

## Chapter 4

# Challenges to sexual behavioural changes in the era of AIDS: sexual cleansing and levirate marriage in Zambia

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### Abstract

**Sexual cleansing (*kusalazya*) and levirate marriage (*kunjilila mung'anda*) are among the cultural practices that have been implicated in the spread of HIV. Using both quantitative and qualitative data obtained from Zambia in the second half of 1998, this study shows that performance of *Kusalazya* is expected in order to 'chase the spirits' of the deceased from the widowed spouse, and that the widowed, regardless of sex, have to be 'cleansed' through sexual intercourse, mostly with a sibling or cousin of the deceased. Although other practices that do not involve sexual intercourse have evolved, about one in three of the respondents still support sexual cleansing and levirate marriage and one in five of the widowed have been sexually cleansed. The main reasons offered include the need to support the spouse and children, and to continue the deceased's lineage. Religion, sexually transmitted diseases, and now AIDS are the main factors modifying the rituals.**

A number of researchers have strongly argued that sexual networking or multi-partnered sexual behaviour increases the risk of HIV infection (Caldwell, Caldwell and Quiggin 1989; Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell 1990; Orubuloye, Caldwell and Caldwell 1990; Oppong 1995; Orubuloye *et al.*, 1994; Cleland and Way 1994). The cultural practices that have been implicated in such sexual behaviour have included sexual cleansing or ritualistic cleansing, *kusalazya* in the Chitonga language of Zambia, and the practice of *kunjilila mung'anda*: levirate marriage or widow inheritance. Ntozi (1997:133) reports that similar practices are widely prevalent in parts of India, Pakistan, and a number of countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Burkina Faso, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Zimbabwe and Zambia. Although sexual cleansing is said to be common among the matrilineal Batonga of Southern Zambia (Luo 1993; Siamwiza 1994), it is also practised among many other tribes, whether matrilineal or patrilineal. This signifies the extent of the problem in Zambia.

Although it has been contended that these practices may increase the spread of HIV and consequently AIDS (see Luo 1993:1; Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell 1994:53; Oppong 1995:42; Ekanem 1996:12-15; Mogensen 1997:436; Ntozi 1997:128) there is a serious dearth of

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research in this area. There has so far been very little examination of the reasons and methods of the practices and the nature of their participants. This chapter, therefore, attempts to rectify the situation by discussing three aspects of sexual cleansing: why, how and by whom it is done; how the process is intertwined with elements of *maali* (polygyny) and *kukona* (inheritance of property); and *kunjilila mung'anda* (levirate marriage). Religion, sexually transmitted diseases, and now AIDS are only modifying the ritual. In general, this chapter documents the challenges presented by *kusalazya* and *kunjilila mung'anda* in HIV/AIDS prevention in Zambia.

### Data sources and method

The data for the study, both quantitative and qualitative, come from a survey conducted in the second half of 1998 mostly in Southern Zambia, with additional information collected on all the other eight provinces in the country. For the quantitative approach, a sample, exclusively drawn from Southern Province, was randomly selected in three stages with probability proportional to size. To capture temporal in-migrants and out-migrants, *de facto* enumeration was used. The sample covered 549 households, capturing 3828 household members and 1000 respondents aged 15 years and above, who are the primary units of analysis. Of the 1000 respondents, 524 were drawn from the rural and 476 from the urban areas, and 525 were females.

To complement this sample, qualitative data, drawn from both within and outside the sample, were obtained. Although most data were obtained from Southern Province, relevant additional qualitative information and documents were solicited on other provinces from organizations and individuals who had worked in similar areas. The characteristics obtained from both the household and the individual questionnaires were useful in identifying individuals to include in the qualitative survey. In addition, area truncation (area survey), snowball sampling and informal discussions with different people in the study areas assisted in finding out 'who was who' in the society and consequently identified key informants and those for the case studies. Thirteen focus-group discussions, about 25 in-depth studies or narratives, and 10 case studies germane to the study were conducted. The characteristics that were considered in the study included rural and urban residence; age composition; marital status: single parents, and those in polygynous and monogamous unions, never married, separated, divorced, and widowed persons who had been sexually cleansed and those who had not. Other categories included non-government and community-based organizations; traditional practitioners; traditional rulers: chiefs and headmen; government and religious leaders; and ordinary residents.

