

## The Role of Sahwira's (deceased's friend) Humour and Jokes During Funerals: Evaluating the Dual Process Model of grief Theory

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### Abstract

**Background:** African traditional funeral customs especially the role of sahwira (deceased's friend) in bringing humor and joy to the funeral are often misunderstood and overlooked in modern funeral practices. In addition to the lack of comprehension of indigenous African funeral traditions, there is a shortage of research investigating the significance of humor and joy in funeral rituals.

**Materials and Methods:** The study utilized a phenomenological research approach to investigate the role of sahwira in the traditional funeral practices of the Budya Shona people from a counseling psychology perspective. The main aim was to understand the significance of sahwira in Budya Shona funeral rituals and explore the psychological advantages this role offers to the grieving individuals. Through non-probability purposive sampling, data was gathered from 41 participants, with 14 participating in individual interviews and 27 in focus groups. Thematic data analysis was employed to analyze the collected information, revealing sahwira's various roles such as introducing humor, mimicking the deceased, resolving conflicts, and assisting with funeral rites. The study found that sahwira plays a crucial role in alleviating grief and mourning among the bereaved during Budya traditional funeral ceremonies. In addition to bringing humor, the continuous presence of sahwira throughout the funeral process and beyond burial provides solace to the grieving, aiding in their healing process. The study suggests that Shona traditional funeral customs offer valuable insights for grief counselors, showcasing how these practices could be integrated effectively into grief counseling. Key aspects include psychological benefits, loss, grief, mourning, bereavement, and funeral customs, and Shona culture, dual-process model of grief, humor, and joy.

**Results:** The results of this study highlight the nuanced and potentially beneficial role humor can play within the context of Budya Shona funeral practices. While seemingly counterintuitive, these findings suggest that humor and laughter can coexist with mourning, providing a means for the bereaved to experience moments of lightness and facilitating social connection during a difficult time

**Conclusion:** Despite the predominant influence of Christianity, this study underscores the continued importance of Budya Shona funeral traditions. The sahwira's role is particularly significant, offering both cultural meaning and psychological support to the bereaved. By introducing humor and joy during funerals, the sahwira eases the burden of grief, helping mourners process their loss and ultimately find hope. This aligns with Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief, as it provides a restoration-oriented mechanism for coping, allowing those grieving to experience respite as they adapt to their new reality.

**Key word** Sahwira, humour, jokes, funerals, Dual Process Model of grief Theory, grieving, mourning, bereaved.

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### I. Introduction

The global death toll has been on the rise, with 59,230,000 deaths recorded in 2020 and 60,120,000 deaths in 2021, indicating a significant increase in mortality rates during this period (Ritchie, 2019). This surge in annual deaths underscores the importance of studying funeral rituals and their effectiveness. Leming and Dickinson (2020) argue that the growing number of deaths justifies a fresh examination of death and funeral practices, particularly in understanding the significance of funeral rituals. Despite the crucial role that funeral rituals play in the lives of the bereaved, their nature has evolved due to the influence of Christianity, leading to

changes in the structure and meaning of these rituals (Wesch, 2018). One notable transformation is the diminishing recognition of the role of humor and laughter in funeral ceremonies.

The lack of comprehension regarding the significance of humor and laughter instigated by the *sahwira*, the deceased's friend, at funerals is primarily attributed to the prevalence of Christianity. In Zimbabwe, funerals of individuals of Budya Shona descent who followed both Christian and traditional Budya Shona customs often lead to confusion, as the enduring Budya Shona traditional funeral practices clash with the prevalent Christian funeral customs (Gundani 1994). The enduring Budya traditional funeral customs encompass informal rituals conducted by the *sahwira*, such as sharing jokes and creating a jovial atmosphere during the funeral proceedings. This notable confusion at contemporary funerals, particularly in rural areas, is a matter of concern as it disrupts the smooth progression of the funeral ceremony, especially for the mourning family members of the deceased.

### **The Dual Process Model of Grief Theory**

Granek (2010) credited Freud as the trailblazer in the field of grief psychology due to his profound influence on subsequent psychologists in the 20th century, sparking a surge in interest to delve deeper into how individuals cope with loss. Many of these psychologists either expanded upon or challenged Freud's psychoanalytic theory of grief. One notable figure in this realm is Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, who introduced the widely-known five stages of grief: denial, anger, depression, bargaining, and acceptance (Neimeyer, 2015).

