

# TWR-SA SURVEY ON WIDOWS

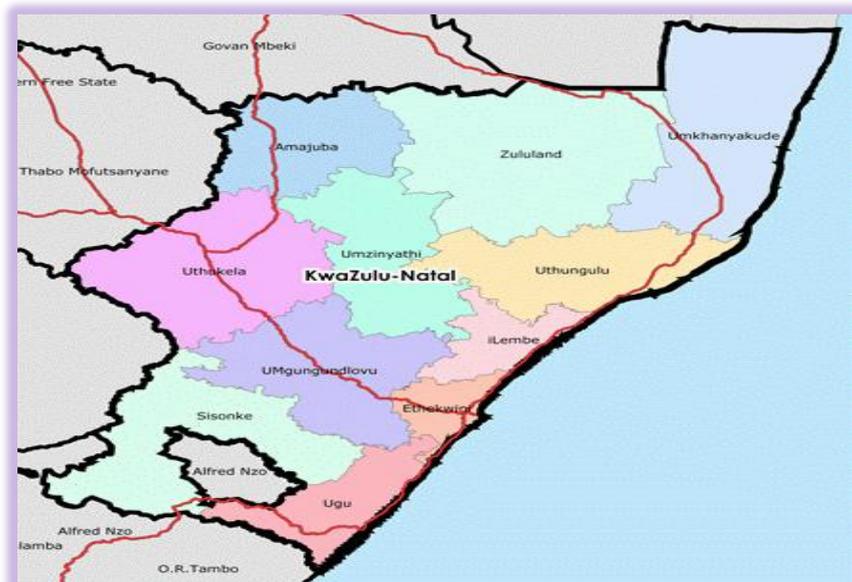


## RESEARCH TOPIC: SURVEY ON WIDOWS IN KWAZULU NATAL (ETHEKWINI DISTRICTS)

CONDUCTED BY: TWR-SA

DATE: SEPTEMBER 2013

CO-ORDINATED BY: Z. GWALA & D. DU PREEZ



*KZN Districts Map*

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## Introduction

*Widow* is a term assigned to any woman whose husband has died. We have started the following MFSII programs:

***Isolomndeni:*** degenerating family values and how democracy has granted rights to children and women to a community that was predominantly tribalistic. This is an opportunity for TWR to spark debate, engage discussions and finally transmit Biblical family values.

***Phambili:*** Pastors and church leaders find themselves inadequate and ill-equipped to handle the flock due to lack of resources and Biblical training. This is an opportunity for TWR to offer an on-air empowerment service to the church leadership in also addressing the social giants and transform the communities as change agents.

***Ethembeni:*** The poorest of women find themselves facing problems of ill health due to HIV/AIDS, unemployment, single parenthood and lack of business skills. This is an opportunity for TWR to identify successful stories of women and empower other women to do likewise.

We met an organisation in one of our focus areas called Molweni. This organisation is called Umyezane – it is a group of widows, where they support each other through prayers, food parcels, skills and encouraging each other to stand up and do something in their community that can help other widows to restore dignity. Most of these widows were getting support from their husbands but after they have lost their husbands it became very difficult to take care of themselves and their children. Sometimes they get Challenges from their in-laws demanding their husband's inheritance. Some of the widows are not even allowed to talk to their neighbour's husband.

It seems like in this community the number of widows is higher than other communities, and yet it is a very small community. Myezane has one hundred and fifty members and there are more widows who like to join this organisation. That challenges us as a team of TWR-SA to find out why their husbands died, and also to make other communities around KZN (Ethekwini districts) aware and let them know the reasons. If it is something that can be prevented, we also like to make some interventions. In KZN, there are so many children who are raised by single parents and widows. Most of widows raise more than three children, which makes life very difficult for them. Most of these widows are unemployed and they do not get any special provision from government.