In addition, participatory observation was used in two ways. First, I used direct observation of events in the study area as when a close relative of mine lost a husband and I was part of the group that witnessed the 'cleansing' process, and secondly, to a lesser degree, I put into context some past occurrences, since I grew up within the studied environment and understand some of the issues. One such occurrence was when another close relative of mine, who was a staunch Christian, lost her husband and was urged, but in vain, to be sexually cleansed. This prompted family members to offer her an unmarried man for remarriage instead of one only for sexual cleansing, to which she consented as it accorded with her church principles.

Ordinarily, focus-group discussions are discussions among small groups of people (6-12) with the researcher acting as the moderator or facilitator (Minichiello *et al.* 1995:5). However, I successfully organized a 'congregation' of about 100 people under the auspices of traditional

headmen and a local chief. The congregation was representative and insightful as people felt secure and freely spoke in the presence of their traditional rulers.

The study adopted the direct interview method largely because of low literacy rates and also in order to verify certain questions that would not easily be understood if the questionnaires were self-administered. Besides, the undeveloped communication network would have hampered the timely completion of the survey if questionnaires had been self-administered.

### **Sexual cleansing: reasons, methods and participants**

There is in Zambia, as in much of the world, a strong belief in different types of spirits (Colson 1962; Scudder 1962). The Tonga, the predominant occupants of Southern Province and the third largest ethnic group in the country, distinguish different types of ancestral spirits that affect people's lives differently. I concur with Colson (1962:1) that it would be better to use the vernacular terms because translations do not cover all the various terms used to describe the different types of the spirits and we cannot find adequate English equivalents. These spirits can generally be referred to as *luwo* (wind) because they are invisible. Or one can talk of the cult of *mizimo* (*muzimo* in the singular) or in a limited sense 'honouring and remembering' the ancestral spirits.

All men and women in the Tonga traditions were expected to make regular offerings at established shrines to the *mizimo* whether or not they were involved in any misfortune at the time. On certain occasions, such as when a man obtained a major item of equipment such as a new gun or plough, at the beginning or end of hunting and fishing expeditions, at planting or harvesting times, offerings were made, and people had to learn the names of the *mizimo* whom they must call (Colson 1962:4). A *muzimo* could protect someone or cause misfortune if ignored. Once created, the *mizimo* are not immortal like the ghosts who are independent of the devotion of living people for their continued existence. When the living cease to remember the *mizimo*, and no longer call upon them by name, they become nameless spirits wandering at large, who now work only for evil. 'They become like ghosts' (Colson 1962:5). The *mizimo* are thought to be concerned that they are not forgotten, so they send sickness and other misfortune to the living as a reminder that beer and offerings must be provided.

Besides the *mizimo* and the High God, known as Leza, the one who created everything, Colson (1962:4) distinguishes three other types of spirits which have the power to affect living people. These are the *basangu* (*musangu* in the singular), which are effective in affairs of general community interest and which make their demands known through people whom they possess; the *masabe*, the spirits of animals or of foreigners, which cause illness to those whom they possess until these learn the dances appropriate to the possessing spirit; the *zyeelo* (*ceelo* in the singular), which we may call the ghosts of the dead people. Over ghosts, the living have no direct control, unless they are sorcerers, and ghosts are presumed to be only evil. They may act against the living of their own volition, or they may be agents of sorcerers who have pressed them into service. A sudden dangerous or mortal illness is therefore usually attributed to ghosts. The *muzimo* may cause injury to the living, but this is not its primary purpose, nor is it free like the ghost to cause injury to anyone with whom it comes into contact. A *muzimo* is dependent on the living for its continued existence, and it causes injury to keep its memory alive in the living so that they may provide the offerings on which it depends. If the living refuse to listen to its demands, then it is thought to enlist the aid of the ghosts to inflict more drastic punishment (Colson 1962:6). Colson

did not mention yet another type of spirit, *tuyowela*. These are said to be very brutal ghosts. Some people say that *tuyowela* resemble dogs as they can eat your intestines even while you are alive. Sorcerers can send these to the enemy, or the *mizimo* can enlist them if they believe the living to be arrogant.

