

Cultural, Religious and Psychosocial Factors Shaping Grief Coping Strategies in the Nigerian Community: A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract

Grief is a universal concept; however, it manifests uniquely in Nigeria due to cultural practices and religious influences. Much of the literature on grief focuses on Western perspectives; thus, there is a need for further research on complex experiences in Nigeria. The research describes how the Nigerian community manages grief and how cultural, religious, and psychosocial factors shape it. It focuses mainly on two ethnic groups in Nigeria: Igbo and Yoruba.

This study adopted an interpretive phenomenological research design to identify and understand the distinct coping mechanisms employed by Nigerians for grief. Eleven participants aged 18-40 years from the southwest and southeast geopolitical zones of Nigeria were recruited for the study. Using the voluntary response sampling technique, seven individuals with first-hand experience of grief were selected, while four cultural experts were recruited using the purposive sampling technique. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant and expert. The interviews were transcribed before the themes were identified.

Data analysis revealed many strategies that influence the Nigerian community's management of grief. These include cultural and religious influences, proverbs and songs, emotional expression and regulation, and social support networks during grief. All these factors have had a considerable influence on shaping strategies for coping with grief in the Nigerian community.

Overall, this study contributes to the knowledge of how grief is managed in Nigeria, thereby furthering the literature on the necessity of intercultural competence to enable successful psychological interventions within Nigeria's multicultural setting.

Keywords: Grief, grief coping strategies, grief support, bereavement, Africa, funeral songs

Introduction

Grief is a universal yet deeply personal experience shaped by cultural, religious, and psychosocial factors. While the death of a loved one often triggers emotional, psychological, and physical disruptions, responses to such loss vary widely across societies. Oyebode and Owens (2013) emphasized that cultural practices and religious beliefs enable individuals and communities to navigate grief, providing both structure and solace. Although grief is often described in stages—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969)—these stages are

not linear, and individuals may experience them differently. Existing grief research has primarily focused on Western contexts, overlooking the experiences of Nigerians. Empirical evidence on the lived experiences of Nigerians and how culture and religion influence these experiences remains scarce. This under-representation creates a significant gap in the existing literature. To address this gap, this study aimed to deepen the understanding of grief coping in Nigeria through thematic analysis of qualitative data. It explores culturally grounded strategies shaped by social context, family ties, and communal expectations. While psychosocial factors such as

personality, age, gender, and resilience influence coping (Hasdenteufel & Quintard, 2022; Ukeh, 2018), this study focused on uniquely Nigerian elements to provide culturally relevant insights for mental health support and grief intervention.

Literature Review

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping how individuals cope with grief, influencing rituals, emotional expression, and community support. As Nwosu et al. (2017) metaphorically describe, “Death is like clay... it is the potter’s culture that determines the size, shape, and motif of the pot,” emphasizing that cultural fingerprints define grief responses. In Nigeria, a country rich in ethnic and cultural diversity, grief is expressed through deeply rooted traditions that vary from community to community. Many Nigerian groups engage in elaborate mourning practices, such as dancing, singing, and ceremonial displays of the deceased, which serve as emotional outlets and reinforce communal bonds. O’Connor et al (2008) notes that such rituals offer stability and connect mourners to ancestral resilience, helping to restore meaning during loss.

Among the Yoruba, grief is navigated through strong communal ties and verbal expressions of comfort and support. Families and communities provide emotional and practical support, and culturally significant phrases help soothe the bereaved (Adamolekun, 1999). The Igbo people also embrace expressive mourning customs. Crying, wailing, and spontaneous musical performances reflect a dynamic emotional landscape (Nwosu, 2019). Artistic elements, such as songs and visual displays, channel grief and foster healing. The second burial, *Ikwa Ozu*, is a celebratory event that unites the community in honor of the deceased (Lane, 2015). However, these ceremonies can be financially demanding, sometimes leading to stress, debt, and prolonged grief (Ofor, 2022). In Hausa culture, grief coping is shaped by Islamic beliefs and a strong sense of communal solidarity. Religious leaders offer spiritual guidance, and neighbors bring food and household items. Eulogies and poems help mourners to express their emotions and preserve

memories. Together, these cultural frameworks illustrate how Nigerian communities transform grief into a shared, meaningful experience, blending tradition, spirituality, and social support to help individuals navigate their loss.