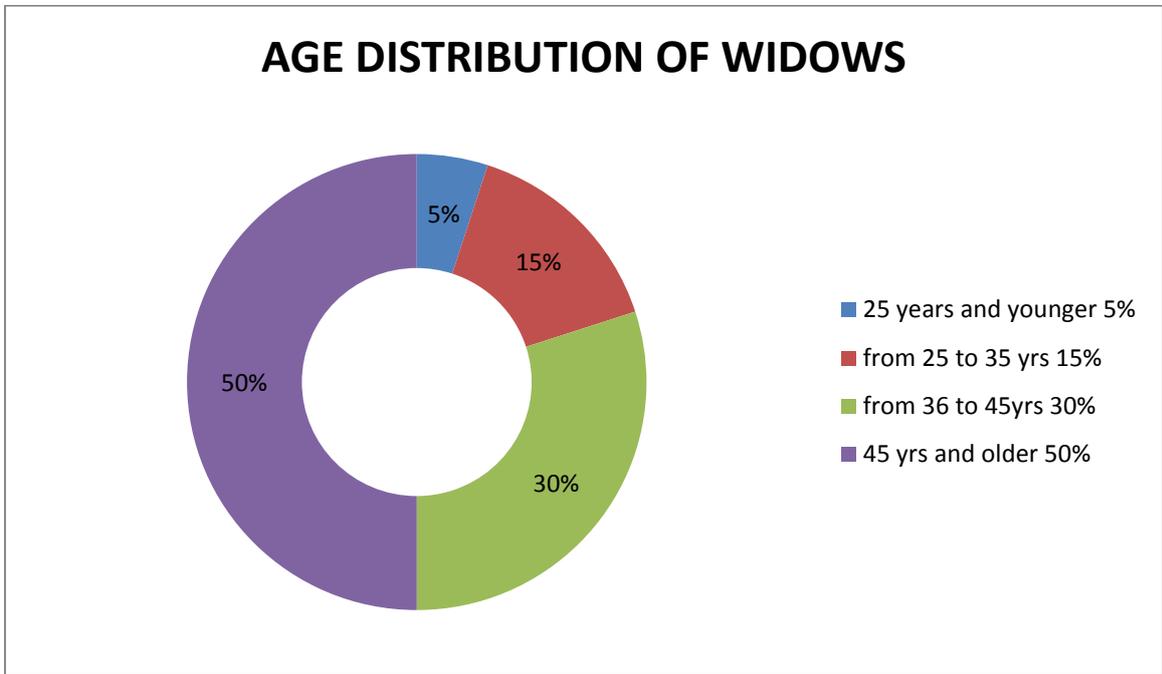
We believe that after this survey many people will have a clear vision about widows and we hope that they will also do some interventions to support widows in their communities. TWR vision says: "Every Man, Woman and child, a true disciple of Jesus Christ through mass media and valued partnership, transforming their communities". Our survey was conducted in the following communities: Kwanyuswa, Molweni, Shongweni, Inchanga and Mbumbulu all these being a random sample for communities that are in Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. This vision will be realised through the following:

- Producing and airing relevant Biblical programmes at our offices in Botha’s Hill in partnership with the church and other Christian organisations to help address people’s needs...

**SECTION ONE: GENERAL INFORMATION ON WIDOWS**



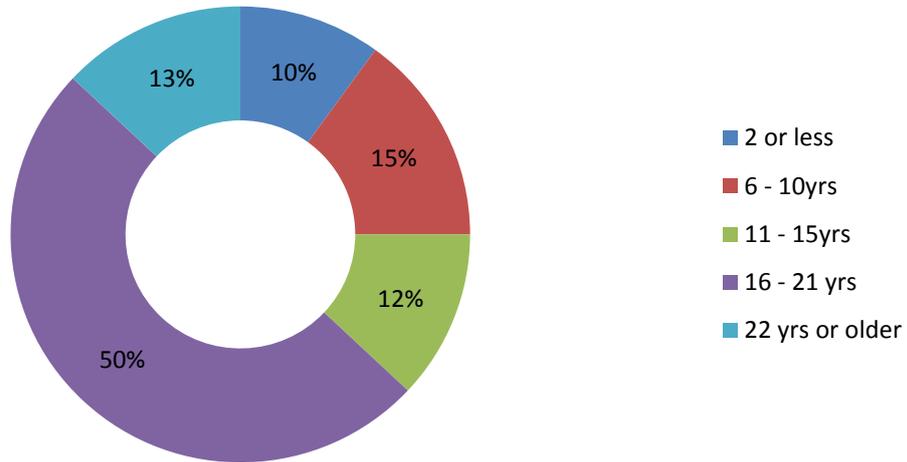
As a Christian Organisation we encourage churches to take responsibility to liberate women from the unjust experiences they go through in the community. The church is a critically important agent in achieving a society in which women’s equality and dignity is recognised. If the dignity and importance of women in general is not recognised, the plight of widows cannot be addressed. The church has to identify and side with women, not only in order to better the situation of widows, but because it is her duty to be in solidarity with those that are in pain.



**Summary:**

This graph shows that 50% of widows are 45 years and older, but they are still strong and working hard for their children, they do not rely in other people. Although it is very difficult for them.