When a person dies, therefore, two spirits remain, one the *muzimo* and the other the ghost. The ghost is always a newly created spirit, some saying that it originates in the dying breath (Colson 1962:9). However, not all people produce a new *muzimo* when they die, but there is general agreement that only those who have achieved a certain status during their lifetime give rise to a new *muzimo* at death, while others, including children, leave behind them only the already existing *muzimo* associated with them since naming.

Living people never want the dead people to trouble them in any way. When an adult person dies, the ritual of *kulya zyina* or *kwaanga muzimo* (giving the name or *muzimo* of the dead to someone still living) is done in order to please the deceased. In addition, someone has to have sexual intercourse with the spouse of the deceased in order to chase away the spirit of the dead. Otherwise, the *muzimo* or the ghost of the dead person brings misfortune on the remaining partner, regardless of sex, or any member of the family. This strong belief in the ancestral spirits should be emphasized when discussing the ritual of sexual cleansing.

In answering the question, 'In this community do widows and widowers have sexual intercourse in order to be cleansed after losing their spouses?', over 50 per cent of both males and females in the urban areas expected widows to be sexually cleansed. The proportions for their rural counterparts are slightly lower at 43 and 37 per cent, respectively (see Table 1). Overall, rural areas registered 40 per cent lower than urban areas.

**Table 1**  
**Respondent's opinions on whether widows and widowers should have sexual cleansing, by sex and place of residence, Zambia, 1998**

Place of residence	Sex of respondent	Yes response on widows	Total number	Yes response on widowers	Total number
Urban %	Male	54.4	217	53.5	217
	Female	56.6	256	56.1	255
<b>Total urban %</b>		<b>55.6</b>	<b>473</b>	<b>54.9</b>	<b>472</b>
Rural %	Male	42.7	255	42.7	255
	Female	36.7	267	36.7	267
<b>Total rural %</b>		<b>39.7</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>522</b>
<b>Total number</b>		<b>470</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>466</b>	<b>994</b>
<b>Total %</b>		<b>47.2</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>46.9</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

The expectations are similar for widowers: 47 per cent, with 55 and 40 per cent, respectively, in urban and rural areas. In both cases, the expectations are lower among rural than urban areas. The difference could be that while people in urban areas expect the ritual to still be common, those in the rural areas have resorted to alternate rituals of *kusalazya* that do not involve sexual intercourse. As to whether men, just like women, are cleansed, a chief said:

Even if you [pointing at the male interviewer] and your wife are truly in love, when she dies you have to be cleansed by her relatives. They have to look for something to cleanse you with. Long time ago, girls were used for cleansing. If you had a well managed home, the family of your wife would provide you with a girl whom you could marry as well as to look after the children.

**Researcher:** Is this ritual of cleansing for both sexes?

**Chief:** Yes! The widows and widowers all get cleansed.

This may be at odds with some views that Zambian men are not sexually cleansed (Luo 1993:1). The current revelation that men are also expected to be sexually cleansed may make it clear that no previous research had been done on this.

When asked why *kusalazya* was performed, close to 70 per cent of the 470 respondents who answered the question cited chasing the spirit of the dead and 29 per cent said it was cultural, which could as well be practised for chasing the spirit of the dead (Table 2). More people in rural (73%) than urban (66%) areas and more females (average of 72%) than males (67%) believed in this. Chasing the spirit was also stressed during an in-depth discussion with the local chief:

**Researcher:** What is the main objective of cleansing as a custom?

**Chief:** It is the spirit. It cannot be detached from the widowed. It stays or lingers on the victim until he or she is cleansed. Before cleansing, the victim cannot be allowed to sit on someone else's stool or chair, either at drinking places or at funerals.

Similar views were reiterated by the ‘congregation’ and all other sources, except that the church leaders were against the practice. It was generally said, by all the sources, that if a person is not ‘cleansed’, he or she is likely to turn mad, a sickness traditionally known as *cibinde*. Over one in five said that the widowed had to ‘always sleep with someone’, about three-quarters said that sometimes the widowed had to sleep with someone and only 5 per cent said that the widowed never slept with someone.

