

# Restrictions on Funeral Gatherings during COVID-19: A Religious/Spiritual Perspective among the Zimbabwean Community Living in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

This essay endeavors to understand the impact of COVID-19 hard lockdown restrictions on funeral gatherings from a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective. For most Zimbabwean Christians and non-Christians, funeral rites of passage are at the apex of all religious activities and are revered in most social settings. The central questions to this study are: How have funeral gathering restrictions impacted on the religious/spiritual beliefs of many Zimbabwean immigrants living in South Africa, who were not able to attend funeral ceremonies back home in Zimbabwe? What religious/spiritual implications does it have to attend or not attend funeral ceremonies from a Zimbabwean religious perspective? These questions are raised because during the pandemic, most Zimbabweans who lived in South Africa were forbidden to go home to attend funeral ceremonies due to travelling restrictions between the two countries. This study found that most Zimbabwean immigrants who did not participate in funeral rites of passage due to COVID restrictions were left with spiritual distress after the pandemic. Data for this article were collected through interviews with individuals from Zimbabwe who are living in South Africa. Interviewees were selected using purposive sampling. Confidentiality, anonymity, and suppression of names are some of the ethical considerations maintained throughout this research.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, hard lockdown, funeral rites, religio-spiritual worldview, prolonged grief, spiritual distress, Zimbabwean immigrants, pandemic

## **Introduction**

This article investigated the impact of the restrictions on funeral gatherings during COVID-19 from a religious/spiritual perspective particularly among the Zimbabwean people living in South Africa. Previous scholars have noted that due to COVID-19's rapid transmission and the unavailability of a drug to cure the virus, South Africa and Zimbabwe, like other countries introduced several restrictions to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus (Chirisa, Mavhima, Nyevera, Chigudu, Makochekanwa, Matai, Masunda, Chandaengerwa, Machingura, Moyo, Chirisa, Mhloyi, Murwira, Mhandara, Katsande, Muchena, Manjeya, Nyika, & Mundau 2021:2 of 10). Among the restrictions imposed by these two countries were the restrictions on border crossing, funeral gatherings, and a complete ban of body viewing during burial. Accordingly, key religious/spiritual questions to ask were: How are most Zimbabweans who were prohibited to attend the funeral ceremonies of their loved ones who died during the pandemic coping with their grief after COVID-19? Did these surviving family members find closure despite the fact that they could not be at the funeral to put the soil in the grave and do a body viewing? Alternatively, do they perceive their absenteeism from these events as precursor for the ancestors to punish them? These questions are raised because Zimbabweans, particularly from the Karanga culture where the researcher comes from, grew up believing that not attending funeral ceremonies invites a curse from the ancestors and a punishable offence by the community. This article discusses certain funeral rituals which were regarded as cultivating corridors for the bereaved to have a complete closure. Funeral rituals such as body viewing, the throwing of soil on top of the coffin in the grave and just being present at the funeral ceremony are rituals which are meant to put the bereaved on the right path to emotional healing (Chitakure 2020:287). Accordingly, the discussion of these funeral rites of passage were done to substantiate the hypothesis that the restrictions on funeral gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on the grieving process of the bereaved.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This was a cross-sectional survey carried out in Pretoria, South Africa, among the Zimbabwean people living in the diaspora. The research done uti-

lized a qualitative research approach. Within the qualitative research dimension, the religious/spiritual development theory by Chris Boyatzis was employed to understand the phenomena studied. Ther religious/spiritual development theory is a hypothesis that suggest that every child grows up within an organized community that has shared narratives, practices, teachings, rituals, and symbols in order to bring people closer to the sacred and to enhance their relationship with the community (Boyatzis 2005:125). In other words, the religious/spiritual development theory can be understood as a theory that accounts for progressive series of changes in the structure, function, and patterns that characterize people’s search for and response to sacred meaning and connection (Boyatzis 2005:126). The assumption of this theory is that such shared narratives, practices, teachings, and rituals to which a child is introduced during childhood constitute one’s religious personality, sustaining that individual even as they mature and grow into old age.

Borrowing Piaget’s theory on fixation, Boyatzis and others argue that adults find themselves fixed within certain shared narratives, practices, teachings, and rituals introduced to them during childhood (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks 2006:299). It is against that background that this article interrogates how the restrictions placed on funeral rituals during COVID-19 affected the Zimbabwean immigrants living in South Africa who could not go back home and participate in the funeral rites of passage during the pandemic.