Religious coping involves using beliefs, attitudes, and practices to ease emotional distress during life’s challenges (Okoro, 2017). In Nigeria, religion serves as a cultural framework that helps individuals find meaning in the uncertainties and limitations of death (Eyetsemitan, 2002). Embracing concepts such as divine purpose or viewing grief as part of life, as in Islam, can offer emotional structure and healing (Akanni, 2016). People often turn to prayer, rituals, and religious communities for comfort (Kalu, 2019).

Nigeria’s dominant religions, Christianity, Islam, and traditional belief systems, share a strong faith in the afterlife and divine purpose. Churches and mosques provide counselling and communal support, helping mourners find hope and closure. Christians believe that death is not the end, drawing strength from prayer and scripture (Pieper, 2020). Their doctrine encourages mourning with hope, grounded in the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of eternal life (Khalid, 2019). Congregations often support grieving families through acts of kindness and their presence. Muslims believe in a Day of Judgment, where virtuous lives lead to Paradise and sinful lives lead to Hell (Romanchek, 2023). Islamic mourning rituals promote spiritual healing and encourage acceptance of Allah’s will and faith in His divine plan (Akanni, 2016). Traditional Nigerian religions also offer comfort through communal funerals, cleansing rituals and festive gatherings (Asad & Nawait, 2018). Beliefs in reincarnation or ancestral transformation offer spiritual reassurance, helping mourners feel connected to the departed.

Emotional expression varies across cultures and profoundly influences how individuals manage grief. In Nigeria, cultural norms encourage emotional regulation to preserve social harmony, often prioritising communal well-being over personal catharsis. As Dzokoto

et al. (2019) noted, culture shapes how emotions are experienced and expressed in different ways. Nigerian society values resilience and adaptability, often leading individuals to suppress emotions such as sadness or anger. While constructive expression aids coping, suppression can result in unresolved grief and emotional distress (Champ, 2021). The Nigerian Islamic community, for example, discourages excessive wailing or physical outbursts during mourning, aligning with Prophet Muhammad's teachings to grieve with composure: "The eyes shed tears, and the heart is grieved, but we will not say anything except which pleases our Lord" (Ishaq, 2019). These emotional display rules and religious beliefs play a vital role in shaping grief responses and balancing inner strength with cultural expectations.

Social support is vital for helping bereaved Nigerians cope with grief. Strong networks, such as family, friends, and communities, promote emotional adjustment (Henderson et al., 2004). Effective interventions must foster these connections through caregivers, institutions, and community involvement (Sippel et al., 2015). Nigerian culture emphasizes interconnectedness, with families and communities providing both practical and emotional support. "Burial societies" help with funeral costs and offer a sense of solidarity. Nigeria's history of resilience strengthens communal responses to loss, creating a supportive environment that empowers individuals to navigate grief through shared strength and through collective care.

Proverbs and songs play a vital role in helping individuals cope with grief across cultures, offering emotional guidance and support. Proverbs, rooted in collective wisdom, offer moral teachings and help people navigate life's challenges, including loss (Moahi, 2023; Phiri et al., 2015). Dzokoto et al. (2018) found that emotion-focused proverbs in Akan culture shape expectations around emotional expression, highlighting their influence on emotional regulation. These age-old sayings offer encouragement, perspective, and hope, reminding mourners

that others have endured similar pain and found meaning in their suffering (Wangila, 2017).

In times of grief, when words fail, proverbs serve as culturally accepted ways to express complex emotions. Similarly, songs offer a powerful outlet for emotional expression. They allow individuals to articulate grief, sadness, and longing, often metaphorically, without feeling overwhelmed (Aluede, 2022). Nwosu (2019) found that Igbo funeral songs not only mourn the dead but also help to release pent-up emotions. In the Esan traditional society of Edo State, music and proverbs are deeply intertwined, with themes of death and healing being prevalent throughout the culture. Aluede (2022) noted that music is used during mourning to address grief, sorrow, and anxiety. An unbroken cycle of music-making begins immediately after death, serving as a calming and transformative force in the family. Music, whether used alone or in conjunction with rituals and prayers, is viewed as a therapeutic tool that aids emotional recovery and fosters resilience during the bereavement process.

