown as a sign of respect and appreciation of the kind of person he was.” She said, “My husband is a kind person, he always participated in anything they do in their home village and he is loved by everyone for his generosity. Though after his death, our last born lost her memory and this is a very sad memory for me.”

Family Conflict emerged as a theme for four of the eight participants. The participants described how disagreements and tensions within the family added to their stress while they were already coping with the loss. For example, Sunday said that the actions of his father's relatives worsened the situation for him and his sisters. The bad relationship they had with their mother combined with their father's irresponsibility, worsened the situation for them after the death of their mother. They were thrown out and was not given shelter. They struggled to find a place to live as they were denied the love they needed from them. He said they were labelled as spoilt children. As for Adeola, the rivalry arose between her mother-in-law, her immediate brother-in-law, and the suspicion about the sudden death of her husband. Their lack of empathy was another burden to her grieving experience. The brother-in-law took possession of all her husbands' phone, his clothes and ATM cards.

Ayilara experienced intense distress due to the hostile treatment from her brother-in-law. She said, "My child was sick ten days after my husbands' death but my brother-in-law with drawled from us and told me not to call him for anything. I called him because he is in possession of my husband share of their fathers' property." For Mopelola, she was accused of being responsible for the death of her husband because she did not call to tell them immediately as she was rushing her husband to the hospital but only called after he is death. Due to the allegation, the family was divided, as some of the family distanced themselves from her, while some disagreed with the allegation.

4.9.2 Effect of the Loss on Bereaved Families

For the second research question, which explored how family members were affected by the sudden death of their loved ones, six major themes emerged: loss of connection, support systems, financial challenges, circumstances of the death, unforgettable experiences, and family conflict. Among these, loss of connection was the most frequently occurring theme across the eight participants. Participants reported that, for them, after the death of their loved one, they suffered a lot and faced many challenges which affected their grieving process. The loss of the connection affected their health, sleep pattern, created fear in them, psychological imbalance, and

social interactions. For example, Jalala shared, “I developed a high blood pressure from the shock and the added responsibility after the death of my father”. Similarly, Adeola reflected on her social withdrawal, stating, “I am a social person before, but after my husband death I became an introvert because of the fear of the unknown. I became addicted to taking sedatives to make me sleep at night till date.” Mopelola also described the emotional impact of the loss, noting, “Whenever I am sick, there is no one to take care of me. The kids can only say sorry but cannot give me the care and love I needed that moment.”

Another major theme that emerged from the participants is support system. Religious leaders, family members, and community members provided both emotional and practical support to the bereaved. They offered guidance, comfort, and helped ensure the participants did not overreact to their grief. The friends and community helped in welcoming those who came to pay condolence with them, sitting them down, and preparing food for the bereaved family members. The support received from people around them was important to them. Ayilara recalled that, she had to leave her apartment and moved in with her pastor when she was full of fear and could not sleep at night. Bukola said she fainted when she heard of her mothers’ death, but with the support of her husband and her imam, she was able to accept the loss. At first, she was in denial, she could not accept the reality of the loss. Bakare said “My fiancée played a major role in making me to adjust to the loss. I felt encouraged by her words and moral support.” Similarly, Adafila recalled the support he received from his friends and community as encouraging.

Another major theme identified was financial challenge, which affected eight participants. The death of a loved one—whether sudden or anticipated—involves significant financial obligations, including burial arrangements and associated ceremonies. Participant expressed different forms of financial challenge after the death, such as settling debts left by the deceased, covering funeral preparations, and managing their own financial constraints. Adafila said “I had already paid for all the expenses needed for her to travel for hajj (Holy pilgrimage) which was high. It made me run out of money the moment she died. This puts a lot of burden on me as I need to quickly get money to arrange for her burial.”

The circumstance of the death was another theme that identified from the response of the eight participants. They expressed that the suddenness of the death was something they never planned nor expected which really affected their grieving process. For example, three of the participants, Mopelola, Bukola and Sunday fainted upon hearing the news of their loss. They woke up and was still in shock and disbelief. Sunday said, “I dropped out of school as an effect of my mothers’ death. My father is not a responsible father. My mother is the one responsible for my education.” The unexpectedness of the loss triggered their feelings and caused them more pain. Ayilara explained that she was a full-time housewife before the death of her husband, but after his death, she started working. However, according to Adafila, he said, “While I was planning to fulfil her wish of hajj, the biggest and the most shocking experience of my life came in, her death.” Also, Jalala recalled his father did not want him to leave when left his place. He said “When I told him I was going back to my apartment that day, he went inside his room and did not want to come out. I had to go inside his room and forced him out to escort me. I never knew he was at the verge of death.” thirty minutes after I left his place, I received a strange call from my cousin that I should rush back that my father is dead.”