Among the contemporary theories that have garnered scholarly attention, the dual process model of grieving and mourning stands out. In 1999, Margaret Stroebe and Henk Schut developed this model, distinguishing it from others due to its dualistic nature. Stroebe and Schut (1999) introduced the concept of oscillation, which involves a continuous shift between behaviors or emotions related to loss and restoration. They elucidated that the dual process model underscores two types of stressors—loss-oriented and restoration-oriented—as well as a dynamic coping mechanism involving oscillation, where the grieving individual alternates between confronting and evading various grieving responsibilities.

Neimeyer (2015) contended that Stroebe and Schut (1999) highlighted how previous stage-based grief theories were rooted in Western culture and might not necessarily be applicable to bereaved individuals in other cultural contexts, such as Africa. The dual process model of grief theory proposed by Stroebe and Schut has been utilized in studies in Africa, confirming the presence of the oscillation process during funeral rituals in certain African cultures (Gamliel, 2014; Tshoba, 2014; Hunt, 2004; Vambe, 2009; Makumbirofa et al., 2019). This theory's dualistic framework of joy and sorrow was examined for its relevance in these settings. Hence, the dual process model of grieving and mourning emerged as a viable theory for the present study, given its dualistic nature aligning with the Budya traditional funeral practices that encompass both sorrow and humor during funeral proceedings (Muranda, 2018).

## **II. Material And Methods**

This article presents findings from a qualitative study exploring the role of the *sahwira*, a friend of the deceased, in traditional Budya Shona funeral rituals within Mutoko district, Zimbabwe. The research was conducted prospectively, spanning from January 2023 to June 2023.

The study delved into the following key questions:

What are the traditional Budya Shona funeral rituals performed by the *sahwira*? This question aimed to identify and describe the specific rituals and responsibilities associated with the *sahwira* during Budya Shona funerals.

What are the mental and emotional benefits of the role of the *sahwira* during a funeral among the Budya Shona people in Mutoko district, Zimbabwe? This question explored the perceived positive impact of the *sahwira*'s role on the emotional well-being of those experiencing grief during funeral process.

How do the identified benefits of the *sahwira*'s role of humor and laughter contribute to Stroebe and Schut's theory of the Dual Process Model of Grief? This question examined how the *sahwira*'s use of humor potentially aligns with and supports this established grief model.

A qualitative approach was deemed most suitable for this study due to its focus on exploring the subjective experiences and perspectives of participants concerning the *sahwira*'s role within Budya Shona funeral

practices. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the cultural, social, and emotional dimensions associated with the sahwira's responsibilities and the perceived benefits for the bereaved. .

**Study Design:** Phenomenological research design.

**Study Location:** Mutoko District, Zimbabwe

**Study Duration:** January 2023 to June 2023.

**Sample size:** 41 participants (14 individual interviews participants and 27 participants in 3 focus groups for discussion). A total of 27 participants participated in three focus group for discussions (FGD): 8 participants for FGD1, 9 participants for FGD2 and 10 participants for FGD3.

**Target Population:** People who have knowledge and experience of the Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals.

**Subjects & selection method:** Purposive sampling technique.

This study employed a face-to-face, semi-structured interview method to gather qualitative data. To guide the interviews, the researcher developed an interview guide containing core questions and potential probing questions, ensuring consistency and depth of inquiry (Selvam, 2017). These questions were strategically designed to align with the study's three primary research objectives. To respect the participants and enrich the cultural insights, interviews were conducted in the Shona dialect, the vernacular language of the Budya Shona people in Mutoko district. The interviews were subsequently translated into English for analysis, ensuring the preservation of meaning and context during the translation process.

### **Procedure methodology**

The study employed a qualitative methodology to explore the knowledge and experience of Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals. The research adhered to ethical guidelines, and a written informed consent was obtained from all participants before commencing the study. Fourteen participants were engaged in individual face-to-face interviews guided by a pre-designed, semi-structured interview guide. This guide addressed demographic information (age, gender, religious affiliation, relationship to the deceased, and time since the loss of a loved one) alongside open-ended questions delving into their knowledge and experiences with Budya Shona funeral rituals. Focus group discussions: Three focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted, with each group comprising 8-10 participants. These discussions fostered an interactive environment where participants shared their perspectives, experiences, and insights concerning Budya Shona funeral rituals, enriching the collected data.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit participants. This approach strategically selected individuals known to possess knowledge and experience with Budya Shona funeral rituals, ensuring the participants could meaningfully contribute to the study's objectives. All interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in native language while some interviews were audio-recorded. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim into textual format for further analysis. Research assistants aided the researcher throughout the data collection process. This multifaceted approach, combining individual interviews and focus group discussions, aimed to capture diverse perspectives and generate rich, nuanced data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' knowledge and experiences regarding Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals.