Theoretical Framework

The Kübler-Ross model (1969), known as the five stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance—is a widely accepted framework for understanding emotional responses to loss. These stages are not linear, and individuals may experience them differently.

Denial involves rejecting the reality of loss as a defence against overwhelming feelings. Anger arises from feelings of injustice and helplessness, often directed toward oneself, others, or even the deceased. Bargaining reflects attempts to reverse losses. Depression sets in as the permanence of loss becomes clear, often accompanied by social isolation. Cultural norms, religious beliefs, and community support influence the experience of this stage. Acceptance marks emotional adjustment, not necessarily peace, but a readiness to move forward (Kübler-Ross, 1969)

While the Kübler-Ross model explains the stages individuals go through during grief,

Lazarus and Folkman's theory complements it by explaining the cognitive and behavioral strategies individuals employ to navigate grief. According to Lazarus et al, (1986) Coping Theory, coping is shaped by intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Primary appraisal involves evaluating the significance of the loss, which is influenced by the relationship with the deceased, their age, the last interaction, religious beliefs, the circumstances of death, and personal values. Secondary appraisal assesses the available coping resources and the effectiveness of strategies, which are shaped by social support, cultural and religious backgrounds, and past grief experiences. Together, these appraisals guide individuals' responses to the emotional, psychological, and physical challenges of bereavement.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed an interpretive phenomenological research design to capture participants' personal experiences. This approach provided a detailed, in-depth, and holistic first-hand account of the participants' lived experiences with grief, especially considering the cultural and religious contexts of the participants (Oluka, 2025). Seven participants from Nigeria, aged 18-40, who experienced grief after the loss of a loved one, were selected using voluntary response sampling. To gain a deeper understanding of the cultural aspects of grief, we interviewed four experts with extensive cultural knowledge. Two of the experts shared insights from the Yoruba ethnic group, while the other two shared insights from the Igbo ethnic group. In total, 11 participants were interviewed for this study. Expert participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their expertise in their respective cultures. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does culture shape the process of coping with grief in the Nigerian community?
2. How does religion shape the process of coping with grief in the Nigerian community?

3. In what ways do proverbs and songs shape the process of coping with grief in the Nigerian community?
4. How does emotion regulation affect the process of coping with grief in the Nigerian community?

Data were collected using semi-structured interview questions that were carefully designed for the study. The research questions of the study guided the interview questions. Owing to the sensitive nature of the subject, we started with an opening question about their loss. We subsequently opened specific lines of inquiry to engage them in talking about the person who died, their relationship with the deceased, and how the death occurred. The credibility of the data was ensured through continuous engagement and familiarization with the data, as well as through verbatim transcription. The inclusion of two different participant groups (individuals with grief experience and cultural experts) ensured data triangulation (Noble & Smith, 2025). Additionally, Noble and Smith (2025) and Ahmed (2024) argue that even with a single method of data collection, trustworthiness in qualitative research stems from rigour, transparency, and reflexivity. We ensured that by systematically documenting our process, validating findings with participants, and providing rich contextual detail, our study is credible, dependable, confirmable, and transferable.

Participants who had experienced grief were recruited through an advertisement featuring a Google Form that was shared on social media. To avoid bias, the advertisement included a clear explanation of the study's purpose, and the researchers screened responses from the Google Form to ensure a diverse range of ages, cultural backgrounds, and religious affiliations.

The interviews were conducted remotely via Zoom, which enabled the inclusion of participants from the southwest and southeast geopolitical zones of Nigeria. However, one expert was interviewed by phone because of technical issues. Prior to the interview, the participants

reaffirmed their consent to proceed with the study, including the audio recordings.

A six-phase thematic analysis framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyze the data. The primary data source was transcribed interview audio. The audio transcripts were listened to repeatedly to familiarize with the data. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying meaningful features across the dataset. In the third phase, related codes were

organized into potential themes. These themes were then reviewed in the fourth phase to ensure alignment with both the coded extracts and the full dataset. The fifth phase involved defining the themes. Finally, in the sixth phase, the report was presented.