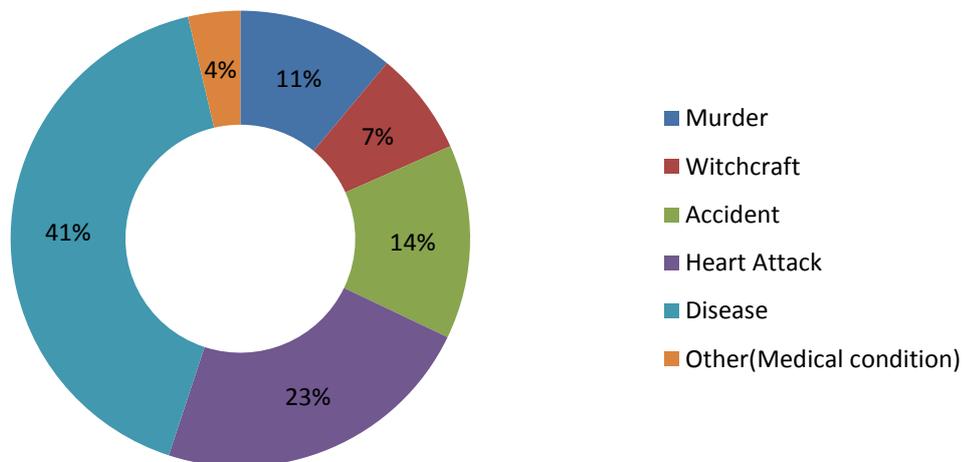
## PERIOD OF WIDOWHOOD



### Summary:

No matter how long you have been a widow, to lose someone you love is always painful, from the first day you receive a word that he is gone, it's like he's gone for years. Most of the widows we met they have been widows between 6 and 25yrs, but when you start asking about the late husband it like you talk about something that has recently happened.

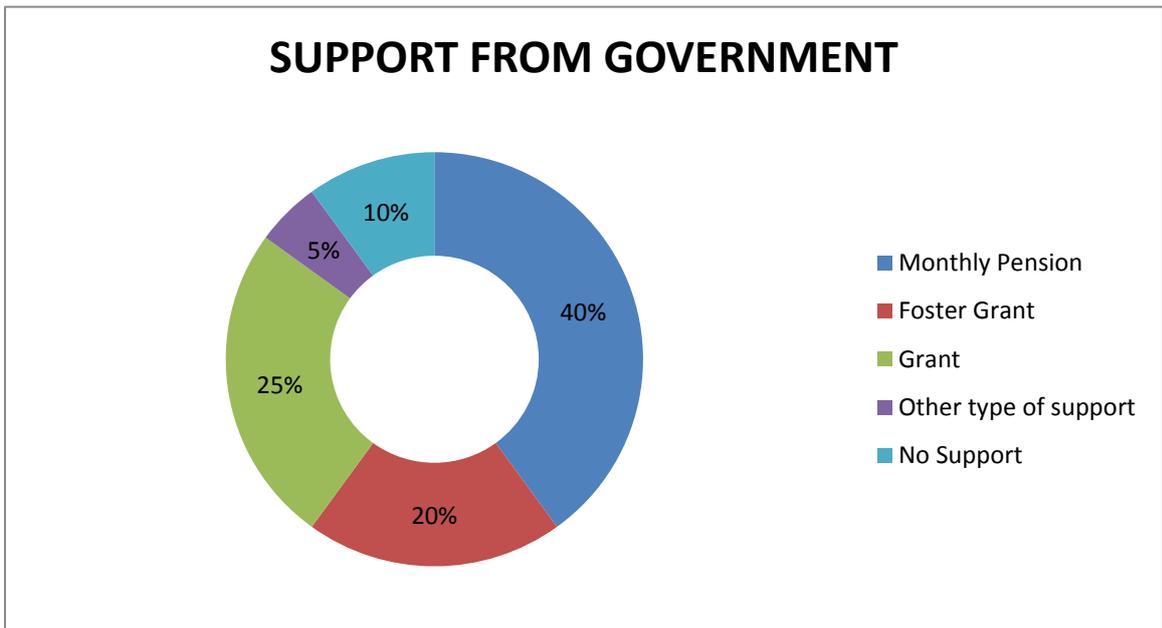
## HUSBAND'S CAUSE OF DEATH



**Summary:**

One particular passage of life is particularly fraught with danger for women: that of becoming a widow. Losing one's partner is traumatic, but this trauma is compounded by the societal and cultural expectations of widows. With the spread of HIV&AIDS widowhood has become even more common, with women becoming widowed at an ever younger age, often also debilitated by the virus. Despite the trauma suffered by widows and despite the fact that this status is becoming more common, widowhood remains an issue people are hesitant to speak about. Death and the dead is a topic to be avoided and people are hesitant to address and confront traditional cultural practices.