### **Data analysis**

This study's collected data was analyzed using thematic data analysis process. The following thematic data analysis procedures were followed: (a) Acquainting the transcribed textual data, (b) Identifying and coding themes in the text, (c) Synthesizing and refining themes into categories, and (d) Refining the categories of themes into major themes to produce a study report. The researcher started by looking at the raw textual data meticulously line by line and sentence by sentence, marking out phrases or sentences that correspond to the ones in the coding template. The researcher used the identified codes from stage two to synthesize and refine the phrases and sentences into sub-themes; and lastly, the researcher ended by refining the sub-themes into major themes which produced the current study's report. The researcher used QDA Miner Lite software to enhance the process of data analysis.

## **III. Results**

The study included 41 participants from the Budya Shona people in the Mutoko district of Zimbabwe. Fourteen individuals engaged in in-depth individual interviews, while the remaining 27 contributed to three focused group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs were distributed as follows: 8 participants in FGD 1, 9 in FGD 2, and 10 in FGD 3. This sample composition offers a diverse range of insights into the role of humor and jokes during Budya Shona funeral rituals. Analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the sahwira (the deceased's friend) plays a unique role in utilizing humor and jokes during the funeral mourning period. Participants described how sahwiras often employ lighthearted banter, amusing anecdotes, and gentle teasing to alleviate tension and

foster moments of shared laughter amidst grief. Observations from this study resonate with the Dual Process Model of Grief. This model posits that individuals cope with loss by oscillating between loss-oriented behaviors (confronting the pain of grief) and restoration-oriented behaviors (adapting to life changes following the loss). The sahwira's use of humor appears to be a restoration-oriented coping mechanism, offering temporary respite from overwhelming emotions and supporting the bereaved in adjusting to their new reality. The results of this study highlight the nuanced and potentially beneficial role humor can play within the context of Budya Shona funeral practices. While seemingly counterintuitive, these findings suggest that humor and laughter can coexist with mourning, providing a means for the bereaved to experience moments of lightness and facilitating social connection during a difficult time

### Emerging Themes

Two central themes surfaced in this study. The first theme illuminates the specific Budya traditional funeral rituals practiced following the loss of a loved one. Secondly, the study delves into the mental and emotional benefits facilitated by the sahwira's role within Budya Shona funeral practices in the Mutoko district of Zimbabwe. Crucially, this research explored how the sahwira's incorporation of humor and laughter aligns with the principles outlined in the Dual Process Model of grief proposed by Stroebe and Schut. This model highlights how bereaved individuals navigate grief by oscillating between processing the pain of loss and adapting to a changed reality in the wake of their loved one's passing.

### The Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals

Seven Budya traditional funeral rituals were identified by this study. Death announcement, welcoming visitors, burial preparations, burial rituals, cleansing ritual, distribution of the deceased's property ritual and the deceased's friend rituals. The identified funeral rituals and their descriptions are shown in Table 4 below. Most funeral rituals are performed before the burial of the deceased's body.

**Table 1**

Research Question 1: Theme and Sub-themes

*The Budya traditional funeral rituals that are practised after the death of a loved one*

Major Theme	Subthemes	Descriptions
The Budya traditional funeral rituals that are practised after the death of a loved one	Death announcements	Death announcements are achieved by beating the drum called <i>kwenje</i> and a whistle called <i>tsuri</i> , alerting the nearby relatives and villagers of the death.
	Welcoming visitors during a funeral	This is a ritual done to welcome the close relatives of the deceased to explain how the deceased died and the cause of the death. Tasks of the funeral are also distributed during this ritual.
	Burial preparations rituals	There are three burial preparations: identification of the grave for the deceased's body, covering the deceased's body with a particular cloth called <i>fuko</i> , and the preparation of the beer called <i>nhope</i> and tobacco powder called <i>fodya</i> to be buried together with the deceased's body.
	Burial rituals	The deceased's body is buried together with the ancestral gifts of <i>nhope</i> and <i>fodya</i> and then followed by a farewell ritual where the children are asked to throw sticks backwards as they leave the grave without looking back.
	Cleansing ritual	The children of the deceased were asked to enter the kitchen hut and come out one by one starting with the eldest to the youngest as they step on water mixed with a herb to be cleansed. This ritual is done the following day after burial.
	Distribution of deceased's property ritual	The symbolic belongings of the deceased are sprinkled with water mixed with a herb and then distributed to the grandchildren and other relatives.