Unforgettable experience emerged as another major theme across all eight participants, who reported being profoundly affected by the memories of their deceased loved ones. For example, Adafila described his pain as intensified: the unresolved issue of the refund for his mother’s Hajj payment, combined with his inability to fulfill her wish before her death, remains an unforgettable experience in his life. Bakare said people’s empty promises affected him so much as he had expected support that never came. He said” Whenever I need assistance from people and they did not bother to help me, reminds me the role my father would play if he was alive.” Being the only daughter among her siblings and not having a role model had a significant effect on Bukolas’ experience. She stopped going to the family house where her mother was staying before her death, and her children also no more go for holidays. The thought of her mother comes most whenever she is facing marital challenges.

Family conflict emerged as a major theme for four of the eight participants. Dealing with families and the treatment they got from them while trying to adjust to the pain of their loss and their grieving process was stressful. For example, Sunday said, “I cannot believe that even at my mothers’ burial my fathers’ relatives were fighting with us claiming that our mother spoilt us and as such they did not participate in her burial and other ritual rite. We were isolated and sent out of the family. None of them gave us the love we needed. We struggle for shelter.” Similarly, Adeola shared, “My brother-in-law started wearing my husbands’ clothes the next day after burial. His phones and car keys were all with him. While I was grieving, I was struggling on how to get my husbands’ things. My mother-in-law too was always requesting for money from me not until my mother intervened and stopped them from acting wicked with. She told them to give me time to mourn my husband.”

For Ayilara, her brother-in-law did not help her grieving process at all but rather affected it in a negative way. Her brother-in-law made things worse for her when he refused to give her husbands’ property to her to help her take care of the children. She said, “When my last baby was sick, I called my brother-in-law to seek for his assistance and to ask for my husbands’ belongings that are in his possession, but he said to me to never call his number again. He said since I have started working, my salary should be enough for me, none of the family care about the children and I like they use to do when my husband was alive.” Mopelola said, “They wanted me to remarry to one of the family members so that he can be taking care of me and my children. I refused to accept the offer and that is where they began waging war against me that I want to be fornicating around that is why I rejected the offer. I rejected the offer because they were only after my husbands’ property.”

4.9.3 Bereaved families Culturally specific grief reactions (Christian and Muslim)

The third research question addressed the culturally specific grief reactions of family members from Christian and Islamic backgrounds in Nigeria following the sudden loss of their loved ones. Two major themes emerged: religious practice and meaning making. For all the eight participants, religious practice provided the context and structure for the bereaved families to confront the reality of death, to encourage their

grief expression and to help through their grieving transition process. The participants acknowledged that their religious practice provides them the avenue to express and share their feelings and thoughts without being judged. The participants reported that the presence of religious leaders such as the pastors and imams helped them in managing their emotions, channelling their thoughts and feelings rightly, and provided directions where they seem to be confused or stressed about. For example, Ayilara said, “At first, I thought the world has come to an end for me. I did not know where to start from, but my pastors came around and prayed with me.” They took turns in staying with her throughout the grieving and mourning process until she could readjust to her new situation. Jalala also said, “I never had experience of death and how the arrangement for fidau looks like, but with the help of our Imam, my fathers’ burial was in place.” She said her church members and pastors never left her place. Bukola said, “The burden and sadness that comes with losing a loved one cannot be described. It takes the will of Allah for a person to be strong during the grieving stage.” She said, “I fainted upon hearing the news of my mothers’ death, but with the help of our imam, I could manage and control my feelings. One has to bear in mind that from Allah we come and to Him is our return.”

Another major theme identified in the bereaved participants’ culturally specific grief reactions was meaning making. Participants reported that their religious beliefs provided frameworks to interpret the context of death, offering explanations and meaning that shaped their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours. Their religious practices and cultural value helped the bereaved to take time and effort to face the reality of their loss and find meaning in their loss. For example, Bukola accepted and adapted to the sudden death of her mother by connecting her loss to a broader Islamic perspective on life and death. She said, “My mother was a pious and a religious woman that everyone would love to emulate. She has done her part in this world, I have to try on my own part too.” Mopelola said, “All I do is to take consolation, because what if he had run mad and was walking naked around the street what would I have done.” As for Jalala, he believed his father lived a good life and left behind pious children. He was convinced that Allah will be merciful with him based on his life spent as many people bear witness to.