A rural man in his late seventies remarked:

To prevent *cibinde*, the traditional rulers and other elderly relatives ensured that a person was cleansed after the death of the spouse. Otherwise the person who was not cleansed was considered an outcast or unclean and would not be allowed to mingle with other people or go to someone’s home, nor reach any public place like wells to draw water. If they contravened the regulations, the punishment was heavy on them and the rest of their family members. The fines included giving a lot of cattle to the one wronged, say one whose home the person visited; chasing the ‘victim’ from the village; or being made responsible for any illness that might befall any member in that community. Anyway, no one wanted to contravene the status quo.

**Table 2**  
**Reasons given for performing sexual cleansing by sex and place of residence, Zambia, 1998**

Place of Residence	Sex of respondent	Reasons given for sexual cleansing			Total number
		Chase spirit of dead	Cultural custom	Other reasons	
Urban %	Male	63.9	33.6	2.5	119
	Female	67.4	29.9	2.8	144
<b>Total urban %</b>		<b>65.8</b>	<b>31.6</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>263</b>
Rural %	Male	70.6	28.4	0.9	109
	Female	76.5	22.4	1.0	98
<b>Total rural %</b>		<b>73.4</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>Total number</b>		<b>325</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>470</b>
<b>Total %</b>		<b>69.1</b>	<b>28.9</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

*Cibinde* was treatable by traditional medicines. Otherwise, a ‘cleanser’ was organized if this problem was noticed in the early stages. Mogensen (1997) confuses *cibinde* with *kafungo* when he reports that if someone is not cleansed he develops *kafungo*, a disease he associates with AIDS. This contradicts the general belief on *kafungo*, a disease which manifests itself in the form of fatal sores, as summed up by a traditional practitioner:

Kafungo is brought about in three ways: first, a man gets it when he sleeps with a woman who recently aborted or miscarried and is not yet ‘treated’. Secondly, any person who eats together with a woman who has recently aborted or miscarried and is not yet ‘treated’. Thirdly, stepping on the place where the woman aborted or miscarried.

It was generally said that the only similarity *kafungo* had with AIDS was the symptom of dry cough. A person who had *kafungo* would in most cases, develop a permanent dry cough in addition to the fatal and 'difficult sore to treat'. Just like *cibinde*, *kafungo* could be treated by traditional medicines provided it was detected early enough. Most people were emphatic that 'AIDS and *kafungo* are very different, *kafungo* has been in existence for a long time, but not AIDS'. They also argued that *kafungo* just like *cibinde* was treatable, but not AIDS. A traditional practitioner said when asked 'Is there any medicine for *kafungo* or *cibinde*?':

We have traditional medication for the old diseases we knew a long time ago but not for this recent one (AIDS). We can make the viruses sleep for some time, but not kill them. Provided the sick person comes to us early enough, he or she can have the virus sleep continually for up to ten years before he or she can die. You just give the person bitter herbs and then the virus sleeps again. These which make people slim down, do not end until the grave takes you. People do not know what to do for the medicine is not there.

Similar views were expressed by a traditional leader:

People have come to realize that AIDS is incurable. A long time ago people used to think that if you become careless with your life and sleep with an infected person, you could be treated after an injection, but now they know that even if you get an injection, you will still die with AIDS. This has led to slightly having people behave morally as they now know that AIDS is not like syphilis and gonorrhoea that can be cured after treatment at the clinic. Now there is slight fear in the light of the knowledge that AIDS is incurable. Those that are already infected keep on dying without recovering.

Respondents were asked who normally cleanses the widowed; the responses of those who answered the question are contained in Table 3. In most cases brothers and sisters (a total of 67 per cent), followed by cousins (28 per cent) of the deceased performed the process. Ntozi (1997:126) made similar observations in Uganda. Other relatives (5 per cent) are occasionally used, but hardly ever (less than 1 per cent) the biological parents. Fewer than one per cent, observed only in the urban areas, indicated that they could hire someone unrelated to do the cleansing. More cousins perform sexual cleansing in urban than rural areas. This could be caused by definitional differences: traditionally, paternal cousins and step-brothers and sisters are regarded as brothers and sisters and not cousins, but not in urban areas. Also it could be because most of the nuclear family members in the urban areas are occasionally not present to do the cleansing. However, it should be realized that when someone dies, the Batonga are generally known to take the funerals back to their villages and re-unite with other extended family members.