	Deceased's friend rituals	The deceased's friend is an important person during the rituals who takes the role of entertainer through jokes and mimicking the deceased's life, resolving conflicts and explaining the cause of the death of the deceased.
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Several key Budya traditional funeral rituals emerged as central to the participants' experiences. The practice of burying gifts with the deceased, known as "nhope," and the distribution of the deceased's property were frequently highlighted as holding particular significance. Participants attributed the centrality of these rituals to the spiritual, mental, and emotional benefits they provide to those mourning and grieving.

Interestingly, the study also revealed that the sahwira's role transcends specific rituals. While there are seven distinct Budya funeral rituals outlined in Table 1, participants emphasized that the sahwira's influence permeates all aspects of the funeral process. This translates to the sahwira having the freedom to participate and even intervene at any point during the various rituals. However, it is important to note that certain specific roles (roles of bringing humor during funerals) within the funeral process remain exclusive to the sahwira, further emphasizing their unique and multifaceted contribution to Budya Shona funeral traditions.

### **Sahwiras roles during a funeral**

Several participants emphasized the historical significance of the sahwira's roles within traditional Shona funeral practices. A 71-year-old female, participant 12, articulated the breadth and depth of responsibilities that sahwiras historically shouldered in these rituals:

*Sahwira was an announcer of facts and truth during the funeral. Sahwira was a family friend who is free to interfere or talk during the funeral. This means that this person can carry out many small rituals such as stopping the carrying of the deceased's body, giving a speech before or during the burial, facilitating some rituals or tasks during rituals, etc. Therefore, he is free to do anything he deems suitable to achieve his goals as a friend of the deceased. His main goal is to bring a joyful mood in the mourners during the funeral such as making people laugh using jokes or mimicking the deceased. He also resolves conflicts during funerals. (Participant 12, female, 71 years old).*

Participant 12 emphasized two main roles of the sahwira during funeral process: announcing of facts and truth about the deceased and bringing joyful mood to the bereaved during funeral process. Participant 9, a man aged 82, further explained in some more detail these roles of *sahwira*:

*Sahwira is a very important person during funerals. He takes the properties he desires during the distribution of the deceased's property before the rest of the relatives. His role is described in Budya Shona as, *kuuraya bonga*, which literally means "to kill the wild cat", and it implies that he would say the truth without fear of being victimized or attacked. He also makes people laugh during the funeral. If the deceased owned evil powers or charms, the sahwira tells all the people about the degree of such evil power. He would say that the deceased should go with his bad things. He entertains the mourners during the funeral. His role is still practised in our modern world. He makes the funeral easy (*anorerutsa nyashwa*). For example, in the case of a deceased person who was bad, he would tell those who exaggerate their mourning by excessively crying and fainting to stop because there is no need to crying for a bad person. Another example is when the meals during the funeral are meanly prepared of ugali and green vegetables only, he would tell the deceased's relatives to provide good meals such as by slaughtering one head of cattle to celebrate the deceased's good life. (Participant 9, male, 82 years old).*

Participant 9's explanations agrees with participant 12's explanations of the importance of the sahwira's roles of truth telling with no fear and helping the bereaved to feel better during the funeral.

Participant responses illuminated the significant role sahwiras play during Budya Shona funerals. Their primary function centers on injecting moments of lightheartedness into an otherwise somber atmosphere by using humor and jokes to uplift the spirits of mourners. Additionally, sahwiras are often announcers of truth about the deceased and they act as mediators, resolving any conflicts that may arise and ensuring a smooth progression of the funeral process.

While participants provided examples of specific actions sahwiras may undertake (such as halting the carrying of the deceased's body, delivering speeches throughout the funeral, and facilitating formal rituals), it's noteworthy that sahwiras do not have strictly defined mandatory rituals. This suggests a degree of flexibility within their role, allowing them to adapt their interventions to the specific needs and dynamics of each funeral.

### **The mental and emotional benefits of the role of the *sahwira* during a funeral**

Sahwira's humour during funeral helps to lessen the mourning and grieving process of the bereaved. There are mental and emotional benefits of the sahwira's role within Budya Shona funerals. Here, the focus falls on the specific ritual of "various deceased's friend roles," which, as participants reveal, is centered on using humor and laughter to lighten the mood during the mourning period.