4.9.4 Bereaved Families Coping Ways in Managing the Grief

The final research question—how cultural and religious beliefs and practices contributed to coping in managing grief—revealed four major themes: religious practice, support system, meaning making, and counseling. The theme of religious belief was emphasized by all eight participants. They described their grieving process as a time of rebuilding and restoring their religious beliefs. They reported that the words of God and constant religious talks from religious leaders has really helped and brought hope to their life. They explained that the remembrance of God when feeling emotional or mentally stressed, helped them in managing their grief well. They acknowledged the need for a constant reminder of their faith and belief. Neglecting their faith, they noted, could intensify hardship and make it difficult to understand the purpose of their loss. For example, Ayilara said, prayers and singing songs of praise helped her to cope better in managing her grief. She said “Sometimes when I feel like crying, I bend down on my knees to pray, and I sing songs of worship. Adeola said, “I am not use to the work of God before, but I am now continuing in serving God.” Jalala also said, “In the remembrance of Allah do heart find rest. The remembrance of Allah has comforted his heart.”

The second major theme, support system, was highlighted by all eight participants. They emphasized that the assistance they received from immediate family members, friends, and the wider community was crucial in helping them cope with their grief. Adafila believed that the support from his friends and wife enabled him to manage through his thoughts and feelings giving him the opportunity to think positively and constructively. Bukola said, “My immediate Family and my extended families were more supportive.” Also, Jalala acknowledged the help form his community, his imam and some Islamic scholars to be helpful. He said, “I do not have experience on how to arrange for my father’s burial, but the Islamic scholars and imam helped me in planning it.”

The third major theme, meaning-making, was highlighted by four participants, who reported that reflecting on the life of their loved ones, the suddenness of the death, and the broader meaning of life helped them manage their grief and find purpose in their loss. For example, Mopelola believed that it would have been a shameful life if he had run mad and was waking naked round the street while people point fingers at her as the wife of the mad man. Bukola said, “It is not easy to be pious in this our present world. I am happy for her life well spent as a pious woman, she has done her part, I pray I can be like her.” Jalala said, “I am happy he left pious children behind that can send prayers for him.”

Counselling emerged as the fourth major theme in response to the final research question. All eight participants described counselling as a crucial process for restoring their broken bonds with loved ones and reconnecting with life. Although the counselling they received was primarily provided by religious leaders, community members, peers with similar experiences, and family elders, participants reported that these interventions offered significant relief during their grieving process. However, the need for additional counselling services to address both the psychological and physical effects of bereavement. Also, participants reported that, at the end of burial and funerals, there were no follow up services for bereaved families and individuals. For example, Ayilara recommended counselling for bereaved families and individuals. She said the support provided for her by her pastor who requested her to move in with host families helped her during her grieving process and her transition period. She said, “I told my pastor that I hear my husband knocking on the door at night, but he sees it in a spiritual way and told me it’s not my husband.” In another example, Bakare said, “Many people talked to me, made empty promises to me, promised me heaven on earth and assured me they would be there for me, but unfortunately after my fathers’ death there was no one to help me when I needed them.” Sunday said there should be need for visitation to bereaved families to console and to encourage them. He said, “If my dad had gotten a proper counselling, he might not have been an addicted drunkard after my mothers’ death.”

4.10 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER 4

This chapter presented the findings on sudden death and the grief experiences of Nigerian Muslim and Christian families following the loss of a loved one. The participants' responses were analyzed through coding and categorization of themes. From the analysis, a total of 64 themes were initially derived, which were subsequently reduced to 9 major themes through cross analysis. Among these, family conflict and meaning making was reported to be the less dominating themes in their grieving process and transitioning. Other themes that impacted the bereaved family grieving experiences included loss of connection, religious practice, support systems, financial challenge, circumstance of the death and counselling. Collectively, these nine major themes addressed the four research questions by highlighting the shared grief experiences of bereaved families, the effects of sudden loss on family members, the culturally specific grief reactions among Muslim and Christian participants, and the coping strategies employed by families in managing their grief.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATION AND SUMMARY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a discussion of the study findings in relation to relevant literature. It also addresses the limitations of the study, provides suggestions for future research, and concludes the chapter.

Through cross-analysis of the interview data, a total of 64 initial codes were identified, which were subsequently reduced to nine major themes: (1) loss of connection, (2) religious practice, (3) support systems, (4) financial challenge, (5) circumstance of the death, (6) unforgettable experience, (7) family conflict, (8) meaning making, and (9) counseling. These nine major themes were used to address the four research questions guiding this study.