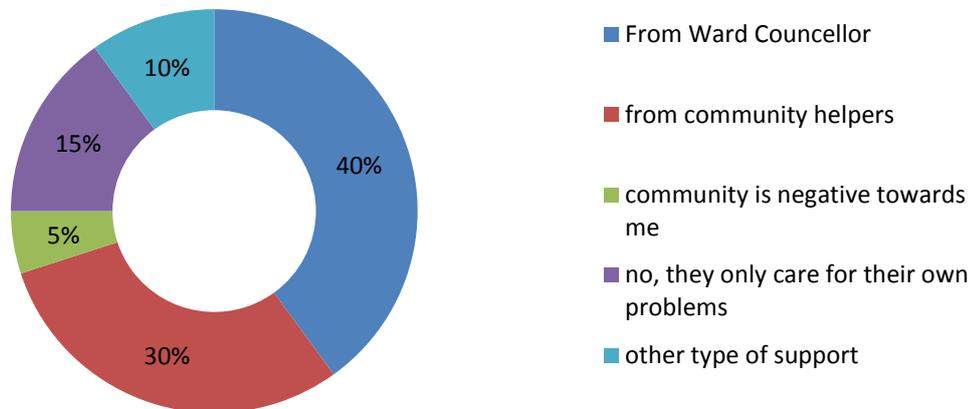
**SECTION TWO: COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT**



**Summary:**

At this stage in South Africa, they do not have widows grant, they can only get disability and old age grant when they reach certain age. The community does not give much.

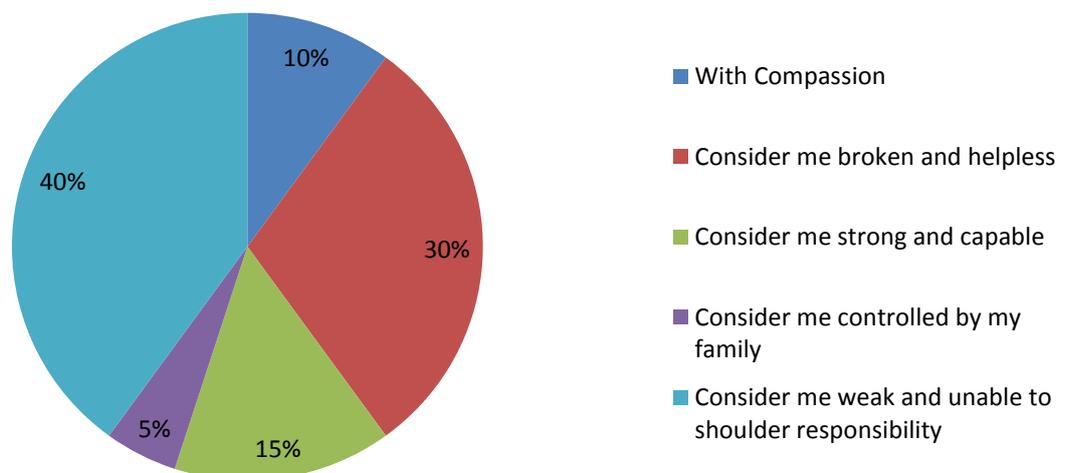
## SUPPORT FROM COMMUNITY



### Summary:

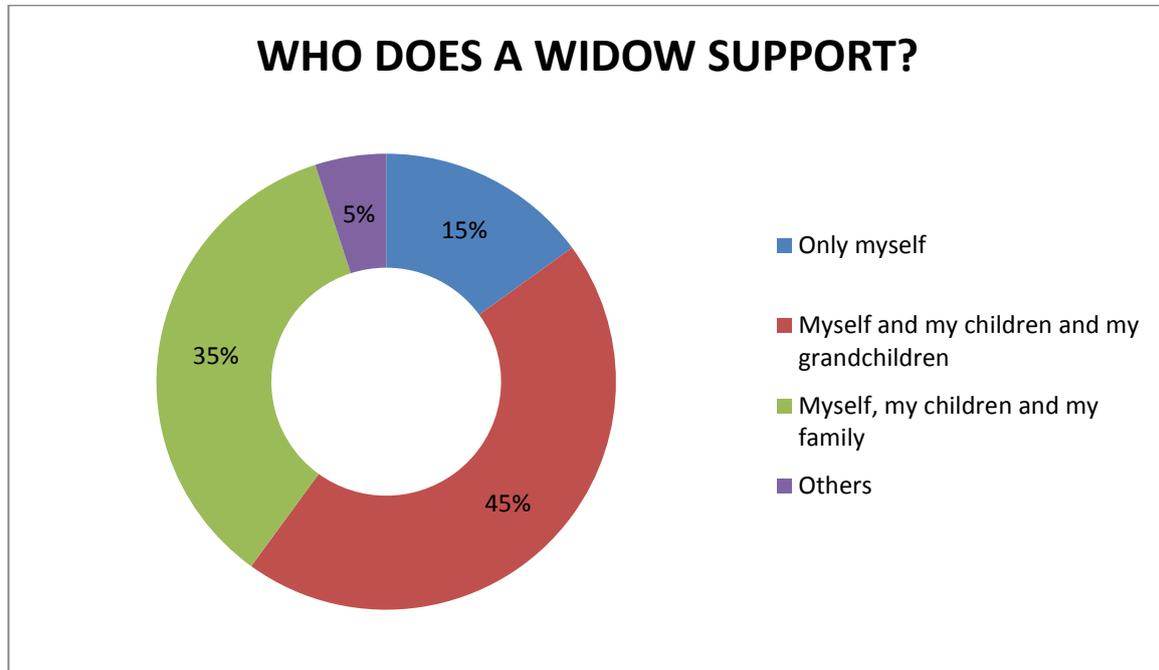
A widow cannot even be sure that she will be allowed to keep the money and property that she herself worked for and earned. If an inheritance is available –such as a house, cars, cattle or money –the widow’s family-in-law often lays claim to it. This is done in two ways. The widow herself can be inherited by a male member of her dead husband’s family (a cultural practice known as “Ukungena”) Forcing her to marry him, the family-in-law gains control of the property and children. In many cases with the absence of a ‘will’ the family in-laws may simply take everything, leaving the widow behind to fend for her.