Participants, such as the 76-year-old male participant 11, emphasized the crucial role of the sahwira (friend of the deceased) in alleviating the emotional burden on the bereaved. They described how the sahwira's use of jokes, humor, and even playful mimicry of the deceased serves to create moments of laughter and emotional respite amidst the grief. This approach, participants suggested, fosters a sense of shared joy and eases the pain of loss for those mourning, offering a temporary escape from overwhelming emotions and facilitating a more balanced experience during the funeral process. Participant 11 explained:

*Sahwira brought moments of an atmosphere of happiness and joy during funerals through his jokes and mimicking of the deceased's behavior. He does this to shift the minds and emotions of the mourners, especially the close relatives, from a sorrowful to a happy mood. (Participant 11, male, 76 years old).*

Participant 4, a man aged 91 years, also said:

*The sahwira makes the funeral less of a burden, or he lessens the mourning and grieving processes of the bereaved by creating jokes about the deceased's life. He is a facilitator of easier grieving and makes things move fast. He is a source of happiness through jokes. In addition, the sahwira's presence during the funeral process provides that support that one needs from relatives and friends. (Participant 4, male, 91 years old).*

Participant 4 pointed out that the sahwira offers social support to the bereaved during funeral process. Participant 9 shared during his interview that the contribution of humour of the sahwira made him feel happy about the life of the deceased and helped him to shift from sorrowful to joyful mood during the funeral of his late brother. Participant 9, a man aged 82 years, explained:

*So regarding my feelings about the role of sahwira during the funeral of my late brother, I can say that sahwira helped me to feel better in the process of mourning. His jokes and humor during the funeral helped me to feel happy about the life of the deceased, instead of feeling sad and crying all the time. We can say that sahwira is an entertainer helping mourners feel happy as a way of overcoming the mourning mood. (Participant 9, male, 82 years old).*

Participant 13, a woman aged 60 years, also explained the mental and emotional benefits of *sahwira* from a personal perspective as follows:

*During the funeral of my mother, the truth that I heard from the sahwira from my mother's clan made me feel better, because the truth he spoke made me understand the circumstances regarding my late mother's life. Sahwira speaks that truth that sets free. He spoke this truth in a joking way, or in a dramatic way, and mostly in a caring way. So sahwira is a good and important person during funerals. Besides that, the sahwira jokes and humour and presence during my late mother's funeral process helped me to accept the death of my mother and move on. (Participant 13, female, 60 years old).*

Participant 13 contributed another benefit of sahwira's role during funeral process of acceptance of death and moving on. Focus Group Discussion 2 confirmed the mental and emotional benefits of the *sahwira* during a funeral as follows:

*Sahwira has no protocol to follow during the funeral process. He is free to do what he wants and carries out any ritual he desires during the funeral. This means that with this freedom and right, he can expose the hidden truth that needs to be heard during the funeral. He speaks the truth that settles and resolves conflicts. He makes things simple and easier to understand during a funeral. One of his major roles during a funeral is to make people laugh by mimicking the deceased and making jokes. The presence of sahwira makes it not necessary to go to a witch doctor to find out who could have bewitched or killed the deceased. However, he only speaks the truth that frees and unites, not the truth that divides and destroys. This means that even if he knew some dangerous truths, he would not expose them. Laughing at the funeral is good for the heart of the bereaved, especially for heavy mourners. So, he makes the*

*process of mourning and grieving a bit lighter and less heavy (kunyevenutsa). (Focus Group Discussion 2).*

**Table 2** Research question 2 theme and subthemes

*The mental and emotional benefits of the role of the sahwira during a funeral*

Major Theme	Sub Themes	Description
The mental and emotional benefits of the role of the sahwira during a funeral	Emotional Comfort	The sahwira provides emotional support to the bereaved family and friends during the funeral, offering comfort and reassurance in times of grief.
	Escape from sorrow to happiness emotions	The sahwira's humour and jokes offer temporary escape from overwhelming sorrowful mourning emotions by making the bereaved temporarily feel happy and joyful.
	Communication of truth about the deceased	The sahwira's jokes and humour is another way to communicate the truth about the cause of the death of the deceased which makes the bereaved to easily understand and accept the death of their loved one.
	Closure and Acceptance	Serving as a sahwira can facilitate the process of closure and acceptance for the bereaved, aiding in their psychological healing and adjustment to loss.