The first research question explored the shared grief experiences of bereaved Nigerian families from different religions (Islam and Christianity). Seven of the nine major themes, which are loss of connection, religious practice, support systems, financial challenge, circumstance of the death, unforgettable experience, and family conflict, emerged as reflective of participants' shared experiences.

The second research question focused on the effects of the sudden loss on bereaved family members. Six major themes, namely loss of connection, support systems, financial challenge, circumstance of the death, unforgettable experience, and family conflict, highlighted the various ways the participants were affected emotionally, socially, and practically following the death of their loved ones.

The third research question examined culturally specific grief reactions of Christian and Muslim bereaved families. Two themes, which are religious practice and meaning making, emerged as central to understanding how cultural and religious values shaped participants' emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses to sudden loss.

Finally, the fourth research question explored the coping strategies employed by bereaved families to manage their grief. Four themes of religious practice, support systems, meaning making, and counselling, were identified as key mechanisms for coping and adjusting to the loss.

Two themes, namely religious practice and support systems, overlapped across three research questions: shared grief experiences, culturally specific grief reactions, and coping strategies. This highlights the significant role of faith and social support in shaping grief experiences, mediating emotional responses, and facilitating adaptation in the bereavement process.

The bereaved families who participated in this study highlighted that the circumstances surrounding the loss, such as loss of connection, religious practice, support systems, financial challenges, the nature of the death, unforgettable experiences, and family conflict, which align with the conceptualization of grief proposed by Stroebe (2017). The loss of a significant figure as pointed out by the participants was a disruptive experience with psychological, physical, and spiritual components. This supports the definition of grief by Stroebe (2017) as an emotional reaction to the loss of a relationship through death, which psychologically and physically affects different parts. Bereaved participants faced challenges in their identity, roles and their responsibilities. For instance, Adeola described that the death of her husband created additional responsibilities as a mother, requiring her to care for herself and her children. Similarly, Ayilara reported that the death of her husband necessitated her entry into the workforce to provide for her family's well-being. Bukola expressed that the loss of her mother profoundly diminished her happiness and sense of emotional stability. Following Bowlby's (1980) theoretical idea, the findings from this study agreed that grief is a reaction to the separation and is rooted in human affectionate bonding following a long interactions and reciprocal relationships. The attachment theory by Bowlby (1998) highlights the link between the need that is met in human connection and the grief reactions that follows the loss of the connection. In this context, grieving is understood as a process and a reaction to the loss of an attachment figure, with consequences that affect emotional, cognitive, and social functioning.

The bereaved families in this study were able to accommodate and face the reality of their loss through the support they received in the time of their sudden loss and grief experiences. Also, the loss of connection was a consequence to the participants' experience of their loss. The support they received from family members and their religious leader such as imams and pastors helped to relieve their stress and serve as assistance to them. For example, Jalala said the death of his father was sudden and unexpected because just 30 minutes after he left his fathers' place, he received the shocking news of his death. However, the support he received from his imam, his wife and friends, helped him to adjust to the sudden and unexpected changes after the death. Bukola relied on the support she received from her husband and friends in dealing with her loss. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the role of social support in helping bereaved individuals accept and adjust to loss (Parkes, 1996; Stroebe, 2017; Rais, 2007; Bonanno, Boerner, & Wortman, 2005). The study also illustrates that the loss of a loved one affects the broader network of relationships, consistent with Turner's (1967) notion that individual loss impacts all connected human networks. According to Stroebe (2017), support from family and community can restore a sense of order and continuity, thus helping bereaved individuals manage psychological stress while adapting to changes in their social, cultural, and religious contexts.

Participants revealed that the financial challenge was an added stress to their grieving experiences mostly when it comes to burial and planning of the funerals. The death of their loved one caught family unprepared, as some of them were dependent to the deceased. For example, Bakere narrated that his worries at the time of his loss was how he could get money for his forth coming examination. As for Mopelola, due to the finance difficulties involved in conducting the funeral, she learned the importance of being prepared in advance to ensure that funeral expenses could be managed.

For Adafila, the financial challenge was when he had to meet the societal demand for his mothers' burial. He was expecting a refund from the money he paid for his mothers' trip to hajj which he thought he could get. This became a significant source of stress for him. Existing literature confirms that bereaved families experience significant stress related to planning and raising funds for the burial of their loved ones. Stroebe (2017) highlighted that, in addition to the psychological and physical

health consequences, bereavement also carries significant financial and economic implications for the affected individuals.