In emphasizing that biological parents are rarely involved, and at the same time, describing how the ritual is performed, a rural 78-year-old man who allowed his wife to cleanse their son-in-law said:

There was nobody who could do it and since it is not full sexual intercourse, just penetrate the vagina but not ejaculating! I told my wife to just go ahead since it was squarely our responsibility to cleanse our son-in-law.

In both patrilineal and matrilineal communities, the maternal and paternal family members of the deceased person, regardless of sex, provided a 'cleanser'. Among inter-tribal marriages, negotiations on which practices to follow are common.

**Table 3**  
**Persons expected to sexually cleanse the spouse of the deceased by respondent's sex and place of residence, Zambia, 1998**

Place of residence	Relation to the deceased	Sex of respondent		Total sample
		Male	Female	
Urban %	Sister/brother	63.0	60.7	36.4
	Cousin	30.6	30.3	18.0
	Parent	0.6	1.4	0.6
	Other relative	5.8	6.6	3.7
	Hired	-	0.9	0.3
<b>Total urban number</b>		<b>173</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>384</b>
<b>% of total sample</b>		<b>55.8</b>	<b>61.9</b>	<b>59.0</b>
Rural %	Sister/Brother	76.6	70.8	30.3
	Cousin	19.0	28.5	9.7
	Parent	-	-	-
	Other relative	4.4	0.8	1.1
	Hired	-	-	-
<b>Total rural number</b>		<b>137</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>% of total sample</b>		<b>44.2</b>	<b>38.1</b>	<b>41.0</b>
<b>Total number</b>		<b>310</b>	<b>341</b>	<b>651</b>
<b>Total %</b>		<b>47.6</b>	<b>52.4</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

As already mentioned, living in urban areas does not necessarily exclude people from exposure to sexual cleansing. Two personnel officers who represented their companies during court cases on sexual cleansing recounted two incidents, one in Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, and the other one in Kitwe, the second largest city after Lusaka:

Women took the late husbands' families to magistrate's court when they did not provide people to sexually cleanse them. The women argued that they had the right to be cleansed and the families were obligated. The courts in both cases disallowed sexual cleansing for fear that the one to do it might be infected. In the ruling, the judges told the women that the men they were trying to get for the practice also had the 'right to life'. In case the women had already been infected by their late husbands, the judges argued that the practice would infect the innocent men. Instead the court ruled that an alternate ritual to sexual cleansing be performed to cleanse the aggrieved women. Before the court chambers adjourned, and in the presence of everyone, some white powder were smeared on the women's faces and small strings tied on their arms symbolising that they were clean.

It should be noted that most people do not know their HIV status as testing is not widespread and some of the people who are tested do not collect their results. Other drawbacks to HIV/AIDS prevention amidst such practices include the fact that condoms are seldom used at all (CSO 1997:45), let alone during ritual processes; there is resistance to abandoning cultural practices, little knowledge of the existence of laws that may protect people who refuse to be sexually cleansed, and fear of isolation if not 'cleansed'.

### **Connection of sexual cleansing with inheritance of property and levirate marriage**

Although 91 per cent of the respondents initially said that they disapproved of sexual cleansing and levirate marriage, about a third of them still support the practices, and gave various reasons for that (see Table 4). Of those that did not support sexual cleansing, 66 per cent cited fear of STDs and HIV/AIDS, 12 per cent said it was not necessary, 8 per cent cited religious conviction and the remaining 14 per cent were not sure. This indicates sexual behavioural changes due to HIV/AIDS.

Of the 323 respondents who supported sexual cleansing, close to four fifths of males and females living in either rural or urban areas expected *zyikusalazya*, the one who has sexually cleansed and remarried the widowed, to take care of her or him and the children. This meant inheritance of both the property and conjugal rights to the surviving spouse. This view is stronger in rural (82 per cent) than urban areas (73 per cent). The other reasons cited were: to continue the deceased's lineage (8 per cent), control property (3 per cent) and control the remaining spouse (3 per cent). Seymour-Smith (1996:166) argues that levirate marriage

is often interpreted as an expression of patrilineality, since it is predicated upon the notion that the woman once married becomes in some sense property of or indissolubly attached to the husband's patrikin.

In Zambia, however, it may be difficult to fully apply this notion: first, both males and females are inherited; secondly, some tribes who practise levirate marriage are matrilineal; and thirdly, less than 3 per cent of the respondents expressed control of spouse as an issue.