The participants' responses above indicated that the *sahwira's* role during a funeral is important for bringing an atmosphere of happiness and some relief from sorrow to the bereaved. Their responses attested that the *sahwira's* creation of humor during funerals has a positive impact on the emotions of the bereaved. It can also be inferred from the extracts from the above participants that the role of *sahwira* during the whole funeral process lessens the mourning and grieving processes in several ways through jokes and humor. Table 2 shows the mental and emotional benefits of the *sahwira's* humour and jokes to the bereaved. The participants' contributions showed that the *sahwira's* humour and jokes provide emotional support to the bereaved family members and friends during the funeral by offering social comfort and reassurance. The *sahwira's* humour and jokes makes the bereaved move their emotions from sorrowful mood to a joyful or happy mood. The participants also expressed that the *sahwira's* jokes and humour conveys information to the bereaved about the circumstances about the death of the deceased. Largely, the participants' contributions above also showed that overall the *sahwira's* humour and jokes and presence facilitate the whole process of closure and acceptance for the bereaved, aiding in their psychological healing and adjustment to the loss. Thus, all in all, the *sahwira's* role during funeral process facilitates easy grieving and making things move fast.

#### IV. Discussion

This study showed that the identified roles of the *sahwira* and their benefits are similar to the funeral processes in other cultures especially in Africa.

##### **The Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals: role of *Sahwira***

The Budya Shona traditional funeral customs exhibit significant disparities compared to those of European cultures, primarily due to the prevailing influence of Christian funeral practices. Consequently, some participants in the study highlighted the continued observance of certain Budya traditional funeral rituals among the Zimbabwe Shona populace.

An analysis of the current study's results and its literature review suggests that there seems to be significant strong similarities among the African funeral rituals. For example, the following elements of the Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals are almost similar to those of the Luo ethnic group in Kenya: death announcement through the deafening women's long quivering wailing, burial preparations in the form of grave identification and vigil before burial, and distribution of the deceased's property (Ngesa et al., 2020). The identification of the grave site together with the vigil before burial are the only parallels between the Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals and those of the Vhavenda people in South Africa (Musehane, 2012). It appears that the resemblances of the Budya Shona traditional funeral rituals with other African funeral rituals point to the African culture's character of a sense of community.

The distinctiveness of the Budya traditional rituals performed by the *sahwira*, the deceased's friend, can be attributed to the unique roles and responsibilities assigned within Budya traditional culture. Studies by Bourdillin (1976) and Mushishi (2010) conducted in Mutoko district, Zimbabwe, also underscore the significance

of the sahwira during funeral proceedings. The similarities between the funeral rituals identified in this study and those documented by Mushishi and Bourdillin affirm the validity of the current findings.

This study successfully identified and described the Budya traditional funeral rituals, drawing upon the insights of participants from diverse religious backgrounds. Two key factors facilitated this process. Firstly, the participation of 10 individuals (24.4%) who actively adhered to the Budya Shona traditional religion proved invaluable. Their familiarity with the religious practices, including funeral rituals, allowed them to provide detailed descriptions (Bratton & De Waal, 2019). Secondly, the remaining 31 participants (75.6%), although identifying with Christianity, also possessed valuable knowledge due to their past experiences participating in Budya traditional funerals. This highlights the intricate cultural landscape of Mutoko district, where inter-tribal marriages and cultural exchange have woven together diverse practices (Moyo et al., 2018). Notably, some participants even pointed out the presence of non-Budya rituals, potentially stemming from these inter-tribal interactions.

Through this inclusive approach, the study effectively distinguished genuine Budya traditional funeral rituals from potentially borrowed practices, ensuring an accurate portrayal of the sahwira's role within this specific cultural context. This clarity is crucial for preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, particularly in regions experiencing cultural exchange and potential integration of diverse practices (Scoones et al., 2019).

### **The role of the deceased's friend in lessening the mourning and grieving process**

This study sheds light on the significant role of the sahwira, a friend of the deceased, in Budya Shona funerals. The findings reveal that the sahwira's primary function is to uplift the spirits of the bereaved by introducing moments of joy and ensuring the smooth flow of the funeral process, ultimately aiming to alleviate the burden of grief. These results resonate with research conducted in diverse cultural contexts, highlighting the potential universality of humor as a coping mechanism during bereavement.