## **Methodology**

Participants for this study were drawn from three Zimbabwean churches with branches in Pretoria. The researcher carried out some interviews with the White Garment (Vapostori) Church members; the Zimbabwe Assemblies of God – Forward in Faith Ministries International (ZAOGA-FIFMI), and the United Family of God Church (UFIC) – all in Pretoria. These churches were selected because though they have set branches in South Africa, many of the members are Zimbabwean immigrants. Added to that, these churches were selected because they represent a Christian strand called African Christianity since these three are African Indigenous Churches (AICs) founded by Africans and not by White missionaries. AICs, unlike White missionaries’ churches have developed a theology that accommodates African cultures. They have their own unique way of interpreting the Bible and have incorpo-

rated African traditions and customs into their worship practices (Amanze 1998:113).

Participants were selected during the researcher's visit to these churches using targeted sampling. Targeted sampling, also known as purposive or judgmental sampling, is a type of non-probability sampling technique where the researcher specifically selects individuals from the population who possess characteristics or knowledge that can provide insight on the research question (Hoffmann 2007:330). Thus, only church members who lost close relatives during COVID-19 were selected for this study. Names of potential participants were provided by church leaders. The involvement of church leaders in identifying potential participants made the interviews possible. Using purposive sampling, a total of 20 participants were successfully sampled and interviewed. While the researcher could have interviewed more than 20, using the targeted sampling was good enough for this study. The researcher used open-ended questions. Open-ended questions are questions that require more than a short, fixed response (Hoffmann 2007:331). Open-ended questions were therefore used because they are designed to encourage the person answering the question to provide a more detailed and elaborate response (Hoffmann 2007:331). This research was carried out between October 2022 and February 2023.

Appointment dates were set and the church leaders' houses were selected as meeting places for the interviews. Each participant indicated to the researcher the day and time convenient for the interviews. To avoid harm, informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were some of the ethical considerations that were adhered to in the study. In addition, participants were informed beforehand about the possible impact of the study to make an informed decision about whether they wanted to participate or not. Information about the purpose of the study, what participation required of them, and the duration of participation were made available to the participants. Moreover, participation was voluntary, and refusal to participate did not have negative consequences on any of the potential participants (Dube, Nkomo, & Khosa 2017:4). The participants' information was treated with utmost confidentiality regardless of their social, health, and church affiliation. The hermeneutic phenomenology of Edmund Husserl was used to analyze the data collected. Hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with personalized lived experiences and interpretations of individuals' experiences (Ramsook 2018:16). In context, the fundamental question was, *How has the*

*restrictions imposed on funeral gatherings impacted on the religious/spiritual lives of Zimbabwean immigrants who did not attend funeral ceremonies back home during COVID-19?* The method was selected because it assumes that multiple socially constructed realities exist and that the meanings given by individuals to their experiences ought to be the objects of study to allow the voices of the participants to be heard without judging them.

## **Research Findings**

### ***The Meaning and Importance of the Rites of Passage***

Rites of passage can be identified as various ceremonies which an individual undergoes to mark a transition from one stage of life to another (Nwadiokwu, Nwadiokwu, Favour, & Okwuazun 2016:42). These rituals are identified with elaborate observations of certain taboos and regulations (Omonisi 2020:2 of 4). Thus, a particular rite of passage done properly would mean that the person involved has graduated from one stage of life to the other (Nwadiokwu *et al.* 2016:41). It is against this backdrop that the selected funeral rites of passage are discussed in this article. Thus, from a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective, funeral rites of passage continue to hold meaning and significance among most Zimbabwean communities (Chitakure 2020:143), even during the pandemic.

The narrative given is that rites of passage have a religious/spiritual meaning as they bring the spiritual and physical worlds together (Nolte-Schamm 2006:134). The unity of the community is renewed through periodic rites of passage with all the rituals and ceremonies being linked to it (Magesa 2014:148). Accordingly, members of an entire community and family are brought together including the departed and even those yet to be born (Mbiti 1975:10). Rites of passage, according to the Zimbabwean religious worldview, epitomize the sense that the divine order is recognized, acknowledged, and actualized through these rites (Chitakure 2020:150). In the Zimbabwean religious/spiritual worldview, every rite of passage re-enacts and connects the living with the living dead (Banana 1991:12). This article discusses the impact of the restrictions on funeral gatherings during COVID-19 from a religious/spiritual perspective among the Zimbabwean people living in South Africa, more specifically in Pretoria.