**Table 4**  
**Why respondents support remarriage after being widowed, by sex and place of residence, Zambia, 1998**

Place of residence	Sex of respondent	Why remarriage is important after being widowed					Per cent of total sample	Total no.
		To continue deceased's lineage	To support spouse and children	To control spouse	To control property	Other reasons		
Urban %	Male	13.0	76.8	-	1.4	8.7	21.4	69
	Female	8.1	70.3	5.4	5.4	10.9	22.9	74
<b>Total urban no.</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Total urban %</b>		<b>10.5</b>	<b>73.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>9.8</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>100</b>
Rural %	Male	3.3	84.8	3.3	3.3	5.4	28.5	92
	Female	9.1	78.4	2.3	3.4	6.8	27.2	88
<b>Total rural no.</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>Total rural %</b>		<b>6.1</b>	<b>81.7</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.3</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>55.7</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Total number</b>		<b>26</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>323</b>
<b>Total %</b>		<b>8.0</b>	<b>78.0</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>-</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

Although traditional leaders reiterated that they recruited spinsters and old unmarried or divorced women, the study discovered that in many instances it really did not matter whether the person to cleanse was married or not provided that person consented. For those already married, this resulted in polygyny. Polygyny is culturally acceptable in Zambia (University of Zambia 1993:58). This acceptance of polygyny does not fully explain the existence of sexual cleansing in this society, but to some extent encouraged the ritual of levirate marriage. During a focus-group discussion among old women in an urban area, the women supported their friend who had been sexually cleansed and remarried as she described the process:

After burial, the man's family take you to a river and put some mud on your face and chest, a sign of mourning. They also give you *kkuba* (maize stalk) which you carry while mourning. This *kkuba* symbolized your being lonely after the death of your spouse. From the river, you lie down at a cross-roads, and one or two of your in-laws would jump over you while you recite your husband's ancestral name. This marks your final separation from him. The following day, your family would wash you and dress you smartly. At the same time, the husband's family would line up possible men, to sexually cleanse you and perform levirate marriage. Long ago, it was really remarriage. The two of you are given a house to sleep in that night, and you have also accepted to marry that man. The following morning, they take you behind the house, they roast some cucumber seeds, which make noise. This is the noise which chases *musangu*, your husband's spirit, as they make the noise near your thighs, which he was very much fond of. From there that is the end, that man has inherited even your husband's name.

In both patrilineal and matrilineal systems, if the deceased is a man, the person who inherits the woman takes over most of the property belonging to the deceased. Other property is

shared among the relatives from both sides. If, however, a woman dies, the remaining spouse, inherited or not, is expected, in both systems, to continue taking care of the children and property. Under the patrilineal system, if a woman is not inherited, the children if old enough are independent. They can inherit some of their father's property and look after their mother. If still young, they would be, with their mother, looked after by the general paternal family membership. In a matrilineal system, maternal uncles are responsible for the children whose mother is not inherited. The children, however, are not expected to inherit their father's property. The widow, in this case, either goes back to her natal family or remains in an independent homestead with limited access to inherited property. Often people who are not inherited choose to remarry for various reasons such as to get support from the new partner. Siamwiza (1994:18), when analysing the HIV/AIDS situation in Zambia, argues that this 'property grabbing is heavily practised among the matrilineal society with the understanding that women do not inherit property from their late spouses nor do their children inherit from their fathers'. However, this practice has also been observed among patrilineal societies (Seymour-Smith 1996:166). Also, the two systems are not rigid.

In answering the question, 'Other than the spouse to the deceased that is inherited, what else is inherited?', about one in four of males and females in both urban and rural areas cited household property and about one-fifth mentioned clothing (Table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Percentage distribution of type of property inherited after death by sex and place of residence, Zambia, 1998**