All the bereaved participants noted that the circumstances surrounding the death significantly affected their grief experiences. For example, Bukola reflected on the death of her mother as an irreplaceable loss in her life. She said, “Being the only girl, I kept imagining who will be my confidant now that I am married.”

Sunday said, “It is more painful now that I am financially stable, my mother is nowhere to enjoy her sweat, she was the one who single handedly sponsored my education.” It was a painful and a difficult experience for Ayilara. She said, “I never thought of sharing responsibilities in marriage, but now that my husband is dead, I shoulder the responsibilities of the children and other maintenance all by myself.” Mopelola said, “I fainted and woke up just to realize my husband is dead for real. I had to delay my admission for my bachelor’s degree so that I could focus on taking care of the children.”

Adeola said she became addicted to drinking Coca Cola since the death of her husband. This finding aligns with Rando’s (1988) assertion that individuals’ grief experiences vary according to different influencing factors such as the time of the death and the nature of the death. Existing literature further emphasizes that grief experiences can impact the ability of bereaved individual acceptance of the cause of the loss be it a sudden death or anticipatory death (Rando, 1988; Parkes, Benjamin, & Fitzgerald, 1969; Stroebe 2017).

Unforgettable experience of the dead loved one can serve as motivation to the bereaved family members and help improve their adjustment to the reality of their loss and living without the loved one. In this study, participants frequently reflected on memories of events surrounding the loss of their loved one and the consequences of that loss, noting how these recollections influenced their grieving and healing processes. For example, Bukola reported that, “My mother is a friendly and a jovial person to all. Mothers who live around our area keeps their children with her.” The unforgettable experience for Ayilara was when the people from their village requested for his corpse to be buried in his hometown. He is a man of integrity and good merit. Adeola said, “I was encouraged from what people say about his life, and the word of

testimony given by his friends and church members.” Stroebe (2017) asserted that, unforgotten memories can help bereaved persons to navigate renewed interest and helps in the effort to face the reality and adjust to life. The focus in grief and the grieving process is on the cognitive processes of confronting the reality of loss, the events surrounding the loss, the memories of the loss and the finding of meaning to accommodate the loss and consequences (Archer, 2008; Dillenburger & Keenan, 2005; Gill & Neimeyer, 2006).

The participants identified family conflicts as a major issue affecting their grieving process after the death of their loved ones. They explained that as they tried their best to confront the reality of their loss and to accommodate their feelings and experiences, were often made complicated and more stressful by family conflicts. Ayilara described her struggle to manage her husbands’ properties that led to unnecessary conflict, while Adeola recalled the disunity that arose between her, her mother-in-law and her brother-in-law.

Sunday experienced family hostility when his father relatives denied them the support and shelter, they needed. Mopelola explained, “They accused me that I killed my husband, and since then they withdraw from talking to me or calling the children. here was a time the children needed their help, but they denied them”. Loss of a loved one can led to family unable to function well. Functional family tend to be supportive, understanding and conflict resolving while, dysfunctional families tends to be hostile and unfriendly (Neimeyer, 2010; Rosenthal 2000; storebe 2017).

The participants’ conscious and unconscious belief systems triggered their emotions and their reactions to the loss of the connection with their loved one and influences their choice of coping. According to the participants, their belief and religious practices facilitated their acceptance and helping them make meaning of their loss. For example, Adafila said, “I have a surprise trip to hajj for my mother but did not tell her not knowing Allah has the biggest surprise which came with a big shock for me.” As for Jalala, he said, “I am grateful for his life well spent and the values he impacted in me.” Mopelola said, “I accepted his loss because if he had run mad and was walking around the streets naked would have been devastating for me.” The focus in grief and the grieving process is on the cognitive processes of

confronting the reality of loss, the events surrounding the loss, the memories of the loss and the finding of meaning to accommodate the loss and consequences (Stoebe, 2017; Freud 1967).

Counseling emerged as another key theme based on the participants' responses. All the participants recognized the need for counselling to encourage and help individual members of the family, to address family issues that usually arise after the death of a loved one, help in dealing with ongoing traumatization, and to encourage financial support. Participants viewed that counseling is a crucial component in assisting bereaved individuals and families throughout the grieving process.

Ayilara stated that the trauma resulting from the sudden loss of a loved one is often lifelong and requires proactive support for the bereaved. Similarly, Sunday said, "The bereaved need a quick counselling help so that they don't harm themselves because so many thoughts will be running in their head". Jalala remarked that it is important to have somebody to talk to as to what to do and what not to do, as well as having somebody to listen to you and not just get abandoned like that. This is necessary to help reduce the tension and challenges that commonly arise during the grieving process.