## HOW DO YOU THINK THE COMMUNITY VIEWS YOU?



### Summary:

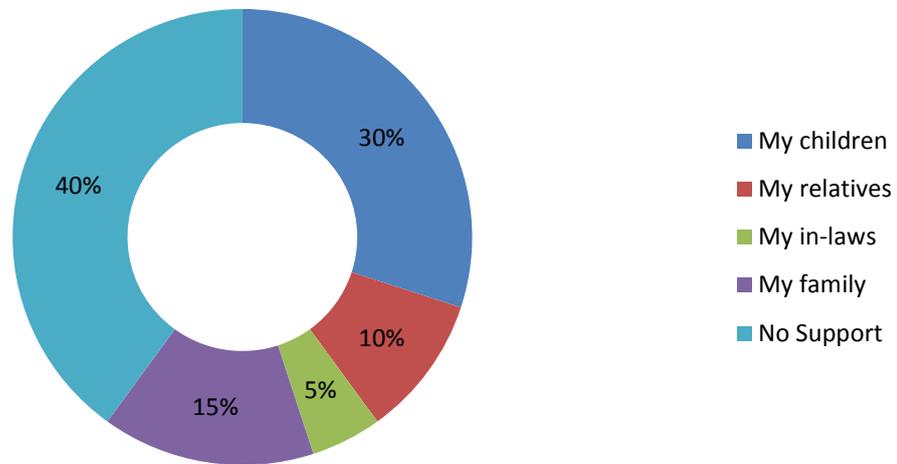
There is a big lack of knowledge/understanding in our Communities and churches regarding widow's life. It seems like they are not aware about what is happening to them after they lost their husbands. I remember while we were conducting research, when we ask directions to a widow's house, some members of the community do not even know who the widow in the area is. About 30% view widows as a broken and helpless person, a form of a handicap.



**Summary:**

**45%** of the widows after the death of their husbands do not receive any support from children, family or church, it is even worse if her husband was the only bread winner, but by the grace of God when she has supportive children, when they grow up and find the job, they take good care of their mother. Support is the most important thing every widow needs. When we were doing survey, we found most of widows are not working and also they are looking after grandchildren, about five to six grandchildren and you will think that maybe their parents are at work, no, they passed away. When they see people coming in their house, they are hoping that maybe they are coming to provide them with food parcels or money.

## WHO SUPPORT UNEMPLOYED WIDOWS?



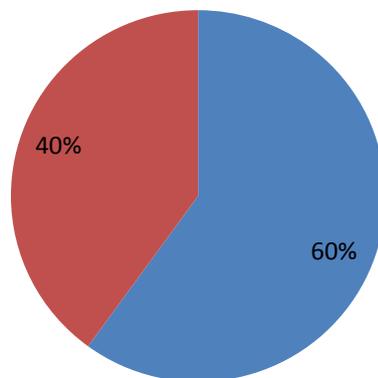
### Summary:

80% of widows are unemployed and this is making life very difficult for them. Raising three to five children alone without consistent income is not easy. A woman who has children not only has to deal with her own trauma at the death of husband, but also that of her children. She has to support them both emotionally and spiritually.