The study aligns with the work of Lunds et al. (2008) who explored the experiences of recently widowed individuals in the United States. Their findings indicated that positive emotions and humor significantly impacted participants' bereavement, particularly following the funeral period. Similarly, the study concluded a strong association between humor and laughter and positive grief adjustments, both during and after the funeral process (Lunds et al., 2008). Furthermore, the mental and emotional benefits of the sahwira's role echo the observations of Moyo (2013) who noted how the sahwira's use of humor during funerals contributes to easing tension and sorrow among the bereaved (Moyo, 2013). This finding also aligns with Yule et al.'s (2017) study, which concluded that humor during funerals allows mourners to temporarily set aside their grief and celebrate the life of the deceased (Yule et al., 2017).

Intriguingly, the present study not only confirms the findings of these previous researchers but also demonstrates the continued relevance and practice of the sahwira's role in Mutoko district, Zimbabwe. The participants' contributions suggest that incorporating humor and joy during funerals might be a valuable and therapeutic practice for those navigating the grieving process, even though it may differ from traditions observed in other cultures. This observation underscores the need for further exploration, potentially through a longitudinal qualitative study, to delve deeper into the potential efficacy of integrating joy and humor into funeral rituals across diverse cultural contexts.

### **Contribution of the sahwira's humour and laughter to Stroebe and schut's theory of Dual Process Model of Grief**

This study examined how the sahwira's use of humour and laughter potentially aligns with and supports this the Dual Process Model of Grief which was started by Stroebe and schut. This study found four subthemes that points to how the sahwira's humour during funerals contribute to Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief. Table 3 shows the four sub themes.



**Table 3** Research question 3: theme and subthemes

*How do the identified benefits of the sahwira's role of humor and laughter contribute to Stroebe and Schut's theory of the Dual Process Model of Grief?*

Major Theme	Sub Themes	Description
How do the identified benefits of the sahwira's role of humor and laughter contribute to Stroebe and Schut's theory of the Dual Process Model of Grief?	Emotional Regulation as a coping mechanism	The use of humour and laughter helps individuals regulate their emotions during the grieving process, providing a temporary relief from intense feelings of sadness and loss.
	Stress Reduction as a coping mechanism	Humour and laughter serve as coping mechanisms that reduce stress levels by promoting relaxation and releasing tension associated with grief.
	Bonding and Connection as an enhancement of social support	Sharing humour and laughter with others fosters a sense of connection and strengthens social bonds, creating a supportive environment for individuals experiencing grief.
	Psychological Well-being: Promotion of resilience for the bereaved	Engaging in humour and laughter can enhance psychological well-being by promoting resilience, optimism, and a more positive outlook on life despite the challenges of grief.

The sahwira's humour during funerals provides moments of regulation of emotions between mourning sorrow and joy. The bereaved get moments of temporary relief from intense feelings of sadness of the loss of their loved ones. This means that there is a balance of emotions between feelings of mourning sadness of the loss and joy caused by the sahwira's humour. This seem to support Stroebe and Schat's theory which states that during funeral, normal grieving process should involve an oscillation between the feelings of sadness and joy. In addition, the sahwira's humour also helps reduce stress for the bereaved. The humour and laughter during funeral promote muscle relaxation and releasing of emotional stress that are associated with grief. Chadran's (2020) argument that humour and laughter during funeral process provides opportunities for the bereaved to find avenues for releasing emotional tensions, seem to agree with Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of grief theory. This study also found that sahwira's humour during funerals serve as a coping mechanisms for the bereaved because it reduces stress levels by promoting physical and emotional relaxation and releasing tensions associated with grief.

The role of the sahwira of including humour and laughter during funerals promotes social support during funerals. The sharing of humour and laughter during funerals fosters a sense of community, connection and it strengthens social bonds. This creates strong supportive environment for the bereaved during funerals. The social bonds fosters opportunities for the bereaved to easily balance between the emotions of mourning sadness and joy during funerals.

The sahwira's humour and laughter during funerals enhance psychological well-being by promoting resilience, optimism, and a more positive outlook on life despite the challenges of grief. With the oscillation process where the bereaved are exposed to emotions of humour, laughter and grieving sadness, the bereaved are given a conducive environment where they can easily find a balance of their emotions and find meaning and purpose of the loss of their loved one. This ultimately help them to have resilience in the loss of their loved one where they get healed in their grieving process and move one with life without the deceased. This strongly supports Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief theory which stipulates that for a normal grieving process to take place there is need for regulated emotions of sadness and joy.

