

## Abstract

Widowhood is a state of losing a spouse through death and has been on the increase in Kenya and all over the world. A spouse's death may affect the widowed persons' social well-being, as they go through the various stages of bereavement. They may become withdrawn and isolated which may affect their self-esteem. There may be adverse effects of widowhood that are social since the widowed persons may rate themselves low after the death of the spouse whom they shared life with. In Meru community, no research has been done on the social effects of widowhood yet widowhood is a common phenomenon in the community. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine the social effects by comparing widowed men and women in Meru County Kenya. A literature gap exists in Kenya on self-esteem of widowed men and women thus motivating the authors to come up with such a study. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine self-esteem as a social effect of widowhood by comparing widowed men and women in Meru County Kenya. Ex post facto's causal-comparative research design was considered appropriate for the study because of comparison of groups. Samples of 384 widowed persons (192 widows and 192 widowers) in four Districts were purposively selected making a total of 384 respondents. Data was collected by use of questionnaires which were administered to widowed persons and two Focus Group Discussions for widowed persons were held in each of the four selected Districts; one for the widowers and another for widows. Data analysis was done by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Inferential statistics included t-test which was used to establish whether differences in self-esteem as a social effect existed between widowed men and women. Descriptive statistics that included frequencies, means and percentages were also used. The findings revealed variations in the widowed persons' self-esteem as a social effect of widowhood where widows showed lower self-esteem than widowers. From the findings, it is evident that absence of either of the spouse negatively affects the self-value of the living spouse especially widows. Counselling programmes of widowed persons in the country are needed to assist and empower them especially widows who are not allowed to remarry. It is therefore recommended that the Ministry of gender, religious organisations, service providers and other stakeholders should use such programmes to address social needs of widowed persons. Finally, the findings will assist the widowed men and women to cope better socially with their state of widowhood as they attach meaning in life and bring up their families single handedly.