Place of Residence	Property	Sex of respondent		Per cent of total Sample
		Male	Female	
Urban	Land (%)	8.2	6.6	3.6
	Household property (%)	26.9	29.9	13.7
	Clothing (%)	19.8	22.2	10.1
	Animals (%)	18.7	17.3	8.6
	Farm implements (%)	16.1	13.9	7.2
	Children (%)	7.6	7.2	3.6
	Other (%)	2.6	2.8	1.3
<b>Total urban %</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>48.1</b>
<b>Total urban number</b>		<b>776</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>1591</b>
Rural	Land (%)	5.1	7.0	3.2
	Household property (%)	24.7	25.8	13.2
	Clothing (%)	18.6	19.7	10.0
	Animals (%)	25.4	23.6	12.7
	Farm implements (%)	21.0	19.1	10.4
	Children (%)	3.7	3.2	1.8
	Other (%)	1.3	1.7	0.8
<b>Total rural %</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>52.1</b>
<b>Total rural number</b>		<b>837</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>1724</b>
<b>Total number</b>		<b>1613</b>	<b>1702</b>	<b>3315</b>
<b>Total %</b>		<b>48.7</b>	<b>51.3</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

Note: The responses number more than the original sample size, 1000, because of multiple responses.

Rural respondents, as expected, wanted, perhaps for their own use, more farm implements and animals than did urban respondents. In both areas, children are not regarded as property to inherit, but were to be looked after by the family in general and the 'new' parents in particular. Money was not often cited and was placed in the category 'Other'. This may be because the traditional economies were hardly monetized, or people do not leave much money at death, or simply because most of the money was left with the remaining spouse. Land also is rarely inherited, perhaps because most of it, up to 96 per cent, belongs to chiefs (*Post* 1998:5), who hold it in trust for their subjects as customary communal property.

When asked 'Can a person refuse to be inherited?', 82 per cent of respondents gave a positive response while 72 per cent said that they actually knew someone who had refused to be inherited. The former put the inheritance rate in the region of one in five and the latter, one in three. A number of reasons were advanced for the refusals (see Table 6).

**Table 6**  
**Main reasons for refusing to be inherited, Zambia, 1998**

Reason	Women		Men	
	No.	Per cent	No.	Per cent
Religion	200	22.1	198	37.8
Other tribe	26	2.9	18	3.4
Poverty	11	1.2	3	0.6
Educated	2	0.2	8	1.5
Old age	49	5.4	32	6.1
Urban dwellers	1	0.1	2	0.4
In polygyny	39	4.3	48	9.2
Dislike person proposed	237	26.1	-	-
Still mourning	24	2.6	-	-
No more marriage	169	18.6	77	14.7
STDs/ AIDS	149	16.4	138	26.3
<b>Total reasons</b>	<b>907</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

Note: The responses number more than the original sample size, 1000, because of multiple responses.

Religion plays a crucial role in refusals. A pastor said:

Now the will of God of not practising incest will be followed due to this disease. This is what we have always believed in. We do not believe in sexual cleansing just like we don't believe in polygyny. The Bible teaches us to support the widowed not to marry them off even in polygynous unions. Maybe yes, to someone not yet married.

Other religious leaders from different denominations supported his views and also pledged their support for the widowed in their churches. The religious believers said:

the spirit which many people think is the ghost of the deceased which comes to trouble them are angels of the Devil or Satan imitating the deeds of the deceased. Accordingly, there was no need for the people to fear that, because once you became a believer in God he will protect you. Besides, the devil will not bring these problems to you because you have come to know that it is him.

Other reasons given for refusing were fear of STDs and AIDS, old age and not wanting marriage any more. The issue of not liking the one proposed is crucial among women and not important among men. This is also the case for 'Still mourning'. This suggests that women may still be vulnerable to sexual cleansing as they may not directly refuse if contacted after the mourning period or given 'their right choice'.

A total of 106 people, 38 men and 68 women, who had been widowed were identified in the sample and asked whether they had been cleansed. The results are presented in Table 7. These numbers put male and female widowhood rates at 8 and 13 per cent, respectively. These indicate increases from 0.9 per cent for men and 6.1 per cent for women in the 1990 census (CSO,1990: 105). It is observed from the table that close to one-third of people aged 55 and over had been sexually cleansed compared to less than 10 per cent of those aged below 35 years. In fact, sexual

cleansing increases by age. This may suggest behavioural change. At the same time it may mean that the older people were sexually cleansed long before the fears of contracting HIV started. The ritual is also more practised in rural than urban areas, among females than males and those with lower educational attainment (primary level and below) than those with higher educational attainment (secondary level and above). The marked differences between sexes could be because some men were in polygynous unions (Table 6) when their wives died, and consequently chose not to get any additional wives. The educated, as expected, may have more knowledge that sexual cleansing is a risk factor in spreading HIV and avoid it, while those in the urban areas, where more AIDS cases have been reported (Ministry of Health 1997), may shun it after observing the impact of the disease on the affected. Also, those in urban areas are likely to be more educated than those in rural areas (CSO 1990, 1997; University of Zambia 1993).

