

## Effects of Funeral Rituals on Social Development of the Giriama Community in Kilifi County, Kenya

Ngalla Kitsao Mwavuo\*, Madiha Salim Khamis, Samuel Kiti Lewa  
Department of Social Sciences, Technical University of Mombasa, P.O. Box 90420 –  
80100, Mombasa (emails: ngallamwavuo@gmail.com; mkhamis2014@tum.ac.ke;  
revkitilewa@gmail.com)

\*Corresponding author's email: ngallamwavuo@gmail.com

### Abstract

The study was looked at from a global perspective in the United Kingdom, South Africa at a regional perspective, Uganda at East Africa perspective and down to the Kenyan perspective. The research was designed to evaluate whether funeral rituals affect social development amongst the Giriama community in Kilifi County. Data was collected from 136 respondents to fill questionnaires in the wards of Ganda, Kakuyuni and Jilore all in Kilifi County. These wards were selected due to their rural set up where cultures are presumed to exist in such areas. The research used the cultural relativism theory and social mobility theory which were identified due to their relevance to the study. The study made use of existing relevant sources of literature so as to identify gaps that existed. This study employed a quantitative research method where both correlational and exploratory research designs were used. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. The findings of this study showed that funeral rituals negatively affected social development across the three selected wards of Kilifi County. The recommendations of this study include; a need for policy framework to address the negative effects of the cultural practice, authorities to come up with development projects that are people centred and the community should be actively and directly be involved when formulating policies to encourage complete adherence.

**Key Words:** Funeral rituals; Social development; Kilifi County

### Introduction

In the United Kingdom, funeral rituals include religious customs that represent the end of life. The funeral procedures include an obituary written by the deceased's family, followed by cars hired to transport mourners and a hearse carrying the casket. This painful event of death creates an economic opportunity for funeral homes and transport companies. These rituals are primarily religious in nature, with the cemetery burial serving as the finale (Berisha, 2023).

In South Africa, funeral rituals exist to honor the dead, who transits and become an ancestor (Croes-Lanspeary, 2023). Funerals rituals are expensive because they involve transport costs and service providers that are contracted to

provide tents and seats, then singers and dancers are also hired. These costs are settled by close family members (Van de Leur, 2023). The immediate family of the deceased normally foot the cost of feeding the mourners by slaughtering animals in honouring the deceased (Perez, 2023).

In Ugandan villages funeral rituals follow stages and processes which all are associated with use of household resources (Onohuean, 2023). The opportunity that arise in this circumstance is that people are hired to transport the deceased and the mourners to where the burials are conducted. Funeral rituals do not only affect resources but also labor distribution, this is because funeral rituals deplete household's resources and forces people to work in other people's farms as laborers in order to meet the food needs of their

family (Adu-Okoree, 2023). Education for children is neglected as a result of traditional funeral rituals because families become unable to raise money to educate their children (Debele, 2023).

In Kenya among the Luhya people, funerals are elaborate. The funeral rituals of the Luhya community are a prolonged periods of mourning that involve, drinking and feasting (Carter, 2023). This community is tied together by death rituals as the belief that attending a funeral helps the dead go to paradise (Amatulli, 2023). People deplete their resources to the extent of pushing themselves to poverty in order to conduct the funeral rituals with pomp (Rajan, 2023). The people who are contracted to provide catering and transport services benefit because they get hired to transport the mourners and prepare meals. An expensive and elaborate funeral confers prestige on the bereaved family. Therefore, money, effort and sufficient time are spent on preparations to carry out the funeral ritual in a proper style (Patera, 2023).

### **Social Development**

The process of improving a person's or a community's economic well-being in accordance with certain aims and objectives is known as social development (Wang, 2023). It is also about enabling people ascend upward on their path to self-sufficiency from poverty (Alphin, 2019). A number of factors that draw a nexus between social development and funeral rituals include low capital accumulation, difficulties in accessing resources and low levels of literacy (Obamuyi, 2021). Buheji (2020) argues that the cause of poverty is the effects of poverty over the generations and also due to the inability by the poor to access opportunities that may change their status. This author posits that these opportunities require finances and even if the government introduces structural changes, the people will remain poor due to the values they developed for being poor.

### **Empirical Review**

Wagana (2020) examined how the Christian religion was responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study pointed out how religious leaders organize in funerals where they perform

religious rituals to the deceased. The study further states that these rituals were interrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic where social gatherings were banned. The study however fails to state how the society was affected by the absence of these rituals. Atieno (2022) states that funeral rituals are important and are being observed because of alleviating grief. However, the study further does not show the cost that come with the practice of the funeral rituals. Khadima (2022) states that funeral rituals are important in healing of the bereaved families but the cost that comes with elaborate funeral rituals can be an impediment to social development because despite the deceased having left a financial void in the family, more resources are channeled towards observing the funeral ritual.

## **Materials and Methods**

### **Study Area**

The selected wards of Ganda, Kakuyuni and Jilore are located in Malindi sub county, Kilifi County, Kenya. The wards are in a rural set up with poor road networks. The three wards form part of the most interior part of Kilifi County. These wards were selected due to them being located in rural areas where cultural practices like the one being studied is likely to be prevalent.