Table 1: *Demographic information of participants*

	Participants with grief experience	Cultural experts	Total
Gender			
- Male	5	2	7
- Female	2	2	4
Age Range	18 – 40	50 – 65	
Cultural Background			
- Yoruba	5	2	7
- Igbo	2	2	4
Religious Affiliation			
- Christian	5	-	5
- Muslim	2	-	2
Minimum Educational Qualification	Bachelor’s degree	Bachelor’s degree	

The thematic analysis revealed how cultural, religious, and psychosocial factors shape grief coping in Nigeria. Drawing from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, the study used a deductive approach to identify five key themes: Cultural Influences, Religious Influences, Emotional Expression, Social Support Networks, and Proverbs and Songs. The sub-themes included Rituals and Communal Support (Culture), Belief, Faith, and Hope, Community Support

(Religion), Shaping Emotional Expressions (Emotion), and Proverbs and Songs as Coping Mechanisms. These findings offer insights into grief navigation within Nigeria’s rich cultural context.

Table 2: *Themes, sub-themes, and codes*

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes	Theme Type
Cultural influences on coping with grief.	Rituals.	Mourning rituals, wearing mourning cloths, observing rites, and head shaving	Semantic
	Communal support.	Avoiding unnecessary expenses. Cultural beliefs. Financial contributions. Communal assistance. Collective grieving. Practical support through daily activities.	Semantic
	Cultural disconnection	Lack of cultural influence. Changes in cultural practices. Erosion of cultural traditions.	Latent
Religious influences on grief coping.	Belief, Faith, and Hope.	Belief in the afterlife. Trust in God. The will of God. Comfort in the Bible. Reassurance from the word of God. Resilience in religion. Coping with prayer. Coping with religion.	Semantic
	Religious Community support.	Counsel of religious leaders. Visits from religious members.	Semantic
Proverbs and songs.	Proverbs as a coping mechanism.	Comfort in proverbs. Use of proverbs for encouragement. Proverbs to explain insensitivity. Hope and encouragement.	Latent
	Songs as a coping mechanism.	Processing emotions with songs. Comfort in songs. Emotional impact of songs. Expressing emotions through songs.	Latent
Emotion expression and regulation	Emotion expression	Crying	Semantic
	Socio-cultural expectations on emotion	Emotion suppression. Men should be strong. Societal restrictions on emotional display. Prescribed mourning period. Guidelines on emotional expression. Taboos to control emotional expression.	Dual
Social support networks		Influence of the support network Presence of people Family unity Spousal support. Support from family. Importance of friendship. Committee of friends.	Semantic

Cultural Influences on Grief Coping:

This theme explores how cultural rites and practices shape grief experiences and coping strategies in the Nigerian context. The study revealed a dual influence of culture, both supportive and challenging, on individuals experiencing grief. While some participants acknowledged the cultural impact, others reported no influence, attributing this to factors such as cultural disconnection, age at bereavement, and the erosion of traditional practices.

Participant 2 (P2) expressed cultural detachment, stating that his Yoruba identity did not shape his grief:

“I am not much of a cultural person... most of my actions are not tied to culture... so culture was not part of it.” (P2, lines 500–503)

Participant 3 (P3) also felt that culture had no bearing on his grief. His uncle, residing in the U.S., shielded him and his siblings from intense mourning by providing distractions such as toys, games, and outings:

“We go to the national theatre... take a burger... the cultural aspect did not really work because of what my uncle did.” (P3, lines 629–633)

P3 further suggested that his young age at the time of loss may have limited cultural involvement:

“Maybe because we were young... they did not really ask us to do anything... nothing happened to us.” (P3, lines 744–746)

Cultural experts highlighted a shift in traditional mourning practices, influenced by rising societal violence and shifts in religious beliefs. Practices that once centered on physical comfort and communal support have been altered or restricted.