### ***Lockdown Measures during COVID-19: A Definition***

As indicated above, Chirisa *et al.* point out that the range of measures that were introduced to stem the spread of COVID-19 were influenced by a multiplicity of factors including the phase of the pandemic in a particular country, epidemiological data, the level of scientific knowledge, and the workability of public health systems (Chirisa *et al.* 2021:2 of 10). In addition, Haider, Osman, Gadzekpo, Akipede, Asogun, Ansumana, Lessells, Khan, Hamid, Yeboah-Manu, Mboera, Shayo, Mmbaga, Urassa, Musoke, Kapata, Ferrand, Kapata, Stigler, Czypionka, Zumla, Kock, and McCoy (2020:1) posit that the high transmissibility of COVID-19 and the fact that asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic individuals may be contagious meant that standard communicable disease control measures involved case detection and contact tracing, while selective isolation and quarantine were insufficient to bring transmission under control particularly when infection rates were comparatively high. Accordingly, the high transmissibility of COVID-19 resulted in many countries implementing additional measures to curtail the spread, to reverse exponential epidemic growth trajectories in order to flatten the curve and increase the capacity of the health care system to respond to the pandemic (Haider *et al.* 2020:2). This is how hard lockdown measures were introduced.

According to Chirisa *et al.* (2021:1 of 10), by the end of 2020, almost half of the world's population had experienced a hard lockdown with strong containment measures. Although the term 'lockdown' is now a commonly used term, Haider *et al.* bring to our attention the fact that a widely accepted definition does not exist and authors use a range of matrices to provide a common definition for lockdown (Haider *et al.* 2020:2). Therefore, Haider *et al.* refer to lockdown as a set of measures aimed at reducing the transmission of COVID-19 that are mandatory, applied indiscriminately to a general population and involve some restrictions on the established pattern of social and economic life (Haider *et al.* 2020:2).

On January 3, 2021, Zimbabwe's government imposed a national hard lockdown following a surge in COVID-19 cases (Mavhunga 2021). The lockdown measures included an overall curfew from 18:00 to 06:00. Premises of essential services were to be closed at 15:00 during hard lockdown. All gatherings were banned for 30 days, except funerals gatherings which were limited to no more than 30 attendees (Mavhunga 2021). In the same year and month, South Africa entered at least two weeks of strict lockdown to combat a devastating third wave of COVID-19 linked to the more transmissible Delta

variant (McKenzie & Nimi 2021). It is during this period that most Zimbabwean immigrants who lost their loved ones could not cross the border to attend funerals back home in Zimbabwe.

## **The Impact of Hard Lockdown Restrictions on Funeral Gatherings in Zimbabwe**

The negative impact of lockdown restrictions on funeral gatherings particularly in Zimbabwe, but also in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa should be understood from both a religious and a spiritual viewpoint. Religion is said to help provide meaning and answers to the problems of uncertainty, powerlessness, and scarcity that death creates (Carteret 2010). Spirituality refers to one's connectedness to God, to our human roots, to the rest of nature, to one another, and to ourselves (Abraham & Mbuy-Beya 2005:57). Thus, funeral gatherings are conducted to reeducate mourners about the meaning of death enabling bereaved individuals to find meaning for an event that for most people is inexplicable (Ekore & Lanre-Abass 2016:370). From a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective, death is regarded as the vehicle transporting people from this world into the spiritual world, from mortality to immortality (Chitakure 2020:178). Most Zimbabweans believe that life does not end with death but continues in another realm (Chitando 1999:17).

This understanding gives mourners the comfort and hope that one day they will meet their beloved ones who would have departed before them. However, for this to happen, certain funeral rituals should have been conducted. For instance, most Zimbabweans believe that one should have a decent burial (Chitando 1999:18). A decent burial includes a well-attended funeral ceremony accompanied by good testimonies. These testimonies are done to remind God about the good deeds the deceased had done before the transition and to comfort the surviving relatives. During the pandemic, such rituals were negatively impacted. Those who died during COVID-19 were buried with few people attending, or buried by funeral parlors with family members standing some meters away. Thus, the funeral rites of passage discussed above were those that epitomize the belief among many African cultures that death is not the end of life but rather a transition to another realm of existence (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:236).