The findings from this study agreed with the recommendation by Storebe (2017) and Rando (1989) that counselling can assist bereaved individuals and families in dealing with their loss adequately and the subsequent consequences. Bukola said, "Yes, I will recommend immediate counselling service for bereaved persons". Existing literatures emphasize that counselling is a form of coping and care intervention to reduce emotional distress and help in maintaining redress and healing to the consequences that follows (Rando, 1988; Stroebe, 2017; Neimeyer, 2011).

Gilbert (2006) suggested the need for comfort and consolation in bereaved families while dealing with their emotional pain. Neimeyer (2011) believed that counselling can help bereaved families give meaning to their loss, to understand, accommodate and develop an explanation to it. It is also understood by the participants that support received also helped their grieving process. For instance, according to Jalala, sharing his thoughts and feelings was helpful to him. The Same

way Sunday pointed out that it is very important for people to be close and console bereaved families. As for Ayilara, her pastor and church members were fully involved for her. She said, “My pastor supported me with prayers and requested me to move in with his families when I could not sleep from the thought of my husband always knocking on the door at night.” These findings align with Stroebe’s (2017) assertion that bereaved families often share their grief through mutual support, which aids in readjustment and acceptance of their loss. According to Stroebe (2017), the loss of relationships and social connections contributes significantly to the experience of grief.

5.1 THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The participants’ responses in this study may not reflect the responses of other Nigerians, as individual experiences of grief can vary. Religious practices were identified by most participants as particularly helpful, highlighting the significant role of religion in supporting bereaved Nigerians. A cross-cultural perspective can enhance public awareness and sensitivity to specific religious practices that facilitate the grieving process.

However, addressing grief-related concerns in clients requires a high level of professional skill. Although counselling is found to be something they need, it is important for national policies, such as those of the Ministry of Health, to ensure the allocation of family counselors with specialized expertise in grief counseling. Professional counsellors who are trained in grief counselling are needed to provide effective support. Furthermore, the education system should implement programs to train future counselors in this area. Counsellors must possess sufficient knowledge about grief and bereavement before they could offer help to people or making referral will be the best step.

Despite this, the government could adopt a policy in response to providing families and individual with measures to help them adjust with the new environment without their loved ones. Also, the importance of grieve studies can be introduced in schools and higher institution by the government. Sufficient knowledge about grief and bereavement can be learnt in schools for individual to be self-educated on how they could help themselves when faced with death.

Further research on sudden death in Nigeria should extend beyond individual families to include diverse ethnic groups, in order to understand grief within a cross-cultural context. Studies are needed to identify the types of bereavement support and services required by bereaved families and individuals in Nigeria. Additionally, counselors should be knowledgeable about family systems and the religious practices of different communities, to better address the needs of those affected by loss.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

This study provides insights into families' perceptions of sudden death and their grief experiences that is often overlooked and has limited research. In particular, nine major themes regarding the experiences of Muslim and Christian families in Nigeria were identified. The emergence of new themes and issues in a research study highlights the contribution of the researcher and emphasizes the need for further investigation (Stroebe, 2017).

Firstly, researcher could examine the experience and response of bereaved families who do not have religious practice and belief as compared to those with religious practice and beliefs following the sudden death of a loved one. Stroebe (2017) explained that it is necessary for a new line of research to analyze the underlying cognitive processes that influenced the bereavement process.

Secondly, researcher could explore on family conflicts as a major source of stress for bereaved family members. Researchers could provide a way for bereaved families on how they could cope with the stressors when encountered. And lastly, researchers can use a quantitative research method to complement the qualitative method by examining the differences between Muslim and Christian grieving style and as well as to examine the differences between the Muslim male and female experiences of grief and that of the Christian male and female experiences of grief.

Undeniably, peoples grieving experiences is influenced and defined by their cultural and religious beliefs. (Rosenthal 2005). It is important to acknowledge a limitation of this study regarding the assessment of participants' religiosity. The information gathered reflects participants' self-reported evaluation of their religious commitment and understanding. For example, Muslim families were able to relate their grief experiences to their religious beliefs; however, some Christian participants described their religious practice as average, making it less clear how their faith informed their grieving process.

In Africa, limited access to comprehensive library resources and inadequate technical means for collecting and storing information posed significant challenges. Additionally, unreliable power supply and limited internet access affected and delayed data collection and storage during this study. It is important to note that the findings of this research cannot be generalized, as the study focused on a small sample of Nigerian Muslim and Christian families, specifically four families from each group, with relatively similar experiences.