“Before, they would come and rest on the person... wipe the tears... now they block where the bereaved sits... you hang on the rail and say what you want.” (E1, lines 1780–1788)

This study emphasizes the complexity of the cultural influence on grief. While some individuals found cultural practices meaningful, others experienced minimal impact owing to personal, developmental, or societal factors. This duality calls for an understanding of how cultural contexts intersect with individual grief responses. Two sub-themes emerged under Cultural Influences on Grief Coping, reflecting continuity and transformation in mourning traditions.

Communal Support:

This study reinforces the vital role of communal support in grief coping within the Nigerian cultural context. Emotional and practical assistance through financial contributions, shared responsibilities, and collective mourning is essential for helping bereaved individuals navigate their loss. Cultural experts emphasized that strong community involvement is deeply embedded in both the Igbo and Yoruba traditions.

In Igbo culture, families rally around the bereaved, especially widows, offering financial support for burial arrangements:

“Actually, when you lose somebody, the family will not leave the person alone... they will gather, rally together, contribute money for the burial.”(E1)

Yoruba customs similarly prioritize care and companionship. One expert described how grieving individuals are relieved of domestic duties, with community members cooking, shopping, and ensuring they eat regularly, even if they previously skipped meals:

“Some people will be appointed to cook... persuade that person to eat... go to the market... contribute money... bring food-stuffs and materials.” (E2)

Another Yoruba expert elaborated on the extended support, especially for grieving women. Community members sleep over, cook from their own homes, deliver meals, fetch water, and wash clothes until the bereaved regain stability:

“They will go and sleep there... cook from their own house... make sure the person eats... help in washing clothes.” (E4)

This communal care extends beyond the ethnic homeland. Diaspora communities maintain strong bonds and offer support, regardless of their location. An Igbo expert in Lagos described how community members gather, mourn, contribute funds, and organize burial logistics, including purchasing caskets and arranging transport to the village:

“Everybody present in Lagos... will support with money... buy a casket... make sure that person is sent to the village.” (E3)

Another expert in Ibadan shared a recent experience in which her community raised funds to support a grieving woman and her children:

“We contributed money today... sent somebody to give to the woman... so she can take care of herself and the children.” (E1)

These insights reveal how deeply ingrained communal support is in Nigerian grief practices, highlighting the resilience and compassion of cultural systems that prioritize collective healing.

Rituals:

Mourning rituals are identified as vital grief coping strategies, deeply rooted in cultural expressions of respect

and remembrance. One expert described traditional practices for widows, including complete head shaving and wearing a single mourning cloth for 40 days, which must be re-worn after drying. During this period, the widow remains indoors and avoids public spaces such as markets (E1, lines 1676–1682).

These customs, although not universally practised today, are still observed by some families as a mark of final respect to the deceased. The same expert recounted her experience following her father’s death in 2015–2016. Despite being advised against shaving their heads due to their educational status, she and her siblings insisted on honoring the tradition:

“We said ‘No,’ since they have been doing it, we have to do it, all of us.” (E1, lines 1700–1706)

She emphasized that while these rituals are no longer mandatory and carry no penalties for non-compliance, they remain meaningful:

“To whom honour is given, much is given, much is expected.” (E1, lines 1714–1716)

These insights highlight how mourning rituals continue to shape grief experiences by blending cultural heritage with personal choice and reverence.

Religious Influences on Grief Coping:

This theme explores the profound influence of religion on grief experiences and coping strategies within the Nigerian community. The study revealed that religious beliefs played a central role in helping individuals navigate the emotional complexities of loss and cope with grief. Across all participant narratives, religion consistently emerged as a powerful source of comfort and resilience for the participants.

Belief, Faith, and Hope: Participants found strength in their belief in the afterlife, trust in God, and comforting words of religious scriptures. These elements provided emotional grounding and helped the participants process their grief. One participant shared:

“My religious background makes me realise that those we lost are now in a better place... So that makes me a bit stronger.” (P1)

Another participant echoed this sentiment, highlighting the duality of grief and hope:

“There is the bit of ‘you are not going to see this person again’... but also the bit of ‘this person is in a better place’... That can give you some consolation.” (P2)

Scripture and Prayer: Engaging with the Bible and prayer were key coping mechanisms. These practices deepened the participants’ connection to their faith and offered solace. One participant cited Matthew 5:4 and Revelation, using scripture to comfort herself:

“I should go by the Bible... at the end... there will be nothing like pains... mourning.” (P4)

Another described a journey from anger to acceptance, finding peace through scripture and spiritual reflection:

“Over time, I received consolation in the word... nobody truly dies in Christ... that was the consolation I had to hold on to.” (P5)

Overall, the study highlights religion as a vital pillar of grief coping, offering hope, meaning, and emotional support.