**Table 7**  
**Percentage distribution of widowed persons who were sexually cleansed by selected background characteristics, Zambia, 1998**

<b>Background characteristics</b>	<b>Per cent sexually cleansed in each category</b>	<b>Total number</b>
<b>Age</b>		
15-24	-	2
25-34	9.1	22
35-44	12.0	25
45-54	13.3	15
55+	31.0	42
<b>Usual residence</b>		
Rural	30.6	49
Urban	8.8	57
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	13.2	38
Female	22.1	68
<b>Education</b>		
None	25	16
Primary	25.9	54
Secondary+	9.5	36
<b>Occupation</b>		
Farming	30.8	26
Trading	7.7	26
White collar	-	2
Professional	-	11
Other	24.4	41
<b>Religion</b>		
Catholic	23.4	47
Protestant	14.3	28
Other	16.1	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>106</b>

Source: 1998 Southern Province Survey

The farming communities as well as the 'Other' category also experience more sexual cleansing. The farming community is predominantly rural and the higher levels may be due to the reasons already alluded to for the rural areas. The 'Other' category, on the other hand, comprised mostly the unemployed, self-employed and retired persons, possibly people with lower educational attainment and the old. Those in white-collar jobs, like those with professional qualifications, are educated people who avoid the practice for the reasons already discussed. Catholics tend to tolerate sexual cleansing more than all the other religious groupings.

The growing behavioural response to sexual cleansing due to HIV/AIDS was summarized by a chief and a number of his headmen:

We have stopped the actual process of sexual intercourse because of these diseases that have surfaced, but use rituals that do not involve sexual intercourse.

However, it was discovered that out of the four chiefs who were visited, one, the oldest of them all, had refused to ban sexual cleansing in his area as he still considered it essential. It was interesting that all the people indicated that sexual cleansing is risk behaviour if the one who died had HIV or AIDS.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The study has revealed that *kusalazya* is culturally expected in order to 'chase' the spirits of the deceased from the clan and especially the spouse; and that the widowed had to have some form of sexual intercourse with someone in order to be cleansed. At the same time, people have come to realize that this practice is a risk factor in the spread of HIV and in turn AIDS. This has resulted in the use of alternate practices of *kusalazya* that do not involve sexual intercourse. The biggest challenge is, therefore, for people to change not only their attitudes and beliefs about sexual cleansing, but more importantly, their practices. At present one in five have actually been sexually cleansed and one in three still support the practice which involves sexual intercourse.

In view of this the following recommendations are made:

1. The government educational campaigns against the spread of HIV/AIDS should not relax their efforts, but rather involve all the people concerned, especially the traditional rulers, the community-based organizations and non-government organizations operating at the grassroots, in both program planning and implementation.
2. The two existing systems of leadership, civic and traditional, should be strengthened to promote stronger collaboration in HIV/AIDS prevention.
3. The existing collaboration among government and non-government organizations should be consolidated in AIDS awareness programs. This needs continued financial and material support from local and international agencies.
4. The church organizations should stimulate more discussions concerning HIV/AIDS among church members. This will support those who have internalized Christian values that prevent the spread of the disease.
5. There must be a deliberate move to popularize those rituals of 'cleansing' or *kusalazya* that do not involve sexual intercourse.
6. There must be a change in opinion on the powers of the spirits; discussions should be held to suggest that it may not be possible for dead people to come back and trouble the living through their spirits.

7. Laws should be enacted and enforced to protect people who refuse to be involved in the ritual of sexual cleansing, and to safeguard their property. Such laws should be made in consultation with all those involved in AIDS awareness campaigns, especially the traditional rulers, NGOs, and community-based and religious organizations.

8. Auxiliary institutions should be assisted to support the widows and orphans who may not be integrated into existing families at the death of a breadwinner.

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