## SECTION THREE: CHILDREN

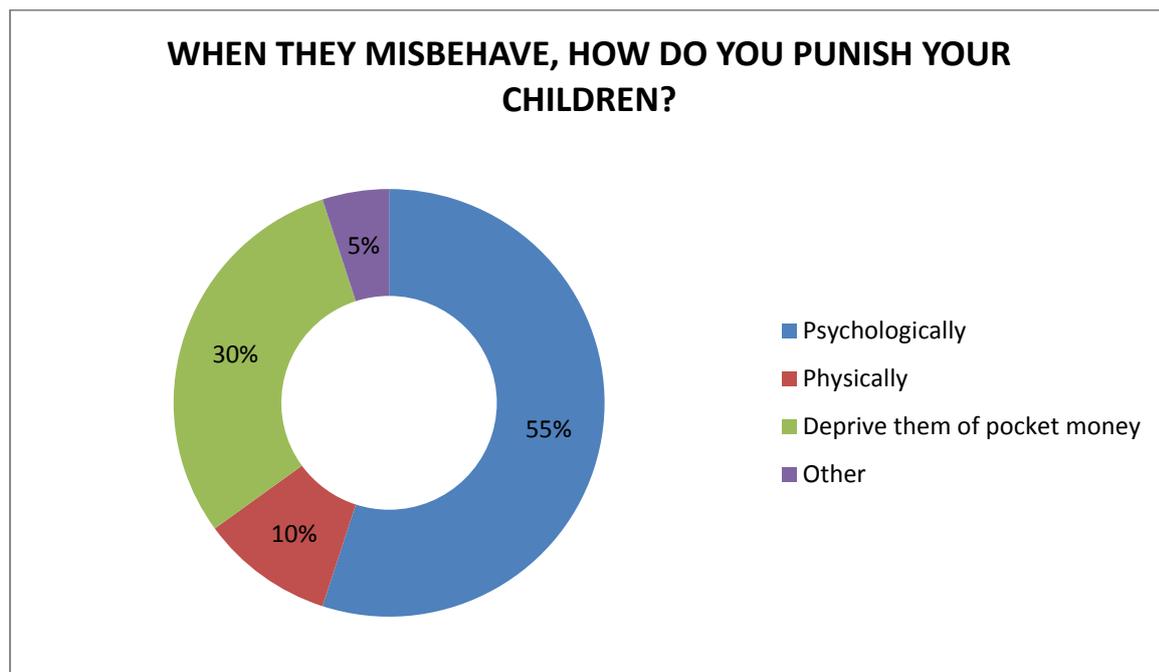
### DO YOU HAVE DIFFICULT WITH THE BEHAVIOUR OF YOUR CHILDREN

■ YES ■ NO



### Summary:

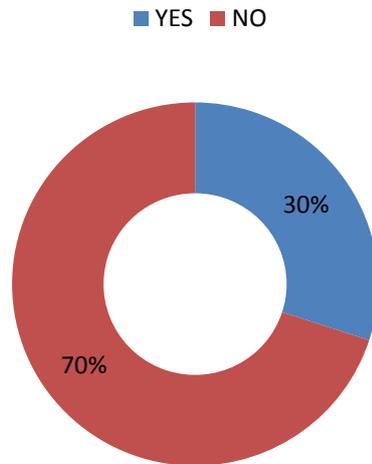
The average profile of widows complain about their children, the absent fathers make their children do something very crazy, they engage themselves in drugs, alcohol, crime and teenage pregnancy. Widows end up facing lot of challenges, a challenge of raising children alone, not working and facing the community because of their children's behaviour. Most of widows were depending on their deceased husbands, financially. 45% of widows raised three and more children alone, which is a big challenge. The children of widows are also vulnerable and 20% have dropped out of school for reasons that were mainly financial, endangering their future. Beyond the everyday challenges of raising children in an unstable environment, widows also have discipline problems with their children; corporal punishment is no longer practical.



**Summary:**

According to South African constitution, corporal punishment is illegal. According to RAPCAN (protecting children's rights) The African charter of the Wrights and welfare of the child and the South African constitution all recognize children's rights for respect of their human dignity, physical integrity and equal protection under the law. As a result if the child is not being respected and treated with dignity, he/she leaners to disrespect other people's rights. Most parents prefer to shout at them so that they will get rid of anger then to beat them.

## IS PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT USEFUL?



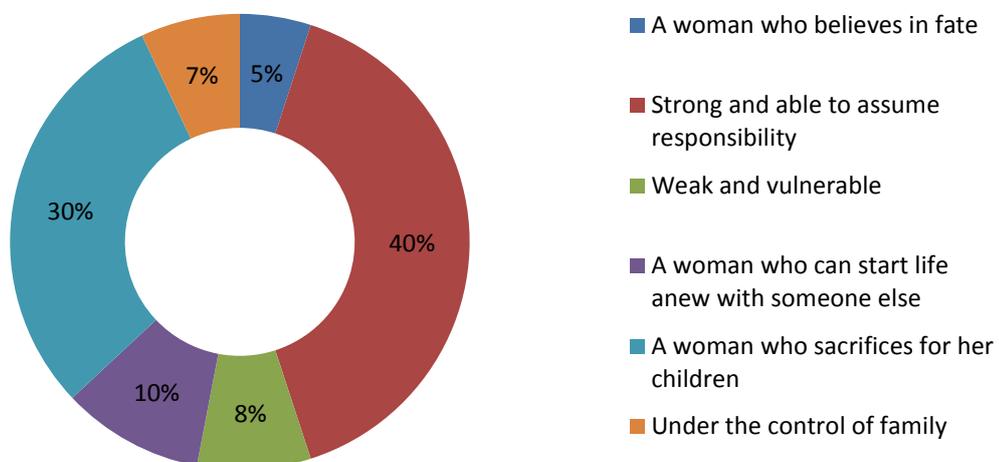
### Summary:

