**Psychosocial Challenges in Mortuary Practice in Kenya**

**Abstract**

The primary goal of the study was to identify psychosocial challenges in Kenyan mortuary practice. Among other stressors, mortuary professionals experience psychosocial difficulties include depression, compassion fatigue, burning out, anguish and death anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, occupational stress, and heightened stress. The current study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The research employed a cross-sectional retrospective design. Mortuary employees in Nairobi County, Mombasa County, Kisumu County, Nakuru County, Machakos County, Kakamega County, and Meru County were the focus of the study. The study findings indicate that the majority of participants fell within the 31-40 age group, which constituted 36% of the total study population. This suggests that individuals in this age range are likely to be more actively engaged in the profession or field under study, possibly due to career growth, stability, or experience. The stigma imposed on mortuary workers may be related to the nature of the profession and the diverse belief among the people that treating the dead is unclean employment. The implications of this finding are that mortuary personnel may confront human resource issues, with employers developing attitudes about this cadre.

Keywords: mortuary practice, occupational stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder

**Introduction**

When it comes to researching occupational aspects that can impact the quality of working life, the funeral and mortuary industry—which includes cemeteries, crematoria, and funeral homes—is a field that is frequently overlooked (Guidetti et al., 2021a; Wandati & Githae, 2025). Among other stressors, mortuary professionals experience psychosocial difficulties include depression, compassion fatigue, burning out, anguish and death anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, occupational stress, and heightened stress. (Kirongo & Mbithi, 2024; Guidetti et al., 2025). The stigma that mortuary workers face from outsiders and, sometimes, from within is the main cause of psychological suffering, including anxiety, nervousness, and depression, even if it may be an occupational danger (Wandati & Githae, 2025). Knowing the difficulties and working conditions experienced by mortuary employees can assist to improve the workplace, which will raise the caliber of work they provide and encourage more young people who are qualified to pursue this vital but dangerous career. (Fathima fahmi Shirin  M et al., 2024). This study's primary goal was to identify psychosocial challenges in Kenyan mortuary practice.

**Materials and methods**

The current study used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The research employed a cross-sectional retrospective design. Mortuary employees in Nairobi County, Mombasa County, Kisumu County, Nakuru County, Machakos County, Kakamega County, and Meru County were the focus of the study. The Yamane Taro formula (1967) was used to calculate the sample size, and it came out to be 222 out of 500 mortuaries. The participants in the study were selected by systematic sampling.

**RESULTS**

The study findings indicate that the majority of participants fell within the 31-40 age group, which constituted 36% of the total study population. This suggests that individuals in this age range are likely to be more actively engaged in the profession or field under study, possibly due to career growth, stability, or experience. The next largest group was the 41-50 age bracket, making up 27% of the respondents, which may reflect professionals at a more advanced stage in their careers who still play a significant role in the workforce. The 20-30 age group accounted for 22.5% of the sample, indicating the presence of younger individuals who are either newly entering the profession or still establishing themselves. Meanwhile, the 51-60 age group had the lowest representation at just 14.4%, which could be attributed to factors such as retirement, career transitions, or a declining number of individuals remaining in the field at this stage of life. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1 Age distribution among mortuary workers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| 20-30 | 50 | 22.5% |
| 31-40 | 80 | 36.0% |
| 41-50 | 60 | 27.0% |
| 51-60 | 32 | 14.4% |
| **Total** | **222** | **100%** |

The study aimed to assess and establish the educational attainment of mortuary workers. The findings indicate that the highest proportion of participants were Certificate holders, comprising 45.0% of the total sample. This was followed by those with Secondary-level education, accounting for 36.0% of the respondents. Participants with Primary-level education represented 13.5%, while the lowest proportion (5.5%) consisted of individuals with higher academic qualifications, including diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and other advanced certifications. These findings are comprehensively presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Education level of mortuary workers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Level of Education** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Certificate | 100 | 45.0% |
| Secondary | 80 | 36.0% |
| Primary  | 30 | 13.5% |
| Other | 12 | 5.5% |
| **Total** | **222** | **100%** |