Religious Community support:

The study revealed that support from the religious community plays a vital role in

helping individuals navigate the complex grief journey. With guidance from religious leaders, comforting visits, and spiritual encouragement, the participants found strength and healing as they mourned. These networks of faith-based support emerge as pillars of emotional resilience and shared understanding.

Participant 4 described how her Christian faith and church community helped her cope:

“We go to church... with the preaching... my pastor would come... encourage us... tell us everything will be alright. So, with that... I will be able to overcome the pain.” (P4)

Participant 3 also acknowledged the role of religious visitation, although he noted its short-lived impact:

“The pastor came... they prayed... came to check... after one or two weeks... everybody got back to their normal way of life.” (P3)

Emotional Expression in Grief Coping

This study also explored how expressing emotions shapes grief experiences. Participants described intense feelings of sadness, anger, and despair, and often found relief through open emotional expression.

Participant 4 shared:

“I cried... I did not keep to myself... I do not hide any of my feelings... I cried every day... I was emotionally down.” (P4) She affirmed that expressing emotions brought relief: “Yes, yes, it does.” (P4)

However, this study also highlighted how cultural expectations influence emotional suppression. Participant 6 explained how being the only grown male in his family pressured him to remain stoic:

“They expect a man to be strong... you should know how to deal with your emotions... to help your sisters and little brother.” (P6)

He further reflected on the emotional toll of suppression:

“When I was able to express the emotion... I will be more lifted... than when I am not able to express.” (P6)

Participant 7, from the Igbo tribe, described how cultural norms led to delayed grief:

“They have passed a belief that... as a man... you are meant to be strong and not show emotions... it gave me a deceit... a delusion.” (P7)

Cultural Perspectives on Emotional Regulation

Cultural experts offered profound insights into how taboos and traditions shape emotional expression. One expert explained how grieving parents are warned not to let tears fall on surviving children, fearing spiritual consequences:

“They will say... the tear from your eyes must not fall on that baby... if not, that baby too will die... spirits will say ‘oh this person enjoys weeping, let us kill more.’” (E2)

These taboos, although symbolic, serve to regulate excessive grief and prevent harm. The expert emphasized that while crying can be emotionally relieving, excessive weeping is discouraged due to potential health risks:

“They will appoint people... to control the way he weeps... some people will weep and want to harm themselves.” (E2)

In conclusion, religious and cultural frameworks offer support and impose boundaries

during grief. While faith communities provide comfort and guidance, cultural norms shape emotional expression, sometimes encouraging release and at other times, enforcing restraint. These dual influences reflect a complex yet compassionate approach to mourning, rooted in concerns for individual well-being.

Social Support Networks:

This theme examines the forms of social support participants received and how they influenced their grief-coping experiences. Family, friends, and the broader community emerged as vital pillars of emotional and practical support. The study highlighted the central role of family dynamics, communication, presence, and shared routines in fostering resilience during mourning. Families provide emotional support and help individuals cope with loss.

Participant 1 described how both sides of her family supported her through prayer, companionship, and their presence:

“They came around... spent some of their precious time... their support, their presence really helps a lot.” (P1)

Participant 3 shared how his family relocated to his maternal home for comfort and how his uncle in the U.S. sent games and toys to ease the grief:

“They felt as if you have all these things around you... they will be able to take the grief out of your mind.” (P3)

He also recalled weekly visits from his mother’s sisters, who brought sweets and chocolates to uplift the children:

“We collect... and for that moment we forget.” (P3)

These narratives highlight the significance of both physical presence and thoughtful gestures in the grief-recovery process. Support extended across borders, showing how globalised family ties remain crucial.