Our graph shows that most parents do no longer believe in corporal punishment while few think that, it is a better way. Others think that it is only useful to small children, but not to teenagers and youth.

### Summary:

Widowhood leads to the woman having to reposition herself within society. Both cultural practices relating to widowhood but also cultural views on widowhood serve to create an entirely new identity, role and position for the widow within her community and broader society. Firstly, the widow is physically isolated, with people avoiding her after the burial. Research indicates that "...after the burial you don't see a single church member coming to visit. You are left in a very, very lonely situation". Many widows have said that this isolation was the most torturous experience they have ever gone through.

## WIDOW'S SELF IMAGE



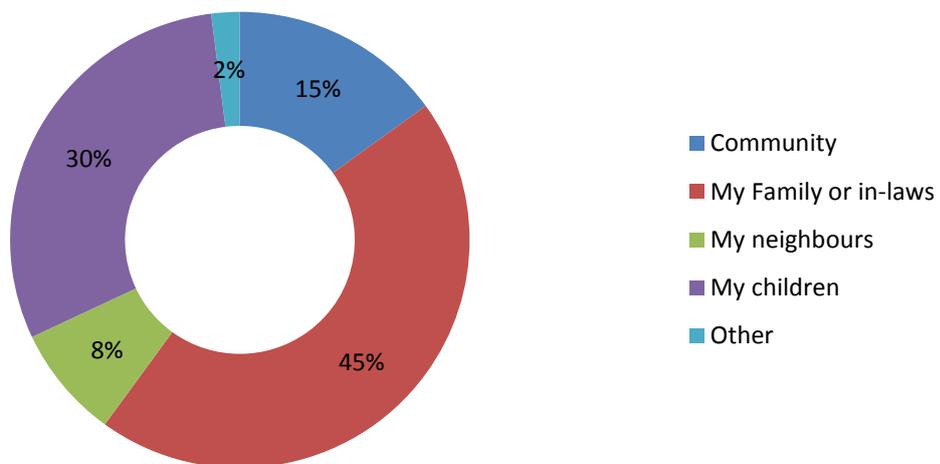
**Summary:**

To see widow crying, it's real touched my heart, when you ask about her image, most of them just said, if it wasn't for God who gave me strength to press on, I was going to follow my husband. The most difficult part is to see families and friends neglecting us, but we thank God that although they pushed us away, someone is always willing to comfort and wipe out our tears that is why we are strong even today. To start a new life with someone else is the worst thing most of them think about, they just decided to sacrifice for their children and be strong and face reality of life, although they are facing difficult times; poverty, negligent etc. but they look at things in a very positive way, e.g. when they invest in their children's education they will reap good fruits. When you look at the graph, about 75% of them say 'are strong and able to assume responsibility. Most of these widows believe in prayer.