### **Data Collection**

Quantitative data was collected from 136 respondents who filled questionnaires. Purposive sampling method was used to sample respondents for the quantitative data. The sampling method allowed the researcher to use instances with the required information (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008). The questionnaires were distributed by hand to the respondents by the researcher with the help of research assistants. The data was collected from November 2023 to February 2024. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to find out the characteristics of the responses.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data gathered and analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Data analysis and interpretation was done using quantitative analysis techniques. Tables that showed frequencies and percentages

were used to analyze and present the findings of the data collected.

### Reliability

To determine reliability, a pilot study was conducted in Garashi ward where a sample size of 10% of the total 136 respondents was used to test the questionnaire. This means 14 households' heads were sampled and given questionnaires to fill. The questionnaire reliability was checked using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha. The Cronbach alpha level of the questionnaire was more than 0.7 and the questionnaire was deemed to be reliable. The challenges that were experienced in the pilot study is that some of the respondents had difficulties in understanding the questionnaire due to language barrier and were assisted by the research assistants. The outcome of the reliability test was that the questionnaire was reliable. The Cronbach alpha level of the studied variable of funeral rituals was 0.955.

### Results and Discussion

In Ganda Ward, out of 49 respondents, 59.2% were male and 40.8% were female. In Kakuyuni

Ward, out of 45 respondents, 60% were male and 40% were female. In Jilore Ward, out of 42 respondents, 61.9% were male and 38.1% were female. The gender distribution across the three wards shows that, out of 136 respondents who filled the questionnaires, 60.3% (n = 82) were male and 39.7% (n = 54) were female (Table 1). This shows that across the three wards, majority of households' heads and breadwinners were male who carried the responsibilities of taking care of the financial needs of most households. This also shows funeral rituals affected the male gender more than female as the males participate more in the economy compared to females. The female gender is also affected by funeral rituals where women are not getting paid for catering services offered during funeral rituals where they prepare meals for the mourners who gather at the home of the bereaved family. Women take a significant percentage of those who head the households at 39.7%, this shows that a good number of women are bread winners for their families and have a significant participation in the economy.

Table 1. Respondents' Demographic Information

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Ganda Ward		
Male	29	59.2
Female	20	40.8
Total	49	100%
Kakuyuni Ward		
Male	27	60.0
Female	18	40.0
Total	45	100%
Jilore Ward		
Male	26	61.9
Female	16	38.1%
Total	42	100%
Overall total respondents		
Male	82	60.3
Female	54	39.7
Total	136	100

A majority of the respondents 73.4% (n = 33) agreed that funeral rituals are still observed in the society. Additionally, majority of the respondents 67.3% (n = 33) disagreed that funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed. Therefore, funeral rituals undermine social development. The Likert scale results reflect a consensus within the community that funeral rituals have a negative effect on various facets of social progress (Table 2).

The findings indicate that funeral rituals require a reasonable amount of resources to be observed. These resources would have been used for other useful ventures. This finding conforms to the study by Atieno (2022) which states funeral rituals are being observed because for alleviating grief. However, the study further does not show the cost that come with the practice of the funeral rituals.

Table 2. Responses on funeral rituals in Ganda Ward

	SD		D		SWD		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Funeral rituals are still observed in the society	5	10.2	7	14.2	4	8.2	25	57.1	8	16.3	49	100
Funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed	11	22.4	22	44.9	5	10.2	7	14.2	4	8.2	49	100
Funeral rituals are observed across religions	5	10.2	8	16.3	5	10.2	23	46.9	8	16.3	49	100
Funeral rituals are beneficial in terms of spiritual nourishment	4	8.2	9	18.4	4	8.2	23	46.9	9	18.4	49	100
Funeral rituals are necessary in societal growth	3	6.1	7	14.2	3	6.1	26	53.1	10	20.4	49	100
Funeral rituals dilapidate family resources	2	4.1	8	16.3	4	8.2	25	51.0	10	20.4	49	100
There is risk of loss of jobs as a result of missing work to attend funeral rituals	4	8.2	9	18.4	2	4.2	26	53.1	8	16.3	49	100

A majority of the respondents 77.7% (n = 35) agreed that funeral rituals are still observed in the society. Additionally, majority of the respondents 79.9% (n = 36) disagreed that funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed (Table 3). Therefore, funeral rituals require more resources therefore undermine social development. The Likert scale results reflect a consensus within the community that funeral rituals have a negative effect on various facets of social progress.

The findings on the effects of funeral rituals on the society of Kakuyuni Ward indicates that the practice negatively affects the society and contributes to poverty. This finding fills the gap of Wagana (2020) which states the role of funeral rituals as a therapeutic measure in overcoming grief and failure to observe them may result to unprocessed sorrow. However, the study fails to indicate the cost the cost that comes with observing the rituals.