Experts also emphasized the role of peer networks. In Igbo culture, “committees of friends” organize support through WhatsApp groups, raising substantial funds for bereaved families:

“They raised 12.6 million... more than what they need for the burial.” (E3)

Together, these insights reveal how diverse forms of social support—local and diaspora, familial and communal—profoundly influence the grieving process, offering comfort, stability, and shared healing.

Proverbs and Songs:

This theme explores how proverbs and songs serve as cultural tools that significantly influence grief coping experiences. Participants and cultural experts described these elements not merely as expressions but as deeply rooted mechanisms of emotional resilience, guidance and communal healing.

Proverbs offer moral teachings and encouragement, helping individuals find strength in the face of loss. Participant 4, an Ijesha woman of Yoruba extraction, shared how proverbs like “*ba o ku, ise o tan*” (“if there is still life, work is not finished”) helped her cope with the death of her father, the family’s breadwinner. These sayings reminded her that life continues and that hope remains:

“With the cultural proverbs and the encouragement... I kept on encouraging myself... those proverbs really helped me to pull through.” (P4)

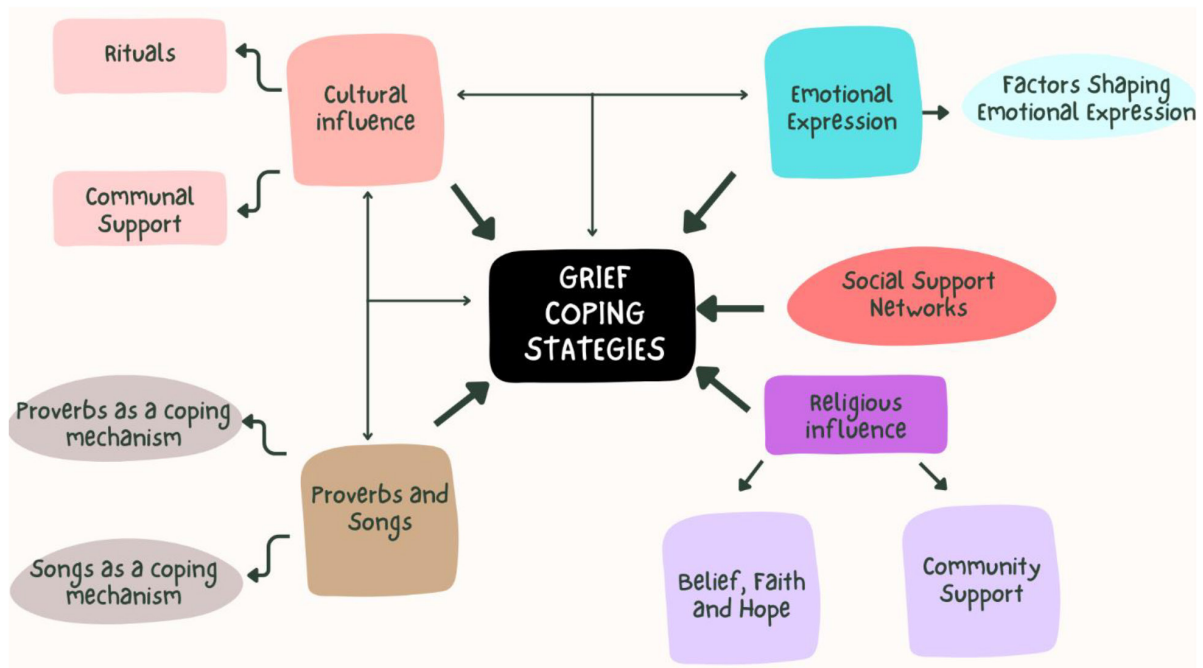
Cultural experts elaborated on how proverbs are tailored to specific contexts of grief. For instance, in Yoruba culture, when a woman experiences a stillbirth, the proverb “*omi lo danu, agbe o fo*” (“the water spilt, but the container is intact”) offers hope for future children. For the death of an elder, “*asiwaju o keyin, akeyin o siwaju*” emphasizes the natural order of life and death:

In Igbo culture, proverbs also serve to address the insensitivity of outsiders. One expert cited “*Eburu ozu onye-ozo, odika ebu ukwu nku*” (“carrying another’s corpse feels like carrying firewood”), meaning only those directly affected truly understand the depth of grief.