Following are sampled interviews carried out by the researcher in Pretoria between October 2022 and February 2023. Interviewee 1 stated: ‘My twin sister died of COVID in Zimbabwe during the hard lockdown. I did not manage to go and bury my sister. She was buried in my absence. I felt robbed and traumatized. We were so close. The body was buried, and I only attended the funeral ceremony online. The body was collected from the mortuary and went straight to the burial site. We were not used to this, and it seems to disrespect the dead. Even the body viewing was not allowed. It was painful for me not to say goodbye to my twin sister’ (Interview Interviewee 1 2023).

Another interviewee who did not have a chance to attend the funeral ceremony of his late father due to COVID restrictions narrated: ‘My father died in Zimbabwe during hard lockdown and I could not go home to bury him. Three months after his burial I started dreaming strange dreams. On many occasions I experienced some blackouts, at times at work or walking in the streets in Pretoria. These blackouts continued for six months. I knew it was because my ancestors were giving me warnings to go home and fulfill some burial rituals for my late Father. After the lifting of the hard lockdown ban on traveling, I traveled to Zimbabwe to see the grave of my Father. The elders there took me to the graveyard and performed the ritual *kukanda ivhu paguva*. What surprises me is that after that ritual I never experienced those dreams and no more blackouts’ (Interview Interviewee 2 2022).

In another interview Interviewee 3 averred: ‘My mother became ill and died during the hard lockdown period. I could not manage to go to Zimbabwe and attend her burial ceremony because of lockdown restrictions. Since then, my late mother used to come in my dreams but not saying a word. I was in trouble until after the relaxation of the lockdown I managed to go and throw soil on her grave as part of bidding farewell to her. After performing that ritual, I never dreamt of her again’ (Interview Interviewee 3 2022).

Throwing the soil on the grave is done by those who have missed the actual ritual of throwing the soil on the coffin in the grave before the actual burying and covering of the coffin are done (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:238). This study argues that throwing the soil in the grave by hand is an important ritual. The reason for this submission is that only close family members are given that opportunity to throw the soil on top of the coffin by hand. According to Baloyi, this ritual is important as it signifies paying the last respects to the deceased (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:236). It also denotes bidding someone a farewell, wishing the deceased to travel well in



their spiritual journey until reaching their destination (re-union with the already departed family members) (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:238).

In another interview, Interviewee 4 asserted: ‘On May 5, 2020 my dad succumbed to COVID-19 after a week-long of battling with the virus at Kalafong Hospital. We received the shocking news in the morning that Dad is no more. None of our friends and relatives could come to our house because we were also patients of COVID-19 and quarantined at home. I thought maybe they will allow the body to come home so we can do body viewing or just to see the coffin before being repatriated to Zimbabwe but none of the above happened. The next thing we heard was that the remains of Dad were transported to Zimbabwe. Dad was buried without anyone of us. We only managed to go home to see where he was buried almost 10 months after his burial. Though I saw where he was buried, I’m finding it very difficult to come to terms with this sad happening. It is almost two years since he left us, but I find it very difficult to accept that my dad is gone’ (Interview Interviewee 4 2023).

Asking another interviewee why funeral attendance was of such significance, he claimed: ‘We grew up knowing that if you do not attend a funeral and participate in its rituals, you will be haunted with troubles sent by the ancestors until you fulfil certain ritual. Ancestors will bring misfortune to people who did not attend the funeral or did not participate in funeral rituals’ (Interview Interviewee 5 2023).

While this interviewee did not speak about his own distress, another one narrated how she suffered ill health which only lifted when she went to her mother’s grave. Supporting the above sentiments, another interviewee revealed: ‘My mother became ill and died during Covid-19 lockdown restrictions. I was here in Pretoria and could not go to Zimbabwe to bury her due to lockdown measures. A few months after her burial, I got so sick. I lost my appetite and could not eat properly. Doctors could not identify the cause of the sickness. During that same time, each night my late elder brother would come to me in my dreams asking me when I last visited my rural home. I knew my sickness only required me to go home and perform the burial ritual. After the lockdown measures were relaxed, I went home to see where my mother was buried and to perform the throwing of soil by hand on the grave. Since then, my health has been restored to me. My late elder brother is also no longer coming in my dreams (Interview Interviewee 6 2023).