The findings reveal that out of a total of 222 responses, nearly half (49.5%) of the workplaces were situated in urban areas, indicating a higher concentration of employment opportunities in highly developed and densely populated regions. This was followed by 36% of workplaces located in peri-urban areas, which are transitional zones between urban and rural settings, often characterized by moderate infrastructure development and expanding economic activities. The remaining 14.5% of workplaces were found in rural areas, where employment opportunities may be more limited due to lower population densities, reduced infrastructure, and fewer healthcare or industrial facilities. These results highlight the distribution of workplaces across different geographical settings and underscore the urban dominance in employment locations. (Table 3)

**Table 3: Work station of mortuary workers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Location** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Urban | 110 | 49.5% |
| Peri-urban | 80 | 36.0% |
| Rural | 32 | 14.5% |
| **Total** | **222** | **100%** |

The study revealed that among the 222 respondents surveyed, mortuary practitioners encountered several significant challenges in their profession. The most commonly reported issue was stigma, affecting 45% of the participants, highlighting the social and cultural prejudices associated with their line of work. Additionally, 36% of the respondents cited difficulties in maintaining a proper work-life balance, indicating the demanding nature of their profession and its impact on their personal lives. Furthermore, 19% of the practitioners identified a lack of essential resources as a major challenge, suggesting constraints in infrastructure, equipment, or operational support necessary for their daily responsibilities.

**Table 4: Challenges faced by mortuary workers**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Challenge** | **Frequency** | **Percentage** |
| Stigma | 100 | 45.0% |
| Work-Life Balance | 80 | 36.0% |
| Lack of Resources | 42 | 19.0% |
| **Total** | **222** | **100%** |

**DISCUSSION**

There is little literature on psychosocial issues in mortuary practice, possibly reflecting the fact that few people regard working in a mortuary as a vocation. In recent years, mortuary practice has received increased emphasis, and training has been standardized. However, these findings indicate a higher concentration of workplaces in metropolitan areas, which could be due to improved infrastructure, increasing demand for services, and more access to resources. The high concentration of workplaces in peri-urban areas demonstrates continued urban expansion and development, possibly representing the eventual transition of these regions into completely urbanized zones. In contrast, a low representation of workplaces in rural areas could imply restricted access to healthcare facilities, inadequate infrastructure, or a lower population density, all of which could have an impact on service delivery and worker distribution. These findings highlight the importance of policy measures aimed at improving healthcare and vital services in rural and peri-urban areas in order to promote more equal resource distribution and increase overall service accessibility. Immediate incorporation of fundamental occupational health and safety practices into informal apprenticeship training for mortuary attendants is important, and studies have highlighted the importance of providing mortuary attendants with necessary equipment to reduce or eliminate ergonomic hazards in their work environments (Dartey et al., 2024). The majority of mortuary professionals have workplace experiences, per the current study. Similar results have been seen in other places. For example, mortuary attendants describe experiencing psychological and emotional stress, being exposed to an infectious atmosphere, and being stigmatized by their friends, family, and communities (Nakakuwa et al., 2024). Anxiety and stigma together might exacerbate mental health issues among funeral professionals (Thorson & Powell, 1996). According to other studies, among job demands, supervisor rudeness, stigma consciousness, and work-to-family negative spillover all have a significant impact on burnout levels. In contrast, meaningful work and family-to-work positive spillover may be useful tools to prevent burnout from starting (Guidetti et al., 2021b).

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

Mortuary practitioners experience psychosocial challenges in the form of stigma from work place and families and this may contribute to mental health disturbance. The stigma imposed on mortuary workers may be related to the nature of the profession and the diverse belief among the people that treating the dead is unclean employment. The implications of this finding are that mortuary personnel may confront human resource issues, with employers developing attitudes about this cadre.

There is need to have welfare group for mortuary workers.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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