5.3 SUMMARY

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of grief among the Nigeria Muslim and Christian families. A phenomenological approach was employed, involving eight participants drawn from four families of each religious group. The study utilized a semi-structured design, and all participants took part voluntarily, sharing their personal experiences. Participants were adults aged 25 years and above, belonging to either the Muslim or Christian faith, and had experienced grief following the sudden death of a loved one within their family.

5.4 CONCLUSION

This study explores the grieve experience of Nigeria Muslims and Christian families following the sudden death of a loved one. The findings indicate that factors such as support systems, beliefs and practices, challenges, and memories significantly influenced the bereaved families' experiences. The context of death from both religions, helped the bereaved families confront their loss and find meaning to it. The study also highlights the need for counseling and care interventions to complement cultural and religious support. Adequate counselling during in times of loss and grief could facilitate the grieving process and help prevent physical harm or mental health issues among bereaved individuals. Counselling could help address issues of family conflicts, enhance support, and reduce unforgettable experiences. The findings of this study can guide the development of educational programs, support services, and community initiatives aimed at assisting bereaved families and individuals.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Title: Sudden Death in Family: Grief Experiences of Nigerian Muslim and Christian families following the sudden death of a loved one

Researcher: Owoyemi Raji Ruqayat,

Doctoral student in Educational Psychology

International Islamic University Malaysia.

Description of the study: The researcher is interested in understanding the grief experiences of family members following the sudden death of a loved one and how religion impact the process. Participation in the study is voluntary. The study is going to be audio recorded and this may take approximately 1-2 hours with the researcher. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Educational psychology at the international Islamic University Malaysia.

Criteria for Participants:

1. Participants must be 25 years or older.
2. Participants must be a citizen of Nigeria currently residing in Nigeria.
3. The participant is fluent in English and comfortable completing the interview in English.
4. Participants must have experienced the sudden death of a family member at least two years ago and a maximum of five years ago.

Confidentiality within the dissertation document is assured by the researcher.

Contact Information: please contact me on 08024261606 and leave your name, telephone number, and the best time to reach you. The researcher will contact you for a brief screening interview to ensure that you are fit for the criteria for participation, and to answer questions about the study.

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to learn and participate in my study. The purpose of this study is to explore the grief experiences within Nigeria Muslims and Christian families. This study will provide individuals the opportunity to describe their grief experiences, and what influenced their mourning process. This study will better inform mental health professionals about the mourning process experienced by this population and provide new research to the scarce literature on grief in Nigeria. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and if you wish to participate, you can withdraw at any time. In case of anonymity, your identifying information will be separated from your interview protocol. This study will last for an hour and will be audio recorded for the purpose of generating the result. You will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire, and an interview surrounding the grief process. If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me at rruqayyahatiku@gmail.com. This study is mainly for the research purpose. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Owoyemi Raji Ruqayat.

Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling

International Islamic University Malaysia.

rruqayyahatiku@gmail.com

APPENDIX C

SCREENING AND INTAKE PROCEDURE

Participants Demographic Information

Name:

Age:

Religion:

Gender:

Education:

Occupation:

Relationship with the deceased:

Rank your closeness (1) the least and (10) the closest.

Cause of death:

Year of loss:

Age at time of Death:

APPENDIX D

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Information

I am conducting this research for the completion of my dissertation in order to fulfill the requirements for a Doctoral degree (PhD.) at the international Islamic University Malaysia. You are invited to participate in this research. The purpose of the research is to explore grief experiences among Muslim and Christian families of Nigeria.

You will be interviewed at a location suitable with you, where you will be asked a few questions relating to your experience losing a loved one to sudden death.

If you agree to participate in the study, the study is going to be audio taped for the purpose of generating main ideas. The interview will last for approximately 1 – 2 hours and you may decide to quit the interview at any time.

You will have the opportunity to share your feelings and experience as a bereaved person with other bereaved people and also contributing to the knowledge of grief.

Confidentiality

A pseudonym will be used to protect the identity of the participants; however, the research is for academic purpose, the write up and result generated shall be under the supervision of the researchers' supervisor. Assoc. Prof Haniza Rais and other committee members.

Contact

You may contact me on ruqayyahatiku@gmail.com if you have any question to ask or feel free to contact me if you are interested in participating in the research.

Participants

Participating in this study is voluntary. There is no penalty if you decide to withdraw. If you have participated after the data is collected and chose to withdraw, your data shall be destroyed or given back to you.