This article has indicated that, according to a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective, body viewing is in fact a farewell to the departed soul. Body viewing is also done to ensure that it was in fact one's relative who has died and is buried at a designated burial shrine. Thus, from a Zimbabwean religious perspective, the grave is the place the deceased is regarded to be wakavata (*asleep*) and where their spirit will be taken from and be brought back home. The grave is therefore an important ritual place (Chitando 1999:14).

Thus, this negative impact of not knowing where one's close relative was laid to rest, is here understood from a religious/spiritual perspective. One of my interviewees shared this distressing story: 'My husband died due to COVID, and his remains were transported to Plumtree for burial. I and the children remained in South Africa due to traveling restrictions. During the burial session, the relatives of my late husband insisted on having body viewing before burial. The funeral parlor tried to remind them that COVID regulations do not allow such practice, but the village head in support of my husband's relatives insisted on intimidating the funeral parlor that no burial was going to take place without body viewing. At last, the body viewing was done, only to discover that it was not the correct body brought by the parlor. So, this body which was mistakenly taken to Zimbabwe for burial was taken back to South Africa. And when they arrived in SA, the correct body had unfortunately already gone somewhere for burial. Up to now we do not know where he was laid to rest. The wound is still bleeding and cannot find closure' (Interview Interviewee 7 2022).

In the same vein, another interviewee shared his distressful story as he was not sure whether the person buried in the homestead was his father since body viewing was banned: 'During the hard lockdown, my father died of the COVID-19 virus in Zimbabwe, and I could not manage to go and bury him because of the traveling restrictions. My father was buried in my absence. I only managed to go there eight months after his burial. Though I saw where they said my father was buried, I am so depressed because I am not even sure whether it was him being buried there because the people who attended the burial were not given an opportunity to identify the body due to COVID restrictions (Interview interviewee 8 2023).

The responses from the above interviews posit that the body viewing ritual has both spiritual and physical meaning to most Africans, particularly in Zimbabwe. Seeing the body before burial was meant to put the bereaved in

the right path to accept death and get spiritual healing. Within the Zimbabwean religious context body viewing literally means *bidding farewell* to the departed soul. Consequently, every family member is encouraged to do body viewing including children. The master of ceremonies would announce, ‘yas-vikazvino nguva yekuonekana ne mufi’ (*Now is the time to bid farewell to the departed*). The physical meaning of body viewing is to confirm that the body is actually the departed relative and that again puts mourners onto the right path to emotional healing.

However, during COVID-19 the ritual of bidding farewell to the departed through body viewing was banned. The Zimbabwean authorities imposed restrictions on the movement of dead bodies to curb the spread of the virus. The deceased’s remains were taken from the mortuary to the burial site without allowing the body to spend a night at home. This was done to avoid night vigils and the gathering of mourners. On the burial day, mourners were not allowed to get closer to the coffin. A distance of about four meters from the coffin was to be maintained throughout the burial ceremony.

Accordingly, this banning of body viewing during the pandemic was obvious through the interviews, indicating that there is growing evidence that many surviving family members are failing to find closure because they did not view the body of their loved ones before burial. Of the 20 interviewees interviewed, 15 intimated to the researcher that they were spiritually distressed because they were not given an opportunity to bid farewell to their loved ones who died during the pandemic.

## **Discussion**

The above findings emphasized the presupposition that the restrictions on funeral gatherings have caused some spiritual distress to Zimbabweans living in South Africa who did not attend funeral ceremonies back home during the pandemic. Borrowing from Boyatzis (2005:128) this article argues that though these Zimbabweans have crossed borders to South Africa, their childhood religious orientations seem to have a lasting impact on an individual’s life, even as one grows older. Thus, the responses given by many of the interviewees during interviews alludes to the fact that such religious concepts were learned during childhood and continued to shape a person’s religious worldview throughout one’s life (King & Boyatzis 2006:1010). The observa-

tion is that these childhood experiences can influence one's perception of the world, their interactions with others, and coping with life's challenges.