Table 3. Responses on funeral rituals in Kakuyuni Ward

	SD		D		SWD		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Funeral rituals are still observed in the society	2	4.4	6	13.2	2	4.4	27	60.0	8	17.7	45	100
Funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed	12	26.6	24	53.3	2	4.4	4	8.8	3	6.6	45	100
Funeral rituals are observed across religions	2	4.4	7	15.6	1	2.2	26	57.7	9	20.0	45	100
Funeral rituals are beneficial in terms of spiritual nourishment	1	2.2	6	13.3	3	6.7	24	53.3	11	22.2	45	100
Funeral rituals are necessary in societal growth	3	6.7	7	15.6	2	4.4	26	57.7	11	24.4	45	100
Funeral rituals dilapidate family resources	2	4.4	5	11.1	1	2.2	26	57.7	11	24.4	45	100
There is risk of loss of jobs as a result of missing work to attend funeral rituals	1	2.2	7	15.6	1	2.2	24	53.3	13	28.8	45	100

A majority of the respondents 69.0% (n = 29) agreed that funeral rituals are still observed in the society. While, 71.4% (n = 30) of the respondents disagreed that funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed (Table 4). Therefore, funeral rituals undermine social development. The Likert scale results reflect a consensus within the community that funeral rituals have a negative effect on various facets of social progress. The results of the study show that the

effects of the practice in social development are huge and directly causes poverty. This finding corresponds with the finding of Khadima (2022) that states that funeral rituals are important in healing of the bereaved families the cost that comes with elaborate funeral rituals can be an impediment to social development because despite the deceased having left a financial void in the family, more resources are channeled towards observing the funeral rituals.

Table 4. Responses on funeral rituals in Jilore Ward

	SD		D		SWD		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Funeral rituals are still observed in the society	3	7.1	8	19.0	2	4.8	20	47.6	9	21.4	42	100
Funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed	10	23.8	20	47.6	1	2.4	7	16.7	4	9.5	42	100
Funeral rituals are observed across religions	3	7.1	6	14.3	2	4.8	20	47.6	11	26.2	42	100
Funeral rituals are beneficial in terms of spiritual nourishment	3	7.1	4	9.5	3	7.1	22	52.4	10	23.8	42	100
Funeral rituals are necessary in societal growth	4	9.5	6	14.3	2	4.8	21	50.0	9	21.4	42	100
Funeral rituals dilapidate family resources	3	7.1	7	16.7	1	2.4	24	57.1	7	16.7	42	100
There is risk of loss of jobs as a result of missing work to attend funeral rituals	2	4.8	9	21.4	3	7.1	20	47.8	8	19.0	42	100

The current study also found out that early hours after a loved one's death, leave the bereaved with strong impressions and recollections, acutely aware of the irreversibility of their loss. Funeral rituals assist the bereaved in overcoming these vital periods, reducing their likelihood of developing complex grief. Funeral rituals help the grieving come to terms with the death of their loved one. Viewing the body, which appears to be resting quietly, aids to this acceptance. In contrast, the inability to say goodbye to the deceased following a calamity or untimely death might aggravate the grieving process.

The current study further revealed that funerals may be postponed till family who live very far away arrives. Today, some people choose to keep their deceased at a morgue for weeks as they await family members, collect donations to

prepare a lavish burial to keep up with current trends resulting to wastage of resources.

Funeral rituals cause some people to become indebted and hence impoverished. It also promotes indiscipline, a culture of wastefulness, and corruption. The burial of the deceased is frequently delayed due to the great expense of the customs surrounding it. The findings of this study filled the gap of Wagana (2020) who examined the role that religious organizations played in stopping the spread of COVID-19. According to the study, different religions stopped practicing the funeral rituals to stop the spread of the virus. This study however failed to indicate the importance of the funeral rituals, the cost that come with observing the rituals and how the society was affected by the absence of the funeral rituals something that has been answered by the current study.

Table 5. Responses on funeral rituals across the three wards

	SD		D		SWD		A		SA		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Funeral rituals are still observed in the society	5	3.7	15	11.0	9	6.6	80	58.8	27	19.9	136	100
Funeral rituals do not need more resources to be observed	32	23.5	79	58.1	5	3.7	10	7.4	10	7.4	136	100
Funeral rituals are observed across religions	8	5.9	15	11.0	6	4.4	81	59.6	33	24.4	136	100
Funeral rituals are beneficial in terms of spiritual nourishment	6	4.4	14	10.3	7	5.1	76	55.9	32	23.5	136	100
Funeral rituals are necessary in societal growth	6	4.4	16	8.1	5	3.7	77	56.6	32	23.5	136	100
Funeral rituals dilapidate family resources	11	8.1	11	8.1	4	2.9	81	59.6	29	21.3	136	100
There is risk of loss of jobs as a result of missing work to attend funeral rituals	5	3.7	16	11.8	9	6.6	78	57.4	28	20.6	136	100

## Conclusion

This study concludes that funeral rituals negatively affect social development hence leading to poverty. The most effective strategy to alleviate poverty is to empower those in need, namely the poor. Although such a practice is critical in keeping many families healthy and alive. However, there must be a better approach to help them stand on their own two feet, an action plan to lift them out of poverty one by one so that they no longer require financial assistance or other forms of support from others.

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