Consent

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be given a copy of this form signed by you for record purpose.

Print Name _____ Date/Signature _____

Interviewer Name _____ Date/Signature _____



APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Research Question: What are the shared grief experiences shared by bereaved Nigeria families of different religions (Christian and Islam)?

1. Tell me about your experience upon the sudden loss?
2. Could you tell me how you or the family member has change since the death of the deceased?
3. What do you think is most difficult for you as a family since the death?
4. Do you talk about the dead with each other in the family?
5. Who in the family thinks about the death most like you do?
6. Is there anything that is surprising about you or anyone in the family has responded to the sudden death?

Research Question: How have family members affected by the sudden loss of a family member?

1. Tell me about your experience upon the sudden loss?
2. What was the experience like living without the deceased person?
3. What comes to your mind most about the loss?
4. What reminds you most of the dead person
5. How are your relationship with the deceased?
6. What are the things you do to remember the deceased within the family?
7. Describe your relationship you had with other members of the family after the loss?
8. Who is taking the role of the deceased person? Are the roles well taking care off?
9. How have you been affected with the death of the deceased person? How has family members been affected?
10. In what ways has family members been affected with the loss? (Psychologically, emotionally, mentally, socially and financially?)

Research Question: What are the culturally specific grief reactions of family members (Christian and Islamic background) in Nigeria react to the sudden loss of their loved ones?

1. As a Muslim or Christian, are there any specific way in your religion to react to the loss?

2. Can you tell me why your feelings were different?
3. How much this feeling has affects you and the family since the sudden loss till now?
4. Does your feelings give you different experience from other members of the family to the loss?
5. Can you tell me how you feel about other members of the family?
6. Did you experience any change in your feelings with others?
7. Is there any experience about the loss that stands out the feelings?
8. Did you have a change-to-change feelings from the time of the loss? Why? How?
9. How would you describe your overall feelings of the loss?
10. How did you express your feelings of the loss?

Research Question: How have their cultural and religious beliefs and practices contributed to their coping in managing the grief?

1. How has your religion help you and your family cope about the loss?
2. Do you think you need additional support from your government apart from family support?
3. How open are you to get counseling help? Are you willing to do it?
4. How has religion helped you and your family adapt to the loss?

APPENDIX F

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Muslim Family 1(Jalala)

Age: 50

Relationship with the deceased: father

Year of loss: 5years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 70 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 45 years old

Jalala was the second born of 9. He lost his father when he was 45 years old. His father died suddenly with no previous sickness. His father died at the age 70 leaving behind his mother, and 8 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 2(Adafila)

Age: 60

Relationship with the deceased: Mother

Year of loss: 4years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 80 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 66 years old

Adafila was the second born of 3. He lost his mother when he was 66 years old. His mother died suddenly with no previous sickness at the age 76 leaving behind his father, and 2 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 3(Bakare)

Age: 32

Relationship with the deceased: father

Year of loss: 10years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 75 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 22 years old

Bakare was the fourth born out of 6. He lost his father when he was 22 years old. His father died suddenly with no previous sickness. His father died at the age 65 leaving behind his mother, and 5 of his siblings.

Muslim Family 4 (Bukola)

Age: 47

Relationship with the deceased: mother

Year of loss: 4years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 64 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 43 years old

Bukola was the only daughter of her mother. she lost her mother when she was 43 years old. Her mother died suddenly with no previous sickness. Her mother died at the age 64.

Christian Family 1 (Adeola)

Age: 45

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 5years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 43 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 40 years old

Adeola is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 40 years old. Her Husband died suddenly after complaining of stomach pain. Her husband was 43 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 2 (Mopeola)

Age: 47

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 9years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 41 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 38 years old

Mopelola is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 38 years old. Her Husband died suddenly after complaining of headache. Her husband was 38 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 3 (Ayilara)

Age: 46 years old

Relationship with the deceased: husband

Year of loss: 9years

Age of deceased at the time of death: 40 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 37 years old

Ayilara is a widow with three children. She lost her husband when she was 37 years old. Her husband died suddenly after complaining of headache. Her husband was 37 years old at the time of his death.

Christian Family 4 (Sunday)

Age: 35 years old

Relationship with the deceased: mother

Year of loss: 7years old

Age of deceased at the time of death: 50 years old

Age of bereaved at the time of Death: 28 years old

Sunday is the last child out of three children. He lost his mother when he was 28 years old. He was in school when they called to tell him his mother died. His mother was 50 years old at the time of her death.