This article argues that the belief that there are blessings in attending funeral rituals and curses in not attending funeral rites of passage act as signs of indoctrination from parents received by most Zimbabwean children as they grow up. For Boyatzis *et al.*, parents influence their children's religious/spiritual development as they do other realms, that is, through verbal communication, induction, and indoctrination of beliefs, disciplinary tactics, rewards, and punishments, as well as behavioral modeling (Boyatzis *et al.* 2006:1011). Thus, the discussion above reveals that the importance and significance of participating in funeral rites of passage are twofold: First, attending funerals is considered a social obligation and a way to show respect for the deceased. Showing respect for the deceased emanates from many Zimbabweans' belief that the living dead continue to influence the living. Ancestral spirits are believed to reside in the afterlife and maintain a connection with their living descendants. Thus, absenteeism from funeral gatherings can be interpreted as disrespect towards the deceased. Accordingly, there is a belief that those who do not attend may face spiritual consequences. Most Zimbabweans believe that displeasing ancestral spirits invite misfortune to the living family members. We noted that some believe that neglecting a funeral attendance could lead to illness, bad luck, or other difficulties.

Second, attending funerals is considered a social obligation and a way to show respect for the community. Thus, social pressure plays a role in ensuring attendance. Individuals may fear being ostracized or criticized if they do not participate in funeral activities. This is because societal norms and expectations often dictate how people should behave during funerals. Thus, in the Zimbabwean setting, funeral gatherings serve as a poignant juncture where social bonds are woven and memories are shared. The gathering of friends, family, and acquaintances provides solace and a sense of collective support during times of grief (Chitakure 2020:178).

We noted that during funeral gatherings several rituals are done to connect, share stories, tears, and silent nods, bridging the gap between the living and the departed. Thus, a funeral gathering is that moment when the community acknowledge the shared humanity which transcends individual experiences. Such experiences lead one to a path of emotional healing. The absence of a physical touch, the inability to stand by the graveside, and the inability to view the body, therefore left a spiritual void in many Zimbabwe-

ans who were unable to attend funeral ceremonies back home. While online funeral services were the most ideal during COVID-19, most of the people interviewed during the research cited the problem of internet connectivity in rural Zimbabwe.

Accordingly, this article argues that from a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective, grief and mourning is a communal event which involves the extended family, friends, and villagers. Kgatle and Segalo who carried their research in South Africa concurred with this research's finding that funeral rituals must be regarded as a humanizing pathway to comfort those who grieve (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:3 of 6). Through funeral gatherings, the bereaved will come to accept the lost that ushers them to a complete mourning, hence avoiding a prolonged grief (Kgatle & Segalo 2021:4 of 6). Thus, the prolonged grief is when the bereaved continues to ask, How sure are we that the person buried here is our relative since no one was allowed to do body viewing (seeing the body one last time)? Am I not going to be punished by the ancestors and my community since I did not attend and participate in the burial rituals of my late relative? This article argues that these are critical questions to reflect on as we reconfigure the impact of the restrictions on funeral gathering after COVID-19.

## **Conclusion**

This article concludes that from a religious/spiritual perspective most Zimbabwean immigrants who did not manage to attend funeral ceremonies back home due to lockdown restriction are left with spiritual distress after COVID-19. This was evident with many interviewees who felt isolated and cut off from their usual support networks due to many restrictions placed during the pandemic. From a Zimbabwean religious perspective, the grieving process often involves sharing memories, stories, and emotions with others who knew the deceased. This article has found that without this communal experience, individuals are struggling to cope with their grief after COVID-19. The article has pointed out that funeral rituals are necessary lubricants to put the bereaved in the right path of emotional healing. From a Zimbabwean religious/spiritual perspective, when mourners are unable to participate in funeral rituals such as body viewings, the throwing of soil in the grave, and other rituals, they may feel a sense of incompleteness, hence a prolonged grief.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, this article recommends that religious communities should take specific steps to help the surviving Zimbabwean family members to find closure. The research suggests that religious leaders should reach out to the bereaved families and offer them spiritual counseling. From both a Christian and African traditional worldview, religious leaders should also organize memorial services as a way for people to come together and remember the person who has passed away. Such services can be a way for people to find comfort in each other's company.

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- Interview with Interviewee 3. October 4, 2022.
- Interview with Interviewee 4. January 1, 2023.
- Interview with Interviewee 5. February 1, 2023.
- Interview with Interviewee 6. January 1, 2023.
- Interview with Interviewee 7. October 21, 2022.
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