

total of 72 participants:

- 60 family members (2 from each family) including widows/widowers, children, youth and extended family
- 12 NGO and government representatives, religious and community members.

The audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed and translated into English. Transcripts will be analysed thematically and analytic summaries written for each participant.

Timetable: The fieldwork will take place in Senegal from May – July 2014. The report (in English and French) will be launched in seminars in the UK in April 2015 and in Dakar and Kaolack in May 2015 and disseminated through professional networks and websites, alongside academic articles and conference papers. The dataset of 72 interview transcripts will be archived with ESDS Qualidata Archive, UK.

Ethical issues: This research conforms to the ethical protocols of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth. Ethical clearance from the University of Reading Research Ethics Committee is currently being sought. Respect for privacy, confidentiality and rights to anonymity are paramount, as is the safety and security of the researchers and research participants. The research data will be treated as confidential, anonymised and stored securely in line with ethical protocols.

We welcome any relevant information about responses to death and family bereavement. Please contact:

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The Leverhulme Trust

Death in the Family in Urban Senegal: bereavement, care and family relations

This research project, funded by the Leverhulme Trust and starting in February 2014, investigates the material and emotional significance of an adult death in families of different socio-economic status and ethnicities in the dynamic urban context of Senegal. It aims to analyse the economic, material, social and emotional dimensions of loss and caring relations from a cross-generational family perspective. This research project will provide the first in-depth understanding of responses to death, care and family relations in urban Africa. It will identify the policy and practice implications for social protection and poverty alleviation. This study builds on Dr. Evans' exploratory research on inheritance, access to resources and family relations in Senegal and Dr. Ribbens McCarthy's interdisciplinary work on family change and 'bereavement'.

Research team:

Dr. Ruth Evans (Principal Investigator) University of Reading
Dr. Jane Ribbens McCarthy (Co-Investigator, The Open University); Dr. Sophie Bowlby & Dr. Joséphine Wouango (University of Reading); Fatou Kébé (LARTES-IFAN, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar)

Background

The loss of a close adult relative is a significant life transition that almost everyone experiences at some point in the lifecourse. In the global South, the death of a spouse, parent, sibling or other relative may have a range of significant practical, financial and emotional impacts on people's lives, resulting in mourning and grief, intergenerational transfers of wealth, changing caring responsibilities, changing livelihoods and decisions to migrate and increased poverty. Very few studies of the social aspects of death and bereavement in Africa have been undertaken to date. This research will make a highly original contribution to death and bereavement studies, which have been rooted in western, medicalised and individualised frameworks to date.

Senegal is a particularly appropriate location in which to explore the dynamics of loss and care following the death of a family member; it provides a complex social milieu with a high rate of urbanisation compared to other African countries (48% of the population live in urban areas (ANSD, 2013). Family relations and inheritance practices in Senegal are underpinned by the 'triple heritage' of African, Islamic and colonial influences. Economic crisis, urbanisation, and increasing competition for land, combined with the large, often multigenerational, nature of households, means that increasing pressures are placed on the growing numbers of families living in urban areas.

Research aims

This research aims to explore the material and emotional significance of a death of a close adult relative for family members of different genders and generations in urban Senegal. It seeks to understand the interaction between the material, social and emotional aspects of loss and compare responses to death among families of different socio-economic status and ethnicities in two cities (Dakar and Kaolack).

This will be achieved through addressing the following objectives:

1. To explore the significance of the death of a spouse, parent, adult sibling or other relative on the identities, time-space practices of care, relationships and responsibilities of different family members and how they negotiate these changes.
2. To investigate how continuing bonds with the deceased are expressed through material and emotional means across different temporal and spatial contexts.
3. To analyse the ways that practices of care among the living following bereavement and continuing bonds with the deceased are embedded in gendered, inter- and intra-generational relations, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status and access to material assets, and place-based differences.
4. To identify the policy and practice implications in order to enhance the support networks and improve the social protection and care of bereaved young people and other family members in urban African contexts.

Methods

Given the sensitivity of the topic, a qualitative methodology is considered most appropriate to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of different family members who have lost a significant other. A sample of 30 families that have experienced an adult relative's death in the previous five years living in Dakar and Kaolack will be selected (15 in each city) to reflect a range of socio-economic backgrounds, enabling us to explore varying levels of vulnerability to poverty. In-depth life history interviews focusing on material and emotional responses to death will be conducted with family members, while semi-structured interviews with community leaders and professionals will focus on their perspectives of the impacts of bereavement, inheritance, perceptions of vulnerability, social protection, support networks. We aim to interview a