Songs were also recognized as influential emotional outlets. Experts described how songs vary in tone depending on the context. For instance, when an elderly man dies, songs like “*Baba Rele Oo, ile lo lo tarara*” (“our father has gone to heaven”) offer comfort. In contrast, songs such as “*Baba awa lo ko dagbere*” (“our father died without saying goodbye”) evoke more profound mourning and communal tears.

Together, these cultural artifacts, proverbs, and songs play a vital role in grief coping, offering wisdom, emotional release, and a sense of shared experience that helps individuals navigate loss.

Figure 1: A thematic map showing the direct and intersectional impact of culture, religion, emotional expression, proverbs & songs, and social support on coping strategies in grief.



Discussion

The thematic analysis of qualitative data revealed five key grief-coping strategies within the Nigerian community: cultural influences, Religious Influences, Emotional Expression, Social Support Networks, and Proverbs and Songs. These themes reflect the complex interplay among cultural, religious, and psychosocial factors that shape grief experiences.

This study highlighted the unique practices of the Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, demonstrating how deeply grief coping is ingrained in their cultural traditions. Families and communities emerged as vital support systems, offering emotional and practical assistance during the bereavement process. While cultural experts emphasized the role of tradition, some participants reported minimal cultural influence due to factors such as age at bereavement, cultural disconnection, and evolving practices shaped by religion and acculturation (Eyetsemitan, 2002).

Religion plays a central role in coping with grief. All participants found comfort through faith, prayer, scripture, and support from their religious communities. Belief in the afterlife and

divine purpose helped them navigate loss, which aligns with Kalu's (2019) findings.

Emotional expression is another key strategy. Participants described crying and sharing feelings as therapeutic, although cultural norms and societal expectations often shaped or suppressed these expressions, reflecting emotion display rules (Dzokoto et al., 2018).

Social support through visitation, contributions, and companionship is crucial for their well-being. It spanned familial, cultural, and religious contexts, reinforcing Olabisi et al.'s (2023) findings regarding its protective role against psychological distress.

Finally, proverbs and songs were recognized as distinct cultural tools. This is a novel contribution to the study. Proverbs offer wisdom and encouragement, while songs provide emotional release and a sense of communal solidarity (Aluede, 2022; Dzokoto et al., 2018). Their unique impact warrants a separate thematic category, emphasizing its significance in the context of Nigerian grief coping. A proverb stated by the participant, such as "if there is still

life, work as not finished,” works similarly to the concept of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). These proverbs serve as statements that challenge negative thoughts and replace them with more resilient thoughts. The study’s findings also revealed that cultural songs sung during funerals do not serve only as an aesthetic addition to the funeral; they are primary cultural interventions designed to help the bereaved externalize grief so it does not fester internally.

Implications for Interventions

This study highlights the key implications for mental health support in Nigeria. Cultural competency and sensitivity are important for mental health professionals to understand and appreciate the wide variety of backgrounds of individuals who require their services.

There is a need to recognize the importance of religious beliefs and practices as mechanisms for directly addressing grief and to collaborate with religious leaders and communities to provide spiritual support and guidance to those grieving.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the significant impact of proverbs and songs in conveying cultural knowledge and helping individuals cope with their grief. The use of proverbs and songs can also be integrated into therapeutic interventions, using them as mediums of communication and expression to facilitate healing.

Conclusion

This study explored grief coping in the Nigerian community, revealing five key themes: cultural and religious influences, emotional expression, social support, and the roles of proverbs and songs. It highlights how Yoruba and Igbo traditions shape mourning practices, with families and communities offering vital emotional and practical support. These findings deepen our understanding of grief responses and provide a foundation for culturally sensitive mental health interventions.

Declaration

We declare that this is an original paper yet to be published and is not under review by any journal.

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Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Informed Consent:

Standard ethical principles were followed during the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study. Given the sensitive nature of grief-related discussions, the interviews were conducted with empathy and care.

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Data Availability Statements (DOS)

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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