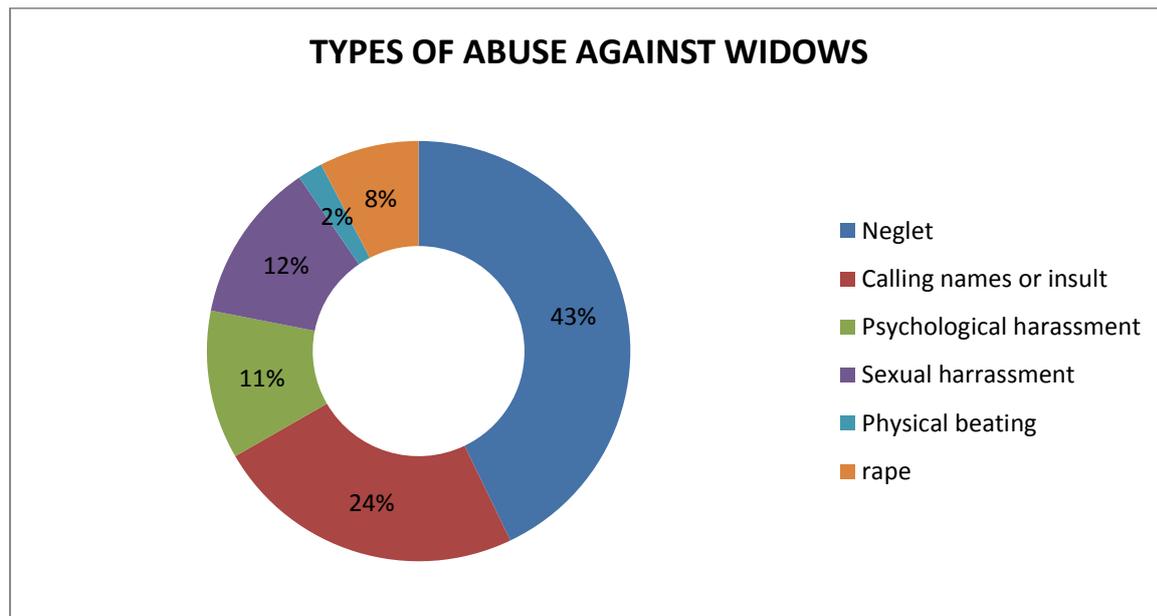
**SECTION FOUR: ABUSE AGAINST WIDOWS**

**SOURCE OF ABUSE**



**Summary:**

When her husband dies the woman is perceived to be unable to make any concrete decisions. Decisions are imposed on her, mostly by her family-in-law. These decisions are often not to her benefit, nor does it take her wishes into account. For example, the widow is not allowed the freedom to decide on the format of her husband’s funeral. This is decided by his family. An acquaintance of mine was in a car accident with her husband. He died fairly quickly, while she continued to be kept in hospital for observation. Yet cultural practices demanded that her husband be buried immediately, due to the belief that the body of a person who died in an accident may not lay in state in the house (the way it normally does), as misfortune will then



**Stories:**

I became a widow when my husband died in 1998. I lost my husband in a car accident. It happened while we were in Johannesburg, thus I was far removed from friends and family in KZN. The accident occurred on a Friday and I was only informed about the accident and his death on the following Tuesday. I will not forget the terrible week following that Tuesday, having to arrange for his remains to be taken back to KZN.

My husband was beaten by criminal, he became paralysed. He has to work in that situation, because he was the bread winner. After that he became very sick until he passed-away.


**Financial implications**

Society expects that the costs of the death and burial be carried by the widow, in cases where the deceased was working and it is assumed that the widow has money. These expenses are not limited to the funeral. For example, a widow is expected to erect a tombstone for her husband one year after this death. Sometimes this is done without any financial assistance from her dead husband’s family. Cultural beliefs state that the soul of her husband will haunt her otherwise.

## Challenges:

Thus many widows are forced into crippling debt by having to pay for the tombstone. Before one year I consulted my father-in-law about erecting the tombstone of my husband. I was shocked with his response which indicated that it was my sole responsibility to make sure that this was done. My brother-in-law further said that this assignment was costly and that I should be ready for the cost. Eventually this proved true and I was only supported by my family members.

## Recommendation:

- Churches to address issues like this and try to intervene with some widowhood rituals, the financial abuse of widows is rarely been addressed by churches
- Communities to look after and protect widows, to avoid rumours about widows behaviour towards married mans.
- Government to fund trainings that will help all widows to attain skills, so that they can start their own business to support their children's education.
- More awareness and education about widowhood should be provided.

## Conclusion

In most African cultures the church and contextualized theology should work at providing refuge spiritual and emotional support for widows as people created in the image of God whose human dignity is at stake. Churches and NGO's should also provide practical interventions countering the cultural beliefs and practices that subjugate (overpower) widows. Widows shared stories of what have hampered (troubled) them and what has helped them in dealing with the death of their husbands. It is a continuing process and one that bring healing. The challenge is to allow this space for all widows, so that healing can also be achieved for them.

Philile - Zama - Zodwa – Phumelele (Volunteers)



Our special thanks go to Phumelele, Philile, Zama & Zodwa (Volunteers), for their availability, support and energy. It was a very touching survey and we walked long distance, but these volunteers were always willing to do more.

Phumelele's report; during my September holidays, I volunteered to do research on widows for a Christian organization called TWR. We went to different places and met different people, most of which are widows of course. Most people thought we came from some political party or that we were signing them up for something that we won't deliver at the end. A few were didn't want to participate when we did the research because they thought it was embarrassing to talk about their lives like that, especially to me because I was the youngest volunteer there. After the research God touched my heart as I saw that people are hungry out there and I could relate to them as I myself sometimes find myself in the same situation. I got involved with a Christian organization run by Joe Morris from Sarepta Church, he delivers food to families with orphans and I also had to do more research for him in some in the families that I did research on for TWR. Volunteering to do this research has opened my eyes and I see the need of Social workers in South Africa which is why I'm going to pursue that career after High school.