### Dual Process Model of Grief theory

The study further confirms the validity of Stroebe and Schut's (1999) dual-process model of grief, particularly in the context of the sahwira's role during funerals. The sahwira's responsibility to infuse joy through informal rituals, jokes, and humor aligns with the model's concept of restoration-oriented oscillation, facilitating the grieving individual's movement between feelings of loss and restoration. This process aids in coping with grief and finding hope for the future, ultimately diminishing the mourning and grieving processes.

The role of providing joyful moods during the funeral, which the *sahwira* achieves through some informal rituals, jokes, and humour, can be interpreted as the other concept of restoration-oriented oscillation, according to Stroebe and Schut's dual process model of grief. Thus, the presence of the *sahwira* during the entire funeral process facilitates the restoration-oriented oscillation process, which is part of a process of a movement of back and forth between two behaviours and feelings of loss and restoration. The two stressors according to Stroebe and Schut are loss-oriented and restoration-oriented, as well as a dynamic, oscillatory coping mechanism in which the grieving person alternately confronts and avoids the various grieving duties.

The *sahwira* helps the bereaved to have feelings of restoration and hope by providing joyful moods through humour and jokes. The grieving person's movement from sorrowful to joyful feelings is a coping mechanism, which helps the bereaved person to find avenues for dealing with the death of a loved one and go through the stages of grief until the person attains hope for the future. In other words, joyful feelings lessen the bereaved person's mourning and grieving processes. The current study also adds to other studies in Africa that confirmed Stroebe and Schut's dual process model of grief such as Gamliel (2014), Tshoba (2014), Hunt (2004), Vambe (2009), and Makumbirofa et al. (2019), where the applicability of the dual process model of grief's dualistic structure of joy and sorrow have been investigated by implication.

The innovation of the dual-process model of grief's stressors of feelings and behaviours of joy or restoration during a funeral assumes that without it there are only opportunities for the other stressors of feelings and behaviours of loss. Thus, from the dual process model of grief theory, all the identified Budya traditional funeral rituals provide opportunities for the bereaved to process the loss of a loved one but only in a sorrowful mood. This seems to be true as it was confirmed when some participants stated that the deceased's friend was free to carry out rituals or roles at any moment during the whole funeral process in order to introduce humour and laughter. This entails that without the introduction of joy and humour during a funeral period does not offer opportunities for the bereaved to have feelings of joy and moments to celebrate the life of the deceased. This study emphasized the importance of the *sahwira's* humour and laughter during funerals a healing remedy for the bereaved. Since the *sahwira's* roles and rituals are not formal, they could not be well documented in this study.

However, the dual process model of grief still needs more research to affirm its practicality regarding the efficiency of the joyful moods for the bereaved, precisely to demonstrate how the joyful moods help the bereaved to deal with the loss of a loved one until they attain complete therapeutic healing. Future researchers may focus on how the two stressors of feelings and behaviours or loss and hope complement each other to provide opportunities for the bereaved to attain complete healing.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study highlights the resilience of the Budya traditional cultural beliefs and rituals surrounding funerals, even amidst the strong influence of Christianity in the region. The *sahwira's* role in the Budya Shona funeral process emerges as both unique and psychologically beneficial, facilitating the bereaved's journey through mourning and grief. The study found that the *sahwira's* integration of humor and joy creates temporary shifts from sorrow to more positive emotions, acting as a coping mechanism for those grieving. This process helps mourners navigate the complexities of loss and move through the stages of grief, ultimately having easier processing of the loss and being able to live in the future without the deceased.

Furthermore, the study's findings affirm the relevance of Stroebe and Schut's Dual Process Model of Grief. This model posits that individuals cope with loss by oscillating between loss-oriented behaviors (confronting the pain of grief) and restoration-oriented behaviors (adapting to life changes). The *sahwira's* introduction of humor and joy during a funeral can be seen as a restoration-oriented mechanism, offering respite from overwhelming emotions and supporting the bereaved in adjusting to their new reality without their loved one.

This study also suggests that bereavement and grief counsellors may find inspiration in the mental and emotional benefits of the *sahwira's* role during the funeral process. Bereavement and grief counsellors may benefit from incorporating two ideas in their counseling process: acknowledging and valuing the *sahwira's* role in the previous funeral processes; and maybe reaching out to the *sahwira* following the burial and funeral process, particularly for individuals who might be experiencing prolonged grieving process after